# TOWN OF GEORGIA, VERMONT

# 2006

# COMPREHENSIVE MUNICIPAL PLAN

Adopted by the Georgia Selectboard
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*Submitted by:*
*The Georgia Planning Commission*
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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**


**SECTION I. INTRODUCTION**
- **A. PURPOSE ---------- 3**
- **B. STATEMENT OF AUTHORITY ---------- 4**

**SECTION II. THE COMMUNITY SETTING ---------- 4**
- **A. LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES ---------- 4**
- **B. HISTORY ---------- 4**
- **C. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS ---------- 6**
- **D. POPULATION PROJECTIONS ---------- 10**
- **E. PROPERTY AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS ---------- 11**
- **F. HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS ---------- 12**
- **G. HOUSING NEED ---------- 13**
- **H. THE LOCAL ECONOMY ---------- 17**
- **I. TAXES, GROWTH AND FISCAL CONDITIONS ---------- 19**
- **J. TRANSPORTATION ---------- 22**
- **K. CULTURAL RESOURCES ---------- 25**
- **L. SCENIC RESOURCES ---------- 25**

**SECTION III. THE PHYSICAL SETTING ---------- 26**
- **A. TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY ---------- 26**
- **B. SOILS ---------- 28**
- **C. EARTH RESOURCES ---------- 30**
- **D. CLIMATE AND AIR QUALITY ---------- 30**
- **E. WATER RESOURCES ---------- 31**
- **F. FRAGILE, UNIQUE AND SENSITIVE AREAS ---------- 33**

**SECTION IV. UTILITIES, FACILITIES, AND TOWN SERVICES ---------- 35**
- **A. PUBLIC SAFETY ---------- 35**
- **B. TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES ---------- 36**
- **C. SOLID WASTE ---------- 39**
- **D. WATER AND SEWER ---------- 39**
- **E EDUCATION ---------- 39**
- **F. PRIVATE UTILITIES ---------- 41**
- **G. TELECOMMUNICTIONS ---------- 41**
- **H. HEALTH SERVICES ---------- 42**
- **I. CHILDCARE ---------- 42**

**SECTION V. LAND USE ---------- 44**
- **A. PRESENT LAND USE ---------- 45**
- **B. PROPOSED LAND USE ---------- 48**

**SECTION VI. ENERGY ---------- 52**

**SECTION VII. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION ---------- 53**

**SECTION VIII. RELATIONSHIP OF GEORGIA TO ADJACENT MUNICIPALITIES AND THE REGION ---------- 54**

**SECTION IX. MAPS ---------- 57**

**APPENDIX ---------- 65**

**1. Town Survey Results**
**2. Town Survey Form**

# SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

## A: PURPOSE OF PLAN

This plan was developed to assist Town Officials, residents, and persons contemplating actions involving land use and development in the Town of Georgia. It provides a comprehensive framework and statement of policies, goals and objectives from which to make decisions regarding land use, economic development, provision of services and facilities, resource use and conservation (including historic, scenic, cultural, and natural resources), and public health, safety and welfare.

The Georgia Town Plan also serves as the legal basis for the adoption of local land use regulations, capital budget programs, and impact fee ordinances. By statute, plans must be readopted every five years or they expire.

It is important to note the legal link between the plan and other regulations the Town may adopt. The policies, goals and objectives found herein should serve as a guide for decision making by the appropriate branches of government as well as the private sector. The plan policies give definition and meaning to the regulations and should be used in concert with one another in order to be effective in directing growth and development in desirable ways. A good plan is one that is used by both the public and private sector to make reasonable decisions concerning development and land use for the overall benefit of the citizens residing in the Town.

This plan updates a plan adopted *in Oct 22, 2001*. Since the 2001 plan, there have been changes in the State statutes dealing with local planning (Title 24 Chapter 117 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated). These changes required a greater level of effort on the part of town officials to revise and update the plan. The 2006 plan reflects the results of research and analysis, performed by the Planning Commission, other Town boards, municipal offices, consultants, private citizens, Northwest Regional Planning Commission and the Town Administrator. The citizens of the Town were involved through a town-wide survey which was distributed and tabulated. The survey was responded to by 482 property owners in town representing approximately 26% of those solicited. It produced good results and provided useful insights into how townspeople want to see the Town develop. At the base line, the people of Georgia have said they very much like our current rural character. However, they do want additional services, amenities and jobs but any development should be consistent with the nature of our community. (For additional information on the survey see the appendix.)

This Town Plan, as noted above, required considerable involvement and effort. Projections are based, to a large degree, on the 2000 census as well as a review of past Town reports. Recent statistics show that Georgia is among the slower growing towns in Northwestern Vermont while our expenditures and taxes have increased annually at a rate considerably greater than inflation.

In addition to the citizen survey and census data, several recent studies, reports, and proposals relating to the future of our town have been useful in the development of this Town Plan. .

These include: Georgia Village Plan, a Vision for the Future; Town of Georgia Sewer and Water Assessments for the Historic Village and the Town Center; the Municipal Exploration Committee recommendations; U. S. Route 7 Corridor Study; and the Vermont Interstate Interchange Design Guidelines study.

The Town Plan is given consideration in state agency planning decisions, state and federal regulatory schemes, such as Act 250 Hearings, Agency of Transportation Hearings, and Public Service Board Hearings. The Planning Commission and Selectboard are statutory parties in any Act 250 Hearing involving Georgia and conformance with Plan Policies is one method of participating in those hearings.

A less tangible, but much desired, goal of this Town Plan is to serve as a focus for community action as well as governmental action. There is much that citizens can do for the benefit of themselves and the town by working towards an identified common goal. Georgia has many excellent examples of this, including the Historical Society, the Recreation Committee, the Solid Waste Committee, the Bicentennial Committee, the South Georgia Fire District, and the Conservation Commission, to name a few. These and other groups continue to work to make Georgia a better place to live.

Planning is a continuing and dynamic process, the purpose of which is to prepare for the future by understanding where we came from, how we got there, where we want to go from here, and how that can be best accomplished. The process involves developing a "community vision". This plan is an attempt to provide that vision for the town over the next five years and beyond. As stated in previous plans, "A community which plans has decided to exercise some choice over its future. It rejects the idea that the undesirable consequences of growth are inevitable."

Georgia took the first steps toward planning almost forty years ago when it adopted zoning in 1967. The first town plan was adopted in 1972 and was updated in 1986, 1995, and again in 2001. This plan will be another step in the continuing process of promoting a desirable community setting while protecting and improving environmental quality.

Another statement from previous plans is as true today as when it was written and sums up the purpose of this plan: "Changes are coming and at an increasing rate. The problems posed by these pressures must be addressed by comprehensive forethought to ensure that future decisions will provide long term solutions rather than stop gap measures. Since communities exist primarily for the health and enjoyment of those who live in them, it follows that the nature, location, and timing of any future development should be determined by the people of Georgia rather than left solely to chance or the decisions of developers.

The intent is not to eliminate any existing land uses or to stop all future development, but to channel the desired growth to appropriate locations within the Town."

While municipal planning can lead to many positive actions and benefits to the community, it must also be recognized that there are external factors, over which we have little control, which will influence our community. The national economy, tax policy, federal and state regulation or legislation, natural disasters, the weather, dairy prices and the real estate market are a few factors that can have major impacts on all of us. No plan is perfect nor can anyone anticipate all the factors affecting us as individuals or as a community. Not all of the goals, objectives and policies outlined in this plan will be achieved. So why plan at all? If only a few of the goals are met and the result is that we leave our community a better place for our children, then the efforts will have been worth it.

### B: STATEMENT OF AUTHORIZATION

The Georgia Town Plan has been prepared in accordance with and under the authority of Title 24, Chapter 117 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated (V.S.A.) which will henceforth be referred to in this document as "the Act". As such, the provisions of the Act are hereby incorporated by reference into this Town Plan and the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations and may be used by the Planning Commission to further define and clarify any policies, goals, objectives, powers and duties expressed herein. This Act is also known as the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act.

First enacted in 1968, the Act has undergone several amendments, with a major change in 1988, known as the Growth Management Act or Act 200. There have been several recent changes to Act 200, including the removal of the "Regional Commission approval" of local plans requirement. The Act provides the legal framework for municipal planning, capital budgeting, impact fee ordinances, transfer and purchase of development rights, and land use regulation.

## SECTION II. THE COMMUNITY SETTING

### A. LOCATION AND BOUNDARIES

Georgia is located in the southwest corner of Franklin County and borders the Chittenden County towns of Milton and Westford to the south, the Franklin County towns of Fairfax to the east, St. Albans and Fairfield to the north and Lake Champlain to the west. Georgia has over seven miles of shoreline along Lake Champlain and part of its border with Milton bisects Lake Arrowhead.

The Town of Georgia has a land area of 30,952 acres, or 47.8 square miles, making it a large town by Vermont standards (many are app 36 square miles).

The Town is characterized by a narrow shoreline, a broad, relatively flat plain, the foothills of the Green Mountains, the Lamoille River and tributaries, as well as various other smaller streams, tributaries and wetlands. The Town is roughly half open land and half forested, with much of the open land devoted to agriculture.

Georgia's long boundary with Lake Champlain, it's relatively flat plain, and foothills of the Green Mountains make it a diverse and beautiful town.

### B. HISTORY

To write a history of Georgia in a few pages is like writing a single page town plan. Since 1967 the Georgia Town History Committee has produced 34 volumes of Georgia history. However, an effort has been made to touch on the highlights of our history reflecting the major changes in our community as we move through the first decade of the 21st century.

Georgia was chartered by the first royal Governor of New Hampshire, Benning Wentworth, August 17, 1763. In 1773 the original shares were purchased by men who later became prominent in Vermont affairs, Levi Allen, Ethan Allen, Remember Baker, Heman Allen and Ira Allen. By the time the town was settled, Ira Allen owned most of the shares.

The town of Georgia was organized on March 31, 1788 at a meeting warned by Judge John White of Chittenden County, of which Georgia was then a part. Reuben Evarts was elected clerk. The other officers were Stephen Davis, Stephen Holmes, and Richard Sylvester, selectmen; Frederick Bliss, constable; Solomon Goodrich and Abel Pierce, haywards; William Farrand, Noah Loomis and Stephen Fairchild, surveyors of highways.

The families of William Farrand and Andrew Van Guilder were the first to winter in Georgia, during 1785-86. The first child born in town was named Georgia Farrand. He was named by Ira Allen. The Farrands settled in the northwest corner of the town, the Van Guilders in the southeast corner. Several single men had spent their summers in town before this, returning to their homes in southern New England in the winter.

Early settlers had to transport their grain to Whitehall, New York, or Vergennes to be ground. Transportation was by way of the lake, on foot, or by ox team through the woods. In 1788 there was almost a famine as it was a poor crop year and more people wintered in town than the food supply could support.

The population of Georgia increased rapidly from 1791 when there were 340 people in town. The population figures are interesting:

1800 A.D. – 1068 residents
1810 A.D. – 1760 residents
1830 A.D. – 1899 residents
1850 A.D. – 2688 residents
1870 A.D. – 1603 residents
1890 A.D. – 1282 residents
1910 A.D. – 1090 residents

The population was never again over 1100 until 1970. Georgia was the largest town north of Burlington until 1830 and the largest town in Franklin County until 1840.

In 1800, construction of a "meeting house" was started, and in 1802 the Old White Meeting House was dedicated. It was built under the direction of Captain Spratt, an English architect. It was carefully built of the best of materials and for years was the largest and finest building in northern Vermont. It served the town in many ways for 150 years. It was destroyed by fire on October 2, 1952.

During the War of 1812, smugglers drove beef cattle into Canada to supply the British Army, but the men of Georgia sided with the customs officers and put up so courageous a fight that the traffic was stopped. The smugglers called Georgia "Hells Gate."

The Georgia militia company crossed the sand bar to Grand Isle in September 1814 and was transported across the lake to Plattsburg. There they helped repel a British invasion from Canada.

In 1850 the Central Vermont Railroad was completed through Georgia. The High Bridge over the Lamoille River is the highest railroad bridge in Vermont; it is also the most photographed railroad bridge.

Hemenway's Gazetteer lists 142 men from Georgia who served in the Civil War. Twenty-six of these men died of disease or wounds while in the service. There were six commissioned officers and two Civil War generals born in Georgia: General George H. Stannard and Brigadier General Joel A. Dewey. A granite monument near the Dunsmore farm marks General Stannard's birthplace.

Other famous men of this age who were born in Georgia were Alvah Sabin, Congressman from Vermont; Gardner Colton, who invented the first electric locomotive and who also popularized "laughing gas"; and Daniel Bliss, founder of the American University in Beirut, Lebanon in 1866.

The Vermont roster for the Spanish American War shows five men from Georgia and the roster of the Vermont Adjutant Generals office shows 24 Georgia men in the armed service during World War I. Of these two died in service and two were wounded in action. Six were commissioned officers.

In the Second World War there were at least 56 men and women from Georgia in the armed services. One, Wendell Post, did not return. Many others from Georgia served in the Korean, Viet Nam and Gulf wars.

In 1896 Georgia established a public library. The Georgia Library is now located in the building which formerly housed the Northwest Regional Library on Route 7.

**Our Churches**

As early as 1793 Congregationalists gathered in Georgia. Gradually the congregation diminished until in the 1930s services were no longer held and the church was torn down. Sarah Hyde was the inspiration for the Episcopal Church in East Georgia which was constructed in 1872. It too succumbed to lack of parishioners and by 1945 it was torn down. In 1985 the Northside Baptist Church purchased a building on Route 7 at the north end of town and it soon was renovated to serve its parishioners; this congregation has since left this location for a site in St. Albans which allowed for a larger building.

There are currently three active churches in Georgia: the Methodist Church in Georgia Center, organized about 1830; the Baptist Church in Georgia Plains, organized about 1793; and the Ascension Parish, whose first Mass was celebrated in the school, and in 1988 they gathered in their own new church on Route 7 just south of Georgia Center.

**Our Schools**

Early in its history Georgia had 16 school districts where one-room schools served the neighborhoods. In 1959 a consolidated school opened its door to 242 students. By 1973 another school had been built and the enrollment had grown to 430 students. In 1991 3.87 million dollars was spent to house about 700 students with a new building and considerable renovations to the two older ones. The student population since then has remained quite stable with the latest (2004) being 671.

**Our Town**

We now rank in the top 50 communities in population in the State. Over the years the number of farms has decreased in Georgia until in 2005 there were only 15 active farms left in town.

Although the Grange has been active in Georgia for many years, we now have Friends of the Arts, a Lions Club, active Boy, Cub, and Girl Scout troops, the Gate Players for drama buffs, a Georgia Historical Society, a Riding Club, Snowmobile Club as well as homemakers and 4-H groups. The Georgia Station Post Office opened 1993 at Bob's Hardware, and is now located at the Georgia Market on Route 7.

Georgia will continue to grow. With Lake Champlain on its western shore, Mt. Mansfield not far away, and Burlington within a half-hour, the town has strong appeal. We will continue to grow as the area grows. It is a nice place to live and people will be attracted here.

## C. POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS (DEMOGRAPHICS) OVERVIEW

In order to plan successfully, a community must define its makeup. This section of the town plan is concerned with profiling Georgia. The development of a community profile provides a solid baseline for town planning activities. With an understanding of recent growth trends, current community makeup, and likely future growth directions, a planning effort can better respond to residents' needs, and better account for the impacts and opportunities of growth. A community profile accomplishes the following: 1) documents the growth trends which have brought the town to its current situation; 2) assesses the current makeup of the town, from demographic, economic, housing and social perspectives, and; 3) assesses the range of growth factors affecting the town, to develop a realistic set of growth projections.

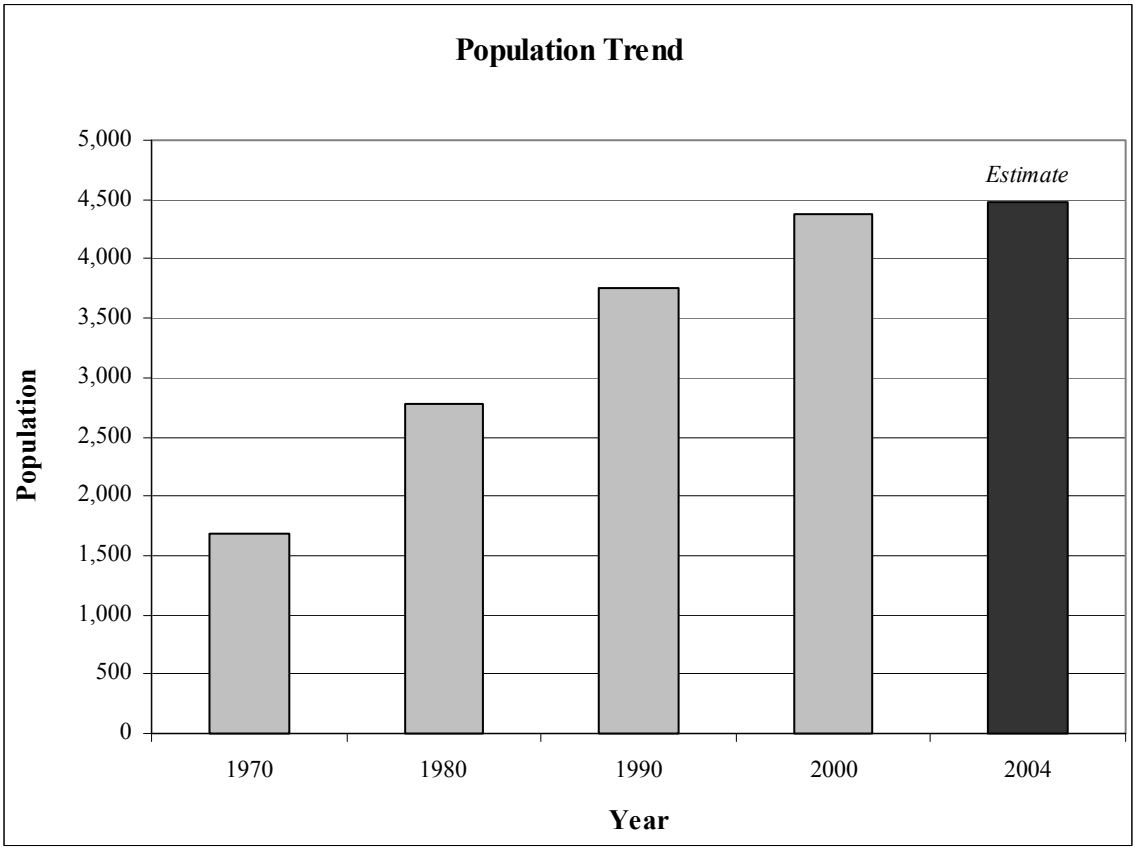



TABLE I - Source: U.S. bureau of the Census

A review of historic population data for Georgia indicates that the past few decades have experienced significant periods of growth. The 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, in particular, were a period of rapid growth for the town, as shown graphically in **Table I**, with a significant moderation seen in the 1990's and beyond. In percentage terms, Georgia grew 61% in the 1970's, 35 % in the 1980's and 16% in the 1990's. The Town has grown only 2.5% so far in the 2000's.

After a relatively strong period of growth between 1791 and 1840, when the town reached a population of just over 2,100 persons, a long period of population decline occurred. In 1940, Georgia reached a low population point of just over 1,000 persons. After some slow growth in the 1940's and 1950's, population levels have increased at a rapid pace. Between 1960 and 1990, Georgia's population increased by almost 2,700 persons. Clearly those 30 years have been a time of tremendous change n the town. Since 1990 the population has significantly stabilized. The slowdown is even more visual in **Table II** below.

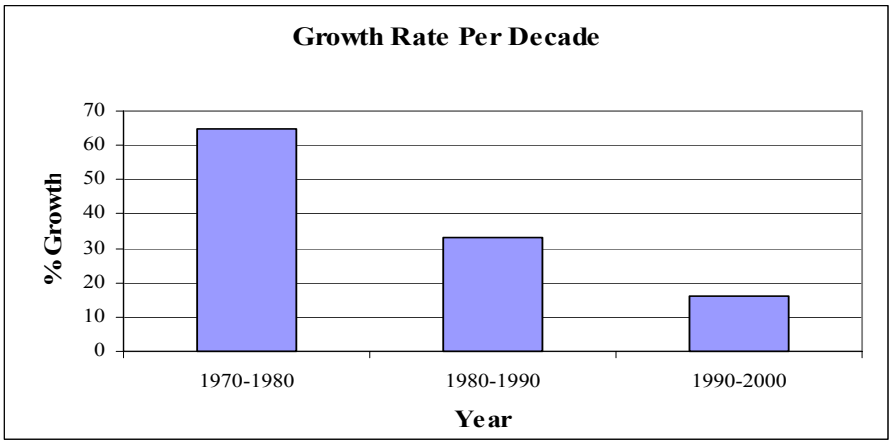



TABLE II - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

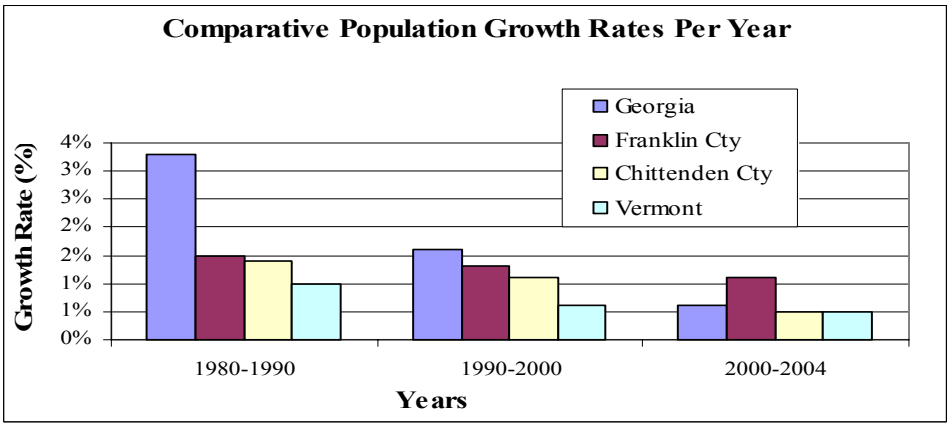



TABLE III - Source: U.S. bureau of the Census

Georgia's slowed growth rate is consistent with growth trends throughout Vermont in recent years. Also, strong growth during the mid to latter 1980's, and a recession has acted as a brake on growth during the past few years. Georgia's strongest growth period occurred between 1986 and 1989. Since 1990 the growth rate as seen in **Table II** has slowed considerably -- the average being about 1.3% per year.

**Table III** compares Georgia's percentage population growth rates during the 1980's, 1990's, and 2000's to date with Franklin County, Chittenden County and Vermont. The Georgia growth rate has dropped considerably since 1990 and is now pretty much in line with that of Franklin and Chittenden Counties and Vermont.

| **Recent Population Increase: Georgia (1988-2004)** | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **1988** | **1990** | **1992** | **1994** | **1996** | **1998** | **2000** | **2002** | **2004** |
| **Population** | 3540 | 3753 | 3921 | 3883 | 4042 | 4151 | 4375 | 4433 | 4485 |
| **% Increase** | | 6.0% | 4.5% | -1.0% | 4.1% | 2.7% | 5.4% | 1.3% | 1.2% |
| | | | | | | | | | |

TABLE IV - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Except for an occasional spurt, Georgia's growth has directed downward when compared on an every two-year basis as shown in **Table IV** above.

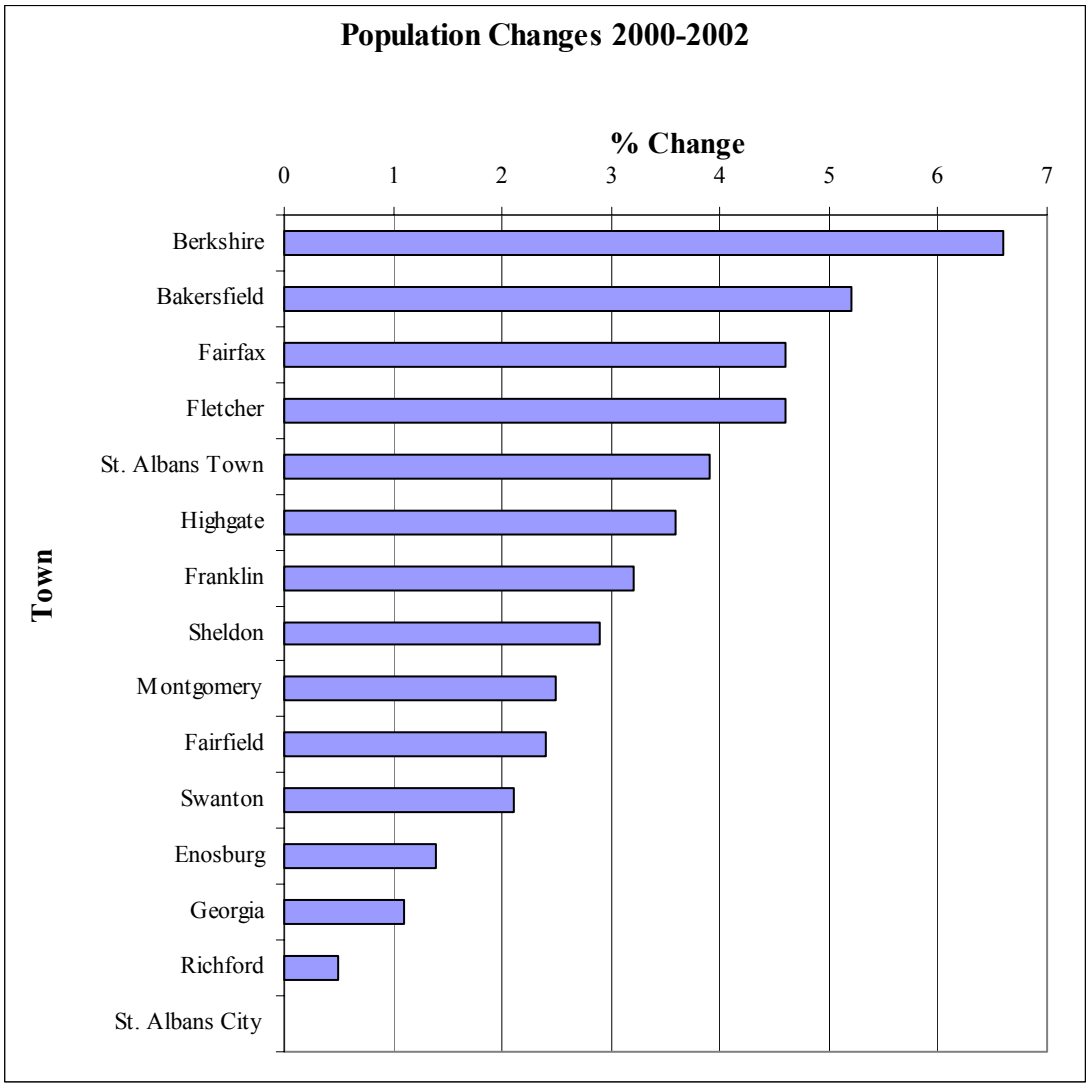
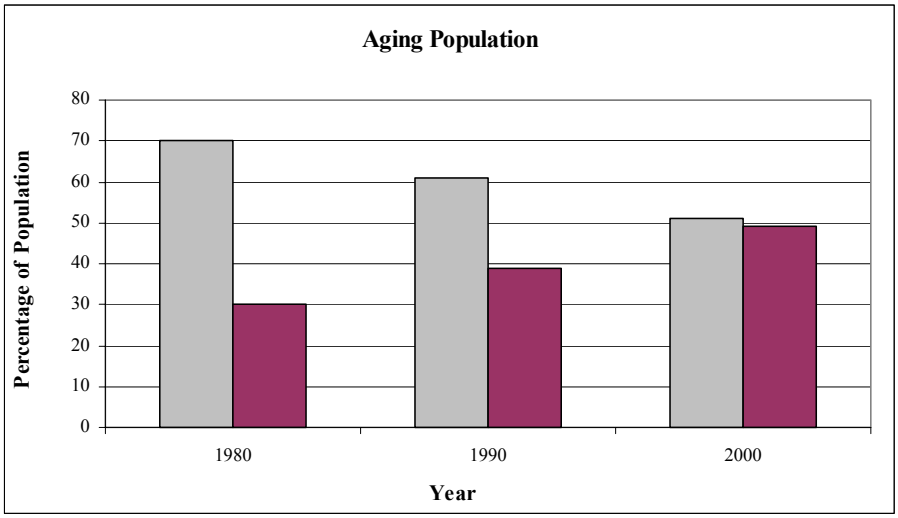



TABLE V - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Table V** shows that since 2000 Georgia is among the slowest growing towns in Franklin County, above only Richford and St. Albans City. Because of Georgia's proximity to Chittenden County, this may be reflective of the relatively slow growth in that county.




Age range <35 35+ <35 35+ <35 35+

TABLE VI - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Table VI** contains a graphic comparison of the percentage distribution of the Georgia population by age group. As is evident, the less than 35 age population is declining while the 35 and older population is increasing as a percentage of the entire town. In other words, the average age of the population is clearly increasing until by 2000 each of these populations is about 50 % of the total, whereas in 1980 the split was 70% to 30% in favor of the younger age group. This is not surprising given the historic impact of the "baby-boom" generation as it ages combined with the slow growth in recent years.

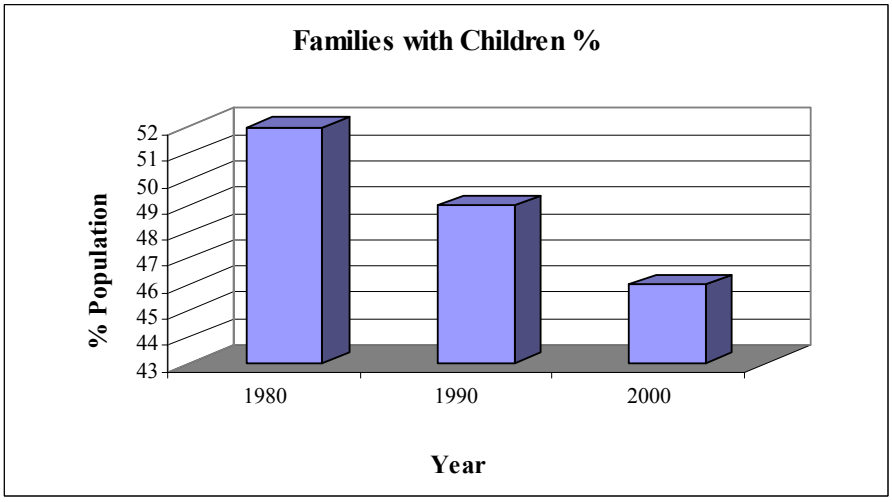



TABLE VII - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

As **Table VI I** make clear, Georgia is experiencing a modest decline in the percentage of total households which are composed of married parents and children, from near 52% in 1980 to fewer than 46 % in 2000. This trend is further reflected in the stability of the school population in town.

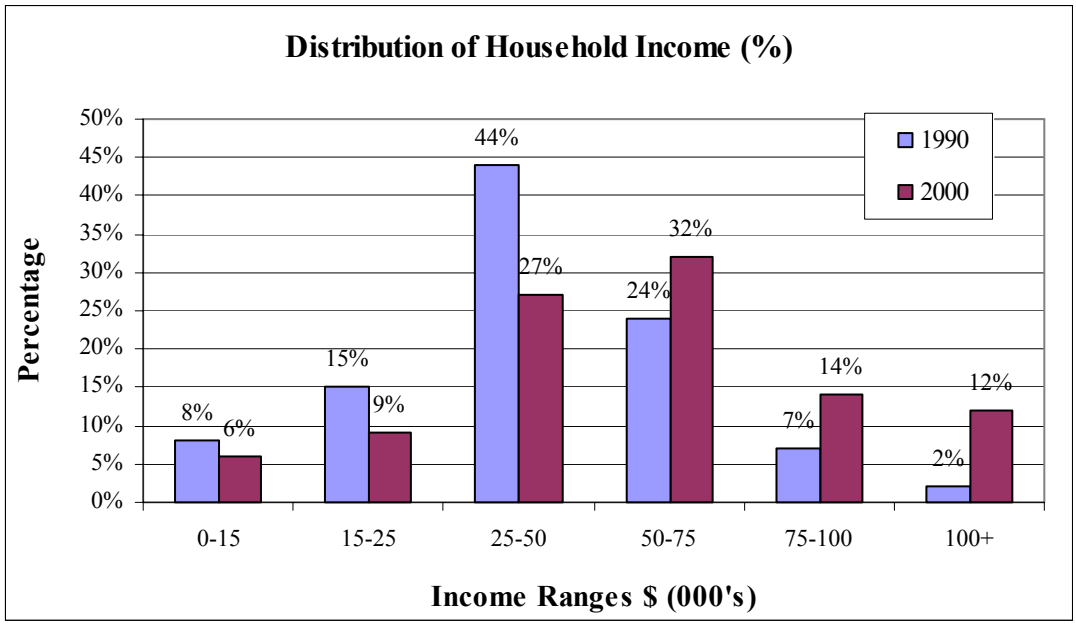



TABLE VIII - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

An investigation of income levels in Georgia suggests, as illustrated in **Table VIII**, that the town is attracting people with substantially higher incomes per household. In 2000 nearly 60% of households had income upwards of $50,000 while ten years earlier that percentage was only 33%. It is one more indicator of our aging demographics. It is probably also a reflection of the type of houses that have been built in recent years.

**D. POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

Georgia's profile is incomplete without an estimate of future growth in the town. Projecting population growth for small communities is difficult due to the large error caused by very small errors in assumptions. During the past few decades, Georgia has become a popular place for young families to move and build a home. This "migration" to Georgia has clearly varied in concert with the regional economy. The mid to late 1980's were years when many families moved to town, evidenced by a substantial amount of residential construction. However, the recession in the early 1990's slowed down the pace of growth, and the growth has been moderate since.

The 2000 Census shows that the town's population increased to 4,375 from 3,753 in 1990, which amounts to an increase of 16.5%, or 1.65% per year. In comparison, Georgia's population grew by 65 percent during the 1970's, and 33 percent during the 1980's. The early 2000's have seen an even slower growth rate of about 0.6 percent per year. This will place a greater emphasis on keeping Town budgets under strict control and finding ways to develop a larger tax base.

| Rate of Growth/Projections | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Table IX** | **Actuals** | | | | **Projection 2010** | |
| | **1980** | **1990** | **2000** | **2004** | **Low** | **High** |
| **Population** | 2780 | 3753 | 4375 | 4485 | 4625 | 4875 |
| **Aver. Growth/Yr** | 110 | 97 | 62 | 27.5 | 25 | 50 |
| **% of End Yr.** | 4.0% | 2.6% | 1.4% | 0.6% | 0.5% | 1.0% |

TABLE IX - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Table IX** shows growth rates in recent decades and clearly demonstrates a steady decline over time. Seeing this trend and knowing of the very slow growth occurring throughout Vermont and seeing nothing on the horizon to change that trend in the foreseeable future, it seems prudent to plan on these trends continuing through the balance of this decade. Therefore, it is felt that a growth rate range of between 0.5% and 1.0% per year makes sense.

| Age Distribution/Projections | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Table X** | **Actuals** | | | | | | **Projection 2010** | | |
| | **1980** | | **1990** | | **2000** | | **Low** | | **High** |
| **Age Range** | **Total** | **%** | **Total** | **%** | **Total** | **%** | **%** | **Total** | **Total** |
| **0-4** | 306 | 11 | 368 | 10 | 309 | 7 | 6 | 277 | 293 |
| **5-34** | 1613 | 58 | 1943 | 52 | 1926 | 44 | 40 | 1850 | 1950 |
| **35-74** | 639 | 29 | 1377 | 36 | 2026 | 46 | 50 | 2313 | 2437 |
| **75+** | 55 | 2 | 65 | 2 | 114 | 3 | 4 | 185 | 195 |
| **Total** | **2780** | | **3753** | | **4375** | | | **4625** | **4875** |

TABLE X - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Given the growth rates projected in **Table IX** above, a distribution of that growth was made recognizing that the trend toward an increasingly aging population that these were then factored by age group as seen in **Table X**. It is significant to note that, as will be shown in Section IV, this Town Plan's maximum rate of residential development is thirty-five new dwellings (year-round) per year. In no year since that policy was adopted has this figure for development been reached.

**E. PROPERTY AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS (GROWTH)**

As the U.S. census figures for 2000 show, the growth rate of population for Georgia has slowed considerably in recent years. Likewise, the number of building units for residential has also declined to well below the number anticipated in the 2001 plan which prompted application of the limit of 35 units built in any one year.

**Property Trends**

| | 1985 | | 2000 | | 2005 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | # prop | %total | #prop | %total | #prop | %total |
| Residential | 897 | 65% | 1,340 | 75% | 1,419 | 77% |
| Vacation | 189 | 14% | 193 | 11% | 184 | 10% |
| Commercial/ Industrial | 38 | 3% | 55 | 3% | 57 | 3% |
| Other | 252 | 18% | 205 | 11% | 188 | 10% |
| Total: | 1376 | | 1793 | | 1848 | |

TABLE XI - Source: Town of Georgia

Georgia's growth has taken a number of forms over the years. This is significant, as a changing distribution of property types affects the town's ability to provide services and has implications for taxpayers. **Table X*I*** shows variation in the distribution of major property types in town, by percent of total value, during the period from 1985 to 2005. In addition, property types have been broken down in terms of the percent of total numbers of listed properties, for 1985 through 2005. Property has been divided into four major categories: 1) Year-Round Residential Property; 2) Seasonal (Vacation) Residential Property; 3) Commercial/Industrial/Utility Property, and; 4) other Property.

In 1985, Year-Round Residential property accounted for 65 percent of the properties in Georgia. This had increased to 75% percent by 2000 and increased to 77% through 2005. Overall, new industrial development in the town has kept the Commercial-Industrial category at an even level through 2005. However, both Seasonal Residential and Farm-Woodland-Open Land have decreased significantly as a percentage of the total.

The combination of the increase in the year round residential property values and the decrease in seasonal and farm-woodland values has tax implications to all residents. Year round residences generally pay less in taxes than they require in services, whereas the farm-woodland and seasonal properties pay more in taxes than they require in services. The tax burden would have been greater over the period, except that the Town has attracted additional industrial and commercial activity, which reduces the burden on residential development.

Trends in Taxable Property

| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 | 2004 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Market value | $43. | $73. | $205. | $225. | $241. | $260. |

Note: all figures in millions

TABLE XII - Source: Town of Georgia

Market Value per citizen

| | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2004 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 2780 | 3753 | 4375 | 4485 |
| Market value | $43. | $205 | $241 | $260 |
| $/pop. | $ 15,500 | $ 54,600 | $55,100 | $58,000 |

Note: Market Values in millions

TABLE XIII - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and Town of Georgia

As shown in **Tables XII and XIII** above, the market value of taxable property in Georgia increased approximately 8% percent between 2000 and 2004 for an annual average of 2%, which is consistent with the annual growth rate of 1.8% per year experienced in the period from 1990 through 2000. It illustrates that, though Georgia is no longer growing dramatically in population, its value is continuing to grow modestly.

**F. HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS**

Georgia's housing trends directly reflect population growth trends. As a primarily residential town which, in part, serves as a bedroom community for regional job centers, the town's housing stock is focused on single family units, used on a year-round basis. The town also has a notable second home component, although this is consistent with the state average. Finally, there is a limited rental housing market in the town.

Between 1980 and 1992, it is estimated that the total number of housing units in Georgia increased by just over 400, a 38 percent increase over the 1980 level. In comparison, countywide, housing units increased by 19 percent while the number of statewide units increased by 22 percent. Georgia's housing stock is strongly oriented toward single family units, as shown in **Table XIV,** with the same trends continuing in 2000.

Comparative distribution of Housing Units by Type (1990-2000)

| | Single Family | Duplex | 3 Units | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1990 #unit | 1,206 | 55 | 24 | 112 | 1,397 |
| %total | 86% | 4% | 2% | 8% | |
| 2000 #unit | 1,290 | 73 | 32 | 91 | 1,486 |
| %total | 87% | 5% | 2% | 6% | |

TABLE XIV - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Georgia has few housing units in multi-unit buildings, or in mobile homes. Clearly, people who live in Georgia prefer single family units on individual lots. Housing usage in Georgia has trended increasingly to owner-occupied from 1990 to 2000 with rentals stable and seasonal declining as a percent of the total.

**Table XV** below shows housing use broken down into four major categories: 1) Owner Occupied (occupied by year-round residents who own the dwelling); 2) Renter Occupied (occupied by year-round residents who rent the dwelling); 3) Vacant-Seasonal Use (held for occasional use), and; 4) Vacant.

A substantial majority of Georgia's housing units are occupied by the persons who own them. There is a limited rental housing market in town. Although the seasonal housing unit component of the housing stock is quite visible along Georgia's lakeshore, these units do not comprise an unusually large segment of the housing stock.

Comparative Distribution of Housing Units by Usage (1990-2000)

| | Owner Occupied | Renter Occupied | Used Seasonally | Vacant |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 75% | 11% | 12% | 2% |
| 2000 | 80% | 10% | 9% | 1% |

TABLE XV - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

## G. HOUSING NEED

### Overview

Housing issues are clearly an important aspect of a town plan. This is particularly true in Georgia, which is primarily a residential community. The following presents some perspective on housing issues, particularly as they apply to Georgia.

Housing markets and issues will change over time along with the economy and other factors. However, it is important to keep in mind that people will always need adequate shelter. Since Georgia is a popular place to live, it will be important to ensure that housing in the town meets the needs of its residents.

In assessing housing issues, it is important to consider a regional perspective. In this part of New England, housing stock and pricing can vary significantly from town to town. No town is a closed system, where future housing needs can be projected based on an analysis of the current population alone. Housing markets are always regional in nature. Demographic trends and in-migration/out-migration over a broad area will affect demand levels and pricing in Georgia.

The town is part of a regional market. This is particularly true, as many Georgia residents commute out of the town for employment. Given existing commuting patterns, it is realistic to assess both Franklin and Chittenden Counties as comparative areas.

### Housing and Market Conditions

The Housing Demographics section of this plan documents an essential point about Georgia. The housing stock is strongly oriented toward single family homes. Further, these homes tend to be occupied by the households that own them. By regional standards, this housing stock is in the moderate range of the price scale. Nevertheless, Georgia does not have many units at the low end of the price scale. Further, it is clear that the local rental housing market is limited. **Table XVI** contains a summary comparison of Georgia's housing stock with those for Franklin and Chittenden Counties.

| Housing Stock Comparison<br>Georgia, Franklin & Chittenden Counties (1990 & 2000) | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Georgia | | Franklin County | | Chittenden County | |
| Table XIV | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| **Population** | 3,791 | 4,375 | 40,158 | 45,417 | 133,394 | 146,571 |
| **Median Home Value** | $94,400 | $119,600 | $82,700 | $99,300 | $117,300 | $139,000 |
| **Median Gross Rent** | $508 | $713 | $412 | $539 | $526 | $662 |
| **% Renter Occupied** | 11% | 10% | 27% | 25% | 36% | 34% |
| **Occupied Mobile Homes as % of Occupied Units** | 8% | 6% | 11% | 10% | 5% | 5% |

TABLE XVI - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Georgia's owner-occupied housing stock is more expensive than the comparative, region-wide value. This reflects the predominance of single family housing. Georgia's housing stock contains a relatively small percentage of mobile homes, which often offer an affordable housing option. Condominiums, which have offered an affordable housing option in other parts of the state, have clearly not gained market acceptance in this region.

Georgia's housing market is affected by regional patterns in both Franklin and Chittenden Counties. Rental and owner-occupied home values are higher than comparable homes in Franklin County but are lower than those in Chittenden County. Given the influence of Chittenden County on Georgia it is likely that housing trends to the south will continue to have significance locally.

From a real estate perspective, Georgia is a single family market. Owner occupied housing is relatively more expensive in Georgia than in Franklin County, but pricing is not at the high end of the scale. Much of the new development in the town during the past ten to fifteen years appears to have been purchased by first time buyers. Lake frontage in the town is associated with seasonal housing stock. However, recent real estate transaction data indicates that this is not a very active market.

A comparison of 1990 and 2000 shows how costs of both home prices and rentals have increased in a major way -- a faster pace than either County has. Median gross rent is now higher than even Chittenden County. Stocks of rentals and mobile homes have remained quite stable over the decade.

**Housing Needs**

The demographics of a community or housing market can be used to assess housing needs, by general type. A range of factors, including individual preferences, affect housing needs. Housing market analyses make it clear that age and income are strong factors in the type of housing people want.

Using data for the current and projected mix of households by age of household head and income, it is possible to make broad assessments about housing need. For instance, a household with a head aged between 25-34 years, with an income level in the $25,000-$49,999 range, will probably be seeking, or have recently purchased, its first home. Markets with a substantial number of households in this category will be a good one for affordable, starter housing. With the exceptions of upper age bracket households and households with a preference for mobile homes, households with incomes below $25,000 are most likely to be renters, while households with incomes of $50,000 or more are likely to be established, single family homeowners.

| Household Income Distribution: Georgia, Franklin & Chittenden Counties (1990 & 2000) | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Table XVII | Georgia | | Franklin County | | Chittenden County | |
| | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 | 1990 | 2000 |
| **$0-$24,999** | 23% | 15% | 43% | 27% | 32% | 22% |
| **$25,000-$49,999** | 44% | 27% | 40% | 34% | 37% | 30% |
| **$50,000 +** | 33% | 58% | 17% | 39% | 31% | 48% |

TABLE XVII - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Table XV II** shows Household Income distribution comparisons with Franklin and Chittenden Counties as well as a comparison of the changes between 1990 and 2000. Clearly, incomes have increased significantly in each region though Georgia's shift to higher brackets is more dramatic. Nearly 60% of Georgia's households now make $50,000+.

Since only a segment of all households will be seeking housing at any time, it is helpful to assess the "propensity to

move" of income categories to estimate the size of the housing markets. Households in various income groups have markedly varied propensities to move within the course of a year. Most significantly, the propensity to move declines with increasing age and income. Thus, lower income households are the most likely to move, while older, higher income households are the least likely to move.

The analyses make it clear that housing needs are likely to stabilize with the trend toward higher income residents since they tend not to be as upwardly mobile. In-migration of moderate income people will be a function of Georgia's ability to make provisions for affordable housing units. This will be a serious consideration for Georgia's future.

It is possible to project maximum anticipated growth in the Town's housing stock, based on the analysis of the Town's public facilities and services presented in Section IV, and on the analysis of the capacity of the preferred growth areas in Section V. With a target average annual increase of thirty-five new year-round dwellings, the Town's year-round housing stock will grow from an estimated 1,378 units in 1997 to 1,483 units in the year 2000, and to 1,658 units in the year 2005.

**Affordability**

In Vermont, it is assumed that housing is affordable if the total monthly cost doesn't exceed 30% of a household's income. Further, assessment of affordable housing needs focus on households whose income level is below 100% of the median household income (Half of all households earn more than the median.). Deeply subsidized housing programs typically focus on households whose income is below 50% of the area median.

**Affordability in Housing**
**Georgia, Franklin & Chittenden Counties (2000)**

| **Table XVI** | **Rental Basis** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Georgia** | **Franklin Cty** | **Chittenden Cty** | | | |
| **Median Household Income** | $54,156 | $41,659 | $47,673 | | | |
| **50% of Median** | $27,078 | $20,830 | $23,837 | | | |
| **30% of Monthly (available for housing)** | $677 | $521 | $596 | | | |
| **Less Utilities/Costs** | -$150 | -$150 | -$150 | | | |
| **Affordable Monthly Rent** | $527 | $371 | $446 | | | |
| | **Purchase Basis** | | | | | |
| | **100% of Median** | | | **80% of Median** | | |
| | **Georgia** | **Franklin Cty** | **Chittenden Cty** | **Georgia** | **Franklin Cty** | **Chittenden Cty** |
| **Median Household Income** | $54,156 | $41,659 | $47,673 | $54,156 | $41,659 | $47,673 |
| **% of Median** | $54,156 | $41,659 | $47,673 | $43,325 | $33,327 | $38,138 |
| **30% of Monthly (available for housing)** | $1,354 | $1,041 | $1,192 | $1,083 | $833 | $953 |
| **Less Taxes/Insurance** | -$300 | -$300 | -$300 | -$300 | -$300 | -$300 |
| **Affordable Mortgage Payment** | $1,054 | $741 | $892 | $783 | $533 | $653 |
| **Affordable Housing Price** | $166,900 | $117,750 | $141,750 | $124,400 | $84,700 | $103,750 |
| ***10% Down, 30 Year, 7.5%** | | | | | | |

TABLE XVIII - Source: Town of Georgia and U.S. Bureau of the Census

Housing costs that are affordable for Georgia, Franklin and Chittenden Counties residents have been calculated and are shown in **Table XVIII** The first table calculates an affordable, monthly rental level for households whose income is below 50% of the median, while the second calculates an affordable housing price for households whose income falls below 100% of the median and 80% of the median.

Housing "Affordability" varies substantially between Georgia and Franklin County residents. From a regional market perspective, a monthly rent of $371 would be regarded as affordable for very low income households. This compares to $527 in Georgia. Because of the limited size of the Georgia rental housing market, and existing, above average market pricing, it is unlikely that these households will find housing within the town. A housing price of just under $118,000 would be regarded as affordable for median income households countywide, while the similar value for Georgia residents would be nearly $167,000. As such, it is possible that these households will find housing in Georgia. However, regional households at 80% of the median income, for whom housing at a purchase price of approximately $85,000 would be regarded as affordable, might have a more difficult time finding housing in town.

Housing Affordability issues are addressed by a number of statewide and regional organizations. At the state level,

agencies like the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA), Housing Vermont, and the Vermont State Housing Authority administer a number of programs which are oriented toward making housing more affordable for low and moderate income residents. Of particular relevance for a town oriented toward ownership housing like Georgia, VHFA provides several low cost mortgage programs, which can decrease both the initial and ongoing costs of home ownership. Land trusts can also play a role in housing development where the dual goals of conservation of open, agricultural land and provision of moderate income housing are involved.

For low income residents, the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity offers a weatherization program which offers greater energy efficiency in housing and which can improve basic housing conditions. Households whose income level is less than 150 percent of the Federal poverty guideline can apply for the program which, dependent on the individual circumstances, can address problems with insulation, building envelope, windows &doors, heating system and distribution and additional items. Unfortunately, there is currently a program waiting list exceeding one year in Franklin County.

**Summary**

Georgia is unlikely to become a center for subsidized housing in the region. There is currently no infrastructure in place to support a concentration of high density housing, and the lack of commercial and social services make it a less than ideal location. However, the recent study GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN, A Vision of the Future by Lamoureux & Dickinson Consulting Engineers, Inc. completed in April 2003 envisioned segments of affordable and senior housing in Georgia Center and the South Georgia Village areas (Southern Tier) of Georgia. These are being addressed as part of a master plan study currently underway as a follow-on to the referenced study.

Given the regional market, and the type of household which has found Georgia to be attractive, a more likely affordable housing initiative might take the form of a reasonably priced, for sale development, which could be subsidized with a land lease shared equity arrangement through a housing trust, and with Vermont Housing Finance Agency mortgage programs. This would give households in the low to moderate income range (80%± of Median) a home ownership opportunity.

Market forces will continue to dominate the housing real estate in Georgia. No matter how active the town may be in housing issues, it is unlikely to make any significant change in the prevailing market. However, by recognizing local and regional housing needs, Georgia can play an appropriate regional role in providing an adequate housing stock for a variety of population groups. The town plan can set policies, or suggest courses of action which could encourage a variety of housing forms in the town. It will be important to consider town services in making planning decisions. Current town services do not provide public water or sewer systems for the majority of town residents. Because most residences must rely upon on-site systems, there is limited opportunity to concentrate residential development at higher densities, which can be an aid in the provision of affordable housing opportunities.

**<u>Housing Goals, Policies and Objectives:</u>**

**Goal:**
**To encourage the provision of housing that:**

**Is appropriate to population growth and meets the diverse social and economic needs of Georgia residents.**

**Is safe, sanitary, energy efficient, and located appropriately.**

**Objectives:**

~ To encourage the provision of affordable housing.

~ Where possible, rehabilitate existing housing through the use of existing programs or volunteer efforts.

~ Provide a diversity of housing types and ownership that meets the needs of Georgia residents.

~ To review local regulations for their effects on housing.

~ Encourage energy efficiency of housing and developments through design review at the planning stage.

**Policies:**

~ Ensure that residential development does not exceed the ability of the community to provide services and facilities for such development.

~ Design and phase development so as to minimize impacts on municipal services, local tax burden and important resources.

~ Changes of use should not be allowed unless they comply with local regulations.

## H. THE LOCAL ECONOMY

**Georgia's economy can be viewed in two ways:**

**1)** What economic activities occur within the town, and;
**2)** In what local or regional economic activities are Georgia residents involved?

While Georgia is often regarded as a bedroom community, the data makes it apparent that there is a substantial amount of economic activity within the town. Clearly, industrial development had a substantial impact during the 1980's. This is true throughout Franklin County. While the county remains Vermont's top dairy producer, it is also home to some of the state's top manufacturers.

Georgia experienced strong employment increases through the 1980's and 90's, largely in response to the establishment of new industries in the local business parks. While Georgia's employment base has experienced significant growth, the town is still not a regional job center.

While employment in Georgia varies from regional norms, Georgia residents are a part of the regional economy, and find jobs in a variety of industries and occupations. **Table XIX** compares the percentage distribution of Georgia residents' employment by industry and occupation with similar breakdowns for Franklin County and Vermont.

Overall, the data shows that Georgia residents find jobs in industries and occupations which do not differ significantly from regional or statewide averages, other than Georgia's dominance in manufacturing which accounts for some 29% of employment.

**Comparative Breakdown of Resident Employment by Industry and Occupation Georgia, Franklin Cty and Vermont (2000)**

**Table XIX**

| Resident Employment by Industry | Georgia | Franklin Cty | Vermont |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Ag/Forestry/Fish/Mining** | 3% | 6% | 3% |
| **Construction** | 7% | 7% | 7% |
| **Manufacturing** | 29% | 23% | 15% |
| **Transportation/Utilities** | 4% | 4% | 4% |
| **Trades** | 14% | 15% | 15% |
| **Finance/Insur/Real Estate** | 3% | 3% | 5% |
| **Professional Services** | 6% | 5% | 7% |
| **Public Administration** | 4% | 7% | 4% |
| **Education/Health/Social Svs** | 21% | 19% | 24% |
| **Other** | 9% | 11% | 16% |

| Resident Employment by Occupation | Georgia | Franklin Cty | Vermont |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Management/Professional** | 32% | 31% | 36% |
| **Services** | 11% | 13% | 16% |
| **Sales & Office** | 25% | 24% | 24% |
| **Ag/Fish/Forestry** | 1% | 2% | 1% |
| **Construction & Maintenance** | 12% | 10% | 9% |
| **Production/Transportation** | 19% | 20% | 14% |

**Source: U.S. BUREAU OF THE CENSUS**

TABLE XIX - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Given its location between St. Albans City to the north and Burlington to the south, Georgia residents might be expected to commute to both market centers. However, employment data makes it clear that the greater Burlington area is the dominant job center in the region. Many Georgia residents commute to Burlington on a daily basis for employment.

Georgia's employment base is highly dependent on Manufacturing, reflecting the importance of the Regional Dairy Industrial Park. The importance of large employers in the employment base is reflected in data regarding the average number of employees per business. Covered employment data available from the state understates the importance of agriculture and small business in local economies because it is largely unreported. In Georgia, small businesses and agriculture are an integral aspect of our economy and, particularly in the instance of agriculture, give the town a unique visual and social image. Note the following:

~ Agriculture provides both full-time and seasonal employment. Seasonal employment in agriculture can help to increase income levels for otherwise underemployed persons.

~ There is a relationship between Georgia's farms and the location of industry engaged in the processing of agricultural products. The continued presence of farms in the town will create jobs both directly and by attracting other businesses which utilize agricultural products.

~ Georgia's agricultural landscape is attractive to Vermont travelers. As such, it creates secondary economic activity for businesses which can draw from travelers in the region.

~ Agriculture is a fiscal bonus from the town's standpoint. While generating substantial tax revenues, it creates minimal need for town services.

~ Small businesses also serve an important economic role by creating jobs for persons seeking a change in careers or underemployed persons. Looking to the future, it is likely that small businesses will create most of the new jobs in the region. Similar to agriculture, small business is a fiscal benefit to the town, as it creates tax base while requiring relatively few services.

**Summary**

Businesses and appropriate industries are an essential component of a healthy community. Careful planning can provide a better standard of living and meaningful jobs to residents. The designation of growth centers and the construction of the necessary infrastructure for certain types of growth will enhance the ability of towns to attract appropriate and desired commercial and industrial activity.

**Economic Development Goal, Policies and Objectives:**

**Goal:**
**To encourage the development and expansion of appropriate and compatible industry and business in the town.**

**Objectives:**

~ To promote a diversified and stable economy by encouraging compatible industrial and commercial development and the continuation of existing industries, small businesses and home occupations.

~ To provide necessary infrastructure to accommodate more intensive land uses (such as industrial and commercial), within areas designated for such growth. To avoid those areas where infrastructure is not available, the land will not support the use, or there would be a conflict with present land uses.

~ To encourage clustering of related and compatible businesses and industries and avoid strip development along highways.

~ When planning for commercial and industrial development, encourage such development to serve the public good in terms of employment, revenue, environmental quality, health and safety, and services.

~ To investigate what business types are compatible with uses in Zones that do not currently allow any business uses, and modify the Regulations, if appropriate.

~ To ensure that the Georgia Industrial Park stays large enough to support future business opportunities

- To investigate programs supporting sustainable agriculture.

- To encourage home occupations that are compatible with the surrounding areas.

**Policies:**

~ To enhance and protect the vitality of Villages and population centers as important community assets.

~ Commercial and industrial development should not place an undue burden on the town in terms of services and facilities required from their development and its associated impacts.

~ To encourage, through the site plan review process, innovation in design and layout for improved traffic flow, pedestrian access, parking, landscaping and screening, lighting and aesthetics.

## I. TAXES, GROWTH & FISCAL CONDITIONS

### Overview

Given Vermont's property tax system and state aid to education policies, the pace and form of land development has a great deal of significance to the fiscal health of communities. Virtually any form of land development has two related effects:

1) The generation of additional revenues in the form of town/school property taxes and state aid to education, and

2) The generation of need for additional community services, which have associated costs.

This plan section provides background on Georgia's recent and current fiscal situation, and provides a basis upon which to project our fiscal future based on potential development trends.

### Town & School Expenditures & Property Taxes

Town and school expenditures have increased at different rates in recent years. This is shown in **Table XX** below, which covers the period from 1996 to 2005. Table XX shows total expenditures broken into two parts: 1) Town (Highways, Police, Fire, etc.), and; 2) Georgia School District.

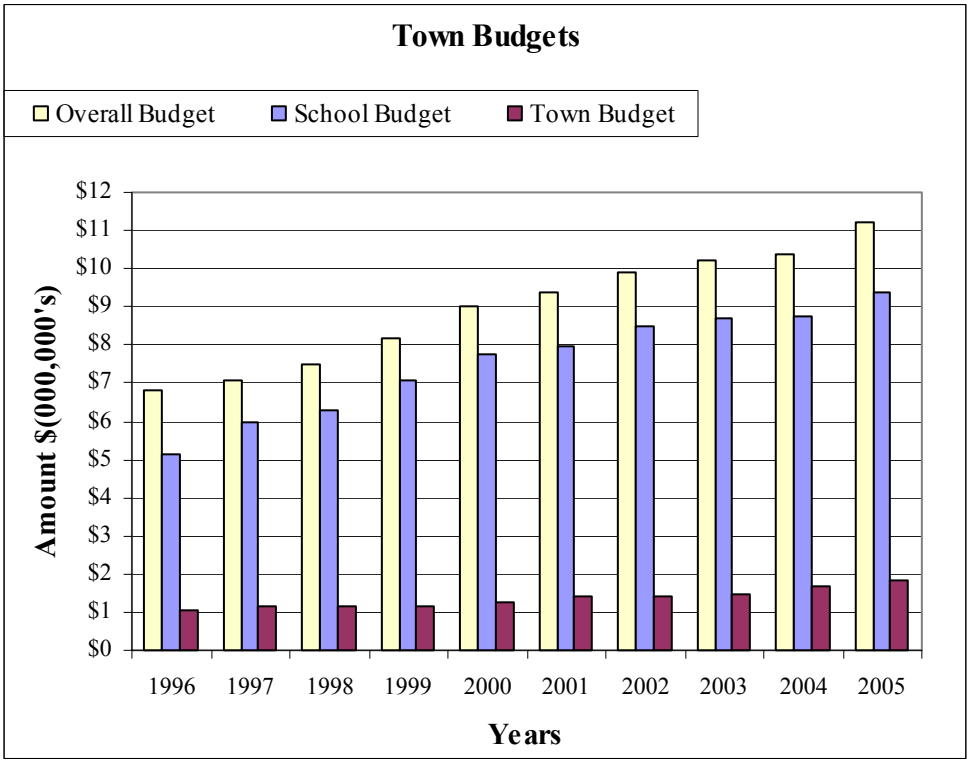



TABLE XX - Source: Town of Georgia

As shown in **Table XX**, town expenditures, though a relatively small portion of the budget picture, have been increasing at about the same rate as the school budgets for the period 1996 to 2005, with school making up 84% and town 16% in 1996 and also in 2005. Over that period the total budget increased from $6.8million in 1996 to $11.2million in 2005 for a 65% total increase. The average annual increase in the total budget was 5.7% per year.

Increases in budgets have been accompanied by real increases in the tax burden carried by Georgia residents. **Table XXI** shows changes in the residential tax rate in Georgia for the period 1996 to 2005. For the period 1997 to 2003, the tax rate increased from $1.65/100 to $2.41/100 or 46% for an average annual increase of approximately 6.6% per year. Since 2001 the Town tax rate has remained stable at about $.37 so the increase since then is solely attributable to school costs.

After 2003 the state changed their formula for allocating rates for state funded education redistribution (Act 68) which reduced the homestead portion as shown on **Table XXI**.

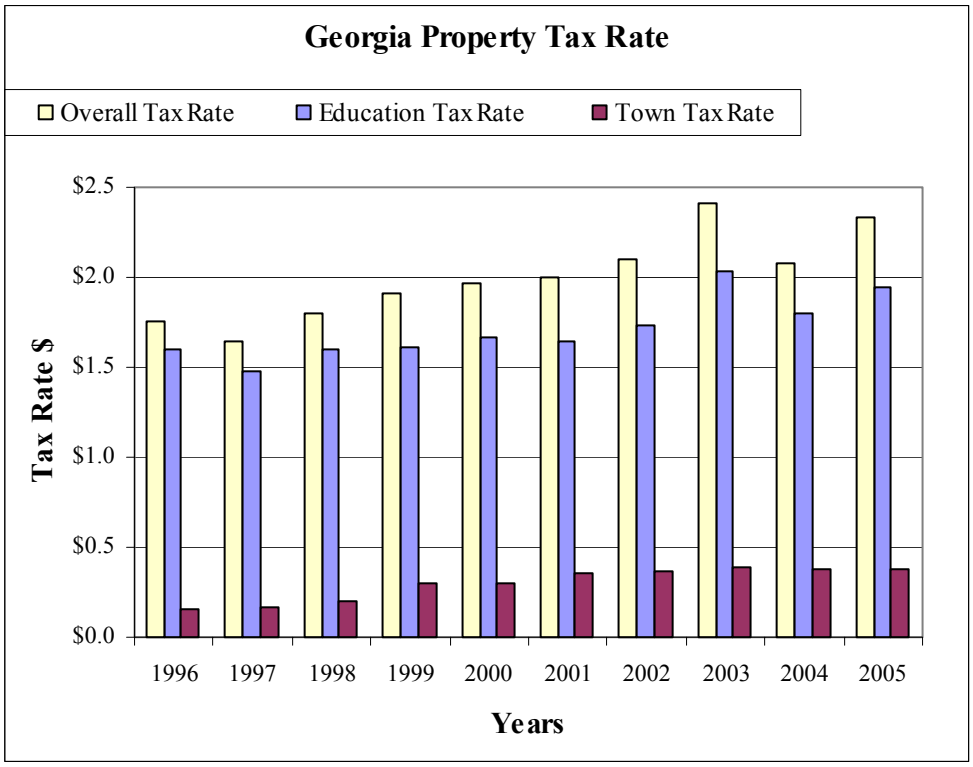



TABLE XXI - Source: Town of Georgia

**Fiscal Impacts of Development**

Fiscal impact assessment involves the measurement of the impact a proposed land use may have on a community, from a dollars and cents standpoint. A common approach involves "cost averaging", an assumption that each new increment of growth will have the same costs as existing development in the town. In its simplest form, this approach includes the following basic steps:

~ Determine the populations generated by growth – People, School-Age Children, and Employees.

~ Translate the populations into consequent public service costs (Town and School).

~ Project the revenues to be generated by the project.

~ Compare development-induced revenues to development-induced costs to determine net result. A positive fiscal impact refers to revenues exceeding costs, while a negative impact refers to the reverse situation.

Certain land uses are generally considered to be fiscal "winners" from a local perspective, because they produce more in revenues than they generate in service costs. These include commercial uses and higher value residential uses which don't produce school children. In a town where the majority of local taxes support education, it is clear that residential development which produces additional school children has real cost implications.

The following are important considerations for future land use in Georgia, particularly with respect to ensuring that town services and facilities will be able to handle growth without straining the town's fiscal resources:

~ It is likely that the real cost of providing services and facilities in Georgia will increase, even if no development occurs. Further, municipalities typically increase service offerings as they increase in size. Historical data indicates that residential property creates approximately 80 percent of all town service costs.

~ An analysis of the direct fiscal impacts of several development types in Georgia shows predictable results. Virtually any residential development which produces school-aged children has a negative fiscal impact. This is typical of virtually any town in Vermont.

~ A similar analysis of non-residential property indicates that on a direct basis, these land uses typically have a positive fiscal impact (although this may have changed with Act 60 and Act 68-see below). This is directly related to education

costs. Non-residential development pays school taxes but does not contribute directly to school enrollment. However, the potential, secondary fiscal impacts of non-residential development should also be noted, as impacts vary dependent on the circumstances of the use. For instance: 1) Non-residential uses which create a substantial amount of traffic or other activity could result in town service costs which exceed revenues generated, and 2) The creation of jobs by a new, non-residential use could have the secondary impact of drawing additional families to Georgia, with resultant education costs. However, regional data indicates that approximately ten percent of newly created jobs will be filled by persons who move to the area for that purpose.

~ Seasonal residential property also tends to have a positive fiscal impact. Seasonal residential development pays school taxes but does not generally contribute to school enrollment.

~ The fiscal implications of undeveloped land (including agricultural land, woodlots, open land and conservation areas) are also important to consider. Evidence shows us that the great majority of community service costs are related to people. Georgia residents and people who work in town create most of our costs. In relative terms, undeveloped land does not contribute much in revenues. However, it clearly generates substantially less need for services. Available research work shows that undeveloped land typically contributes more in revenues than it creates in service costs. Thus, it will be important to consider fiscal implications when assessing the future use of agricultural or undeveloped land. In many instances, it may be fiscally prudent to retain land in its undeveloped or agricultural form. This is particularly true when land is located in remote locations, and would require expensive extensions of service systems were development to occur. In addition, retention of the agricultural character and scenic viewsheds of the Town were a primary message sent by citizens as expressed in the survey.

~ In 1997, the Vermont legislature passed the Equal Education Opportunity Act (Act 60), which is intended to provide equitable levels of funding for education, and be income sensitive for local property-tax payers. The true impact of Act 60 (and Act 68) is difficult to determine. As the town grand list increases the state formula begins to consider Georgia a "sending" rather than "receiving" town, which tends to penalize prosperity. To further complicate the situation, the state in 2004 set a separate, higher rate for non-homestead property of which Georgia has an abundant supply.

**Summary**

Overall, analysis indicates that a strong rate of residential growth will tend to increase tax rates in Georgia, as this type of growth generates new residents and school children, both of which generate service costs. Tax rate increases can be modified by increases in the non-residential property base, particularly in instances where non-residential projects take care of many of their own service needs. The presence of major industries in Georgia has clearly had a positive impact on our town's fiscal situation. However, it is important to keep in mind that the growth of the business and industrial base can have the secondary impact of drawing additional families to the town. Just as importantly, the preservation of undeveloped and agricultural land will also be important from a fiscal standpoint, as these lands generate taxes while creating relatively small service demands.

In the years since 1995 Georgia has experienced relatively small growth in population. Despite this, a review of town and school finance makes it clear that the cost of providing services and facilities increased significantly. These increased costs resulted from the desire of Georgia residents to improve the level of services available as well as increases in state education funding requirements.

A balance of public and private investment is necessary to provide a sound economic base for our community. The cost of the provision of services must be made based on the available tax revenues and reasonable public and private investment. Town government is charged with providing for orderly growth and services at a rate that does not unduly tax the residents, yet protects the health, safety, and welfare of those same citizens.

**<u>Taxes, Growth and Fiscal Condition Goals, Policies and Objectives:</u>**

**Goal:**

**To maintain a sound fiscal balance for the town, to encourage reasonable, functional, orderly development of facilities, utilities and services, and to promote the health of agriculture while providing a stable economic base for the other sectors of the economy.**

**Objectives:**

~ Maintain the Capital Budget and Program with annual reviews so that the pace of residential development can be tied to reasonable expansions and improvements to service systems.

~ Review the Impact Fee Ordinance as needed.

~ Determine what forms and in what locations non-residential development is appropriate in Georgia, and evaluate and amend current regulations accordingly.

~ Encourage the preservation of land in an agricultural, wooded or open state, particularly in areas of the town which are important scenic viewsheds and not well connected to service systems.

~ Investigate the "growth centers" concept for certain areas of town, particularly the southern portion of the town, and other village settings in which higher density growth would be encouraged.

~ Consider the potential of a municipal sewage disposal system in the South Georgia Fire District area. This will allow growth to occur in a more concentrated pattern.

**Policies:**

~ The location, form, and rate of growth must not exceed the ability of the residents of the town to pay for necessary services and facilities required from that growth but must be sufficient to mitigate the increasing cost of services.

~ Development should occur based on projected need, availability of revenues to provide services, and recognition of the limits of human, financial, and natural resources.

~ The development of infrastructure should not significantly impact natural or human resources outlined in this plan unless there is a demonstrated public need.

~ Growth should be guided toward locations which can make use of existing services and facilities.

~ Encourage development patterns which will reduce expected future tax increases to Georgia taxpayers.

- Continue to examine ways to reduce budget increases in the operation of the schools and town offices.

## J. TRANSPORTATION

Georgia is served by a network of State and Town Highways, as well as a Rail line. In many ways, Lake Champlain also serves a transportation function. The private automobile is by far the most common form of transportation.

The Highway System currently includes 84.022 miles of roads (including Class IV roads). This is broken down into State owned and maintained roads and Town roads. Class IV road mileage is included in these figures because of impacts from their use if reclassified and because of their potential recreational use. The State has 17.63 miles of roads, including the 6.53 miles of Interstate 89 and its on/off ramps. The balance of State road miles includes Rte. 7 (7.6 mi.), Rte. 104 (.130 mi.) and Rte. 104A (3.62 mi.). These roads are owned and maintained by the State. Recent changes in the Planning Statutes and policy shifts at the Agency of Transportation allow considerably more input from municipal government and the public at large regarding improvements of these State Highways within Town borders.

The balance of the road network is Town and private roads. No attempt has been made to inventory private roads for this Plan. Some of these roads are Development roads and will likely be accepted into the Highway system at a future date. Others will remain private to serve only the individual landowners.

Town Roads are classified, according to a statutory scheme, into Class I, Class II, Class III, or Class IV roads. These state classifications are primarily for the purpose of distributing State Aid and often do not reflect the actual usage of the road. State Aid is distributed by Class type as follows: 6% of State funds for all Class I roads, 44% of funds to all Class II roads, and 50% to all Class III roads.

Class I roads form extensions of State Highways and are numbered as such, Class II form connections from town to town and or carry more than normal traffic, Class III roads are all other traveled roads receiving State Aid funds, and Class IV roads are all other roads owned by the Town (no State Aid). Class IV roads do not have to be maintained by the Town.

The Town of Georgia has no Class I roads, 17.63 miles of Class II roads, 42.10 miles of Class III roads and 6.36 miles of Class IV roads for a total of 66.09 miles.

A classification scheme which more accurately portrays usage is as follows: Major Arterial Highways, Minor Arterial Highways, Collectors, and Local streets.

**Major Arterial Highways** serve to connect population centers and are generally interregional. These should avoid residential areas and access (road cuts) should be strictly controlled. Average Daily Traffic (ADT) is generally in excess of 3000 trips (refer to Institute of Transportation Engineers Trip Generation figures). Average Daily Traffic is defined as the number of vehicles passing a specified point in a 24 hr. period.

**Minor Arterial Highways** connect collectors and local streets to Arterials and are capable of handling higher volumes of traffic at higher speeds with minimum interruptions. Access (road cuts) to these roads should be limited and discouraged in order to allow for free flow of traffic. Maximum ADT for these roads should not exceed 3000 trips.

**Collectors** serve to connect residential streets to Arterials, provide frontage for lots, and carry traffic to and from adjacent land uses and neighborhoods. Each loop may carry up to 500 ADT. Total ADT should not exceed 1000 trips with no more than 500 ADT at any point of traffic concentration.

**Local Streets** provide frontage and access for lots, and carry traffic to and from the street or road itself or between other roads. These roads are designed to handle the least amount of traffic at the lowest speeds. Each loop may carry up to 250 ADT. Total ADT should not exceed 500 ADT with no more than 250 ADT at any point of traffic concentration. These roads include, but are not limited to, low traffic rural roads, low density development roads, cul-de-sac roads, service roads, etc.

**Functional classification of Georgia Town Highways:**

**Major Arterial Highways** in Town are: Interstate 89, Routes 7, 104 and 104A. Interstate 89 is a limited access highway.

**Minor Arterials** in Town are: Stonebridge Rd. (TH #43), Georgia Plains Rd. (TH #2), TH #6 from Rte. 7 west along
B Ballard Rd. to the intersection of Sandy Birch Rd and hence westerly to the intersection of Sodom Rd., and Oakland
S Station Rd. (TH#4)

**Collectors** include: Georgia Shore Rd. (TH #5+3), Georgia Middle Rd. (TH #3), Mill River Rd. (TH #9), Ballard Rd. (TH #6+29), Decker Rd. (TH #6+28), Sodom Rd. (TH #6), Sand Hill Rd. (TH #33), Polly Hubbard Rd. (TH #14), and Arrowhead Lake Rd. (TH #1). Georgia Shore Rd. is best described as a seasonal collector. During warm weather months the lakeshore is densely populated and traffic can be steady, however at other times of the year the road is not very well traveled.

The rest of the roads in town fall into the category of Local Streets and vary from development roads to Class IV roads and legal trails. The rural roads are generally sparsely populated and little traveled and the development roads see limited through traffic. Refer to the Transportation Map for additional details on Georgia's transportation network.

In addition to the highways themselves, the town maintains bridges, culverts and drainage systems. Maintaining bridges and culverts can be enormously expensive. Fortunately, the State of Vermont offers two programs designed to assist towns with these responsibilities, the Bridges and Culverts Program and a Bridges Grant program. The former involves projects of less than $50,000.00 and the latter is for larger projects. The town has taken advantage of both of these programs very successfully. Past projects involving these programs were the replacement of Stonebridge Brook Bridge and the replacement of two large culverts on Polly Hubbard Road.

Georgia has a major rail line, owned by New England Central Railway, running north and south through Town, though there is little direct service provided to the Town. There is a railway siding where the Vermont Whey Plant used to be located, off of T.H. #31 near the Industrial Park. This could serve as a terminus for additional industrial development in the immediate vicinity. New England Central Railway owns additional lands near the Georgia High Bridge, which at one time served as a cattle and freight yard. If rail commuter service were ever considered for the region, this site might provide access for Georgia residents. At one time there was also a train depot at Oakland Station (hence the name Oakland Station Road). It is possible that this could serve a similar function if a future need arises.

AMTRAK offers passenger rail service out of their St. Albans depot. Amtrak trains provide passenger service to points north and south twice per day. There are several large freight trains passing through Georgia each day. The Town should maintain an emergency management plan in the event of a derailment or accident.

Lake Champlain has served as a significant transportation corridor for all lakeshore communities in the past. The lake has a rich history involving everything from naval battles and rum smuggling to passenger steamship service. Today, most lake transportation takes place in a recreational or sport context. The lake is widely used during warm weather (and to a lesser extent during winter) by large numbers of people.

With regard to public transportation, Georgia is served by the “Network Shuttle” from St. Albans and “Link Express” bus connecting to Chittenden County. Additionally, transportation services are provided to elderly and special needs persons through “Network Shuttle”. There is no local taxi service. The State maintains a parking lot with access off Skunk Hill Road near the intersection of Route 7 and Interstate 89 which serves as a commuter park and ride facility. Air service is provided to the region by the Franklin County Regional Airport in Highgate and the Burlington International Airport in Burlington.

There are only a few sidewalks or pedestrian paths, although there has been occasional discussion regarding this in order to provide for safer means of pedestrian travel, especially in the “village area” near the intersection of Route 7 and Route 104A.

Georgia's Highways are maintained by a Highway Department of four full time employees. For more information regarding the Department and its resources refer to the utilities facilities section of the Plan. The 2005 highway budget was $ 645,344 of which we will receive an anticipated $215,505 in State Aid to Highways. Of this budget, $429,839 is direct costs for road maintenance, the remainder being for equipment and construction. The highway budget accounts for 35% of total Town budget (excluding school district budget). In and of itself, spending is not an accurate measure of the quality of a town's roads. Significantly larger sums of money could be spent in improving and maintaining the highway system. However, road and bridge work is very expensive and those costs are passed on to the taxpayers. It is hoped that a reduction on the reliance of the local property tax for funding education would allow communities to invest more money in other town services such as transportation. Overall, Georgia provides a high level of service and has a good transportation network. One of the major problems facing most Vermont communities is the lack of good gravel and sand resources for road construction and maintenance. A stone quarry is open in Georgia which provides a local source of aggregate for road construction.

**Summary**
Safe, convenient and affordable transportation has become an essential need in today's mobile society. Public investment in transportation systems should be based on need, energy efficiency, and cost effectiveness.

**Transportation Goals, Policies and Objectives:**

**Goal:**
**To provide a safe, efficient, cost effective transportation network to meet the varied needs of the residents of the Town.**

**Objectives:**

~ Maintain the inventory of Town roads using the Road Surface Management Systems computer program, and develop a priority list for roads most in need of maintenance and or construction, develop cost estimates, and schedule improvements.

~ Investigate the implication of designating certain roads in town as scenic.

~ Determine if there are roads that should remain unpaved.

~ Investigate options for developing bike and pedestrian paths in the Town.

~ Review and revise zoning and sub-division regulations to meet goals and policies set forth herein.

~ Maintain the emergency management plan in the event of a derailment or accident involving a spill of hazardous materials.

~ Investigate options for improved programs and facilities for rideshare and carpooling.

~ Develop a plan for pedestrian access to our commercial and business zones.

**Policies:**

~ Development roads must meet specified standards as set forth by the Selectboard. Roads will be accepted into the Town highway system only after meeting these requirements and a finding that it is in the public good to do so. Developers shall bear all costs associated with acceptance of roads.

~ Highway access for the purpose of development shall be strictly controlled on roads designated Major and Minor Arterial Highways. Wherever possible, undeveloped lots will be required to provide one access/egress point onto said highways which will serve the entire parcel. Multiple curb cuts are strongly discouraged.

~ Retain Class IV roads for recreational purposes or future needs. Require those petitioning for development along Class IV roads to bear the costs of making necessary improvements to roads, prior to such development.

~ Strip development along highway corridors should be strongly discouraged. Innovative techniques, such as clustering, to avoid development may be required of developers in order to meet this policy.

~ To plan development so as to avoid the need for major public investment in transportation networks. Particular regard shall be given to impacts on the carrying capacity of transportation networks affected by the development. Developers will be required to pay for the costs of necessary improvements.

~ To support alternative forms of transportation such as bike and pedestrian paths or lanes, particularly in conjunction

with new development or road projects, and to connect these systems, where possible, to form a comprehensive network.

~ To insure that Town interests are protected through the use of a permit process for uses taking place within road rights of way.

~ Roads should not be constructed or extended into important resources areas when it would lead to the destruction or degradation of those resources.

~ The Town will work cooperatively with the state to develop a transportation network that meets both state and local needs. The Town will play an active role in the planning of new improvements proposed by the state which might affect Georgia. Such plans will have to conform to the overall goals and policies of the Town.

## K. CULTURAL RESOURCES

With seventy-seven houses or other structures on the State Register of Historic Places, and historic districts in Georgia Center and Georgia Plains, Georgia is rich in cultural and historical resources. As with many Vermont towns, the value of Georgia's cultural and historical resources is greater than the sum of its parts. The development pattern of villages and countryside, the context for Georgia's historic sites, is a valuable asset. While this pattern is valuable, it is also fragile.

In addition to Georgia's historic structures, numerous cemeteries are located around the town. A link to past generations, Georgia's cemeteries are an important cultural resource.

The Lamoille River and Deer Brook corridors have sites of known archeological sensitivity, while the stream corridors extending northward from Arrowhead Mountain Lake to Silver Lake contain sites of expected archeological sensitivity.

**Summary**
Prehistoric and historic sites are an essential link to our past and represent significant social and cultural investment and deserve consideration in the planning process. Efforts should be made to reduce or mitigate negative impacts on these valuable resources.

**Historic Resource Goals, Policies and Objectives:**

**Goals:**
**To encourage the reduction or mitigation of negative impacts of development on noteworthy scenic features.**

**To protect, preserve and maintain Historic sites and structures in the Town of Georgia.**

**Objectives:**

~ Rehabilitation of historic structures should be encouraged and adaptive uses should be considered where economically feasible. The public is encouraged to contact the Division for Historic Preservation for assistance with site specific projects to further the above policies or when development is proposed for sites of known historic or archeological significance.

**Policies:**

~ Places of outstanding historical or educational value should be protected from development that would unreasonably impair their character or quality.

## L. SCENIC RESOURCES

Georgia's gradual transition from mountain to lake provides an ideal location for scenic resources. It is often at the border of adjacent physiographic regions that the scenic qualities are most enhanced. The juxtaposition of farming, townscape, and forest within the Champlain lowlands enhances the scenic qualities of Georgia's natural features. While identifying specific viewsheds and vantage points, the town needs to pay special attention to sensitive areas. Sensitive areas are those locations that are highly visible, prominent, or important, and would be most affected by land cover or land use changes.

Several specific land features are noteworthy:

~ Goodrich Hill, Georgia Mountain, St. Albans Hill, and Bradley Hill. These forested slopes are prominent features, whose scenic quality are subject to degradation by development or cover change.

~ Lake Champlain Viewshed. The views from and the views to the lake are both important.

~ I-89 Viewshed. The interstate may be considered a scenic corridor.

~ Route 7 Viewshed. Particularly from Georgia Center north, this viewshed plays a key role in peoples' perception of the town.
~ Areas adjacent to Arrowhead Mountain Lake and Lamoille River.

~ Georgia Plains and the Lowlands Areas. The area between Middle Road/Cline Road and Route 7, transversed by Mill River, Polly Hubbard, Reynolds, Pattee Hill, and Georgia Plains Roads contains a characteristic and historic Champlain Valley landscape.

~ River and Stream Beds. These are also part of the visual landscape. While they are protected through state and federal legislation, they are nevertheless vulnerable to physical and thus visual alteration.

Scenic resources are important to a town for many reasons. The visual character of Georgia individually and the State of Vermont as a whole, make it an excellent place to live and visit.

**Scenic Resource Goals and Objectives:**

**Goal:**
**To encourage the preservation of noteworthy scenic features.**

**Objectives:**

~To encourage innovation in design and layout of development so that the visual impact can be minimized.

~ To encourage the use of vegetative buffers and other screening methods to help reduce the visual impact of development.

~To continue Town investment in a conservation fund to buy development rights from property owners who own land of importance to the community.

## SECTION III. THE PHYSICAL SETTING

### A. TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

**Overview**

The Town of Georgia is rich with natural resources. The diverse landscape, which stretches from the shores of Lake Champlain across the sandy flats of Georgia Plains and the open farmland of Georgia Center to the western foothills of the Green Mountains, offers varied geology, topography, and vegetation. To some extent this makeup represents the model landscape,

offering the full transition from mountains to coastal plain. The significant forest lands, wildlife habitat, rare plant species, geologic sites and river corridors help define the character of Georgia.

**Geology**

Both for analyzing Georgia's natural resources and for planning future development possibilities, it is useful to divide Georgia into three physiographic regions (see Town of Georgia, Physiographic Map).

The first of the regions is dominated by the 5-mile north/south length of Champlain thrust fault ledges, a limestone and dolomite precipice that overlooks the lake. The shoreline slopes west of the Champlain thrust fault are generally less than 12%. The Champlain thrust fault is typically made up of rock outcrop and west facing slopes greater than 12%. These rock outcrops and steep slopes of the Champlain thrust lie in a sparsely populated area several thousand feet east of the shoreline and west of Middle, Cline, and Bronson Roads.

The second region, the Champlain lowlands, extends eastward from the Champlain thrust fault to the Hinesburg-Oak Hills Thrust fault, which is generally marked by I-89 and the ridge of quartzite it rides along. The slopes are typically less than 12%.

The third region, the foothills of the Green Mountains, lies east of I-89. Many of these forested slopes east of the northern half of I-89 and around Cushman Hill and Georgia Mountain are greater than 12%, while a few areas of slopes greater than 25% exist around Lamoille River, Arrowhead Mountain lake and several of its tributaries.

The Champlain lowlands were formed as a result of Lake Champlain's predecessors (Lake Vermont and the Champlain Sea), glacial action and weathering. The Geological history of the bedrock and soils are therefore much different than the history of the Green Mountains. The bedrock tends to be less complex and not as highly metamorphosed. Dolomite and Limestone marbles, shales, slates, and occasional quartzite are the most common bedrock materials in the Lowlands. Soils in the Lowlands also reflect the geological history and are predominately marine sediments, such as clays and sands. These are most often found in elevations of less than 700'.

The Green Mountain foothills have a much different geological history than the Lowlands. The Bedrock is highly metamorphosed and complex due to the numerous upheavals and folding of the earth's plates and enormous heat and pressure created in the process. In the vicinity of the Hinesburg Oak Hill Thrust, the bedrock is primarily Dolomite Marble. As you move eastward to the foothills, the bedrock changes to predominately Quartzite.

A major difference between the foothills and the lowlands are the soil types, again a factor of geological history. The foothill soils are generally known as glacial tills. Till soils are formed as a result of the deposits left by the melting glaciers. They are composed of particles of all sizes ranging from clay to boulders and are generally less than ten feet thick. This haphazard formation creates a scenario where soil conditions on the ground can vary widely from one spot to another. Soil characteristics tend to be much more uniform in the lowland areas than in the foothill areas.

Parker Cobble is identified in Vermont Natural Area Inventory as a significant geological site containing fossils which are used as age indicators for the Cambrian Geologic Period.

**Topography**

Topography, or the shape of the land surface, is a function of the underlying bedrock, soil cover, and the effects of weather over the ages. Georgia's topography is comparatively uniform; there is no major mountain range and the difference between the highest elevation and the lowest elevation is 1300'. The lowest elevation in Georgia is app. 100' feet above sea level at Lake Champlain. The highest is Georgia Mountain at 1400' in the southeast corner, near the Milton Fairfax border. In Georgia, most human activity such as homes, farms, and businesses, takes place in the 100' to 500' elevation range.

Topography is one of the major factors that determine suitability of specific land uses. Traditionally, major settlements have been located near water courses, for power and transportation, and roads have followed the course of valleys and streams for ease of construction.

As a result of its topography and geology, Georgia has relatively poor drainage patterns. The existence of meandering streams, lakes and ponds, and significant wetland areas attest to this fact. This poor drainage pattern also is apparent in many parts of the town which have high ground water tables.

Where development is proposed on slopes of greater than 15% the developer should address the potential concerns of erosion, structural problems, and ground water pollution associated with the thin soils usually found on steep slopes. Steep slopes present greater limitations for road construction, on site sewage disposal, foundation construction, and provision of emergency services by the town.

The Slope Map gives a good indication for the limits for development, based on slope factors.

**Summary**

The underlying bedrock and surficial geology are important considerations in the capability of the land to support development and should be considered in the planning stage. The continued availability of pure water supplies, and earth and mineral resources depend on sound planning for their wise use. The identification, protection and wise use of these resources are extremely important to the residents of the town as they are in limited supply and can be contaminated, depleted or rendered

useless by certain developments.

Drainage and slope are very important considerations for establishing appropriate and economic use of land. There are physical factors associated with slope and drainage ways which directly affect the cost of development and provision of services. Areas of steep slope are more expensive to develop and are subject to much higher rates of foundation failure, septic problems, and serious soil erosion problems. Upland areas also provide needed habitat for wildlife, and recharge our ground water resources for drinking water.

**Geology and Topography Goals, Policies and Objectives:**

**Goals:**
**To consider geologic factors in future planning.**

**To protect private and public investment and maintain the natural environment through the consideration of topography and Geology when determining land use.**

**Objectives:**

~ Geologic factors should be considered in planning to insure the proper use of land.

~ Development should be sited so as to avoid important geologic features and to permit the future extraction of valuable earth resources when needed.

~ Developments on ridges and hilltops should be discouraged and their adverse aesthetic and environmental impacts should be prevented.

~ Site modifications necessary for a particular project should be allowed but there should be no substantial change to natural drainageways.

**Policies:**

~ Intensive land development on slopes in excess of 25% shall be prohibited and every effort shall be made to maintain a suitable cover of natural vegetation to reduce erosion.

~ Conventional on site septic systems shall not be allowed on slopes exceeding 15%. Development shall be performed so as to prevent runoff and soil erosion. Vegetative cover should be maintained or established and erosion control measures shall be undertaken at the time of construction.

**B. SOILS**

Topography, geology, drainage, and soils are major factors presenting opportunities or constraints for development. These factors should be viewed as a whole when assessing the ability of the land to support a certain use or activity. Many other factors may enter into a planning process, but if the physical conditions will not support the proposed use, problems will result, not only for the town but for individual landowners too. Georgia's soils fall into two general groups, those formed from the Green Mountain's glacial till, and those formed from lake and marine sediments and the Champlain Lowlands glacial till.

As development potential is concerned, the town has a mix of soils. Some are ill suited to development, having low permeability (or high), shallow depth to bedrock, or high water table. Others are well suited to development presenting few constraints from a physical perspective. This is a very broad picture of the town and does not indicate that specific sites might or might not be suited for development. Individual sites should have on site soils testing performed to determine soil capability. Soil tests and qualified septic system design helps insure adequate treatment of waste water, protects homeowners against septic system failure, and reduces groundwater contamination.

From a different use perspective, the town has a fairly high percentage of Primary Agricultural Soils as defined in the Soil Conservation Service (S.C.S.) bulletin, Agriculture Value Groups for Vt. Soils. These soils are of significant benefit to the farming community.

The two categories of interest for plan purposes are Prime Soils and Statewide Soils. Prime Soils are described as "having the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, forage, and fiber crops, and are also available for these uses." Statewide Soils are defined as "having good potential for growing crops, but have one or more limitations which restrict the choice of crops and require more intensive management than prime soils."

The location of these soils does not necessarily correspond to areas presently being farmed, rather it indicates areas that have the highest capability for producing crops from a soils capability perspective. The Soil Survey of Franklin County, published by S.C.S can be referenced, if necessary, to determine soil potential for a variety of uses other than agricultural potential.

The shoreline soils west of the Champlain fault are of two general types: 1) those formed by water deposited materials in

flood plains (Limmerick-Rummney Variant-Winooski); and 2) those formed in glacial till in the Champlain Valley (Farmington-Lordstown Georgia-St. Albans and Massena-Lyons).

The soils in the first type tend to have a high seasonal water table and are subject to flooding. Potential for agriculture is good, for forestry is fair, and for urban development is poor.

The soils in the second type are more variable. The Farmington-Lordstown and Massena-Lyons soils are generally poor for urban development, good for agriculture and fair forestry purposes. The Georgia-St. Albans soils are generally fair for urban development, good for agriculture and good for forestry. The Georgia- St. Albans soil types are in the minority along the shore and development potential is somewhat limited.

It should also be pointed out that the underlying bedrock here is slate-shale and is almost vertical inclined, highly fractured, and relatively soft and easily eroded. It is therefore very susceptible to water infiltration and contamination. It is also somewhat fragile and subject to erosion and weathering.

Soils in the area between the Champlain Thrust and the Hinesburg Oak Hill Thrust also fall into two general groups, 1) Soils that formed in glacial till in the Champlain Valley (Farmingtown-Lordstown Georgia-St. Albans Massena-Lyons); and 2) soils that formed in water deposited material on terraces and old lake plains (Au Gres-Ensoburg-Wareham Munson-Belgrade-Buxton Scantic-Raynham-Binghamville Kingsbury-Covington Windsor-Missisquoi).

The Windsor-Missisquoi and Georgia-St. Albans soils have fair to good development potential, good agriculture and fair to good potential for forestry uses. The Munson-Belgrade-Buxton, Scantic-Raynham-Binghamville, Kingsbury-Covington, Au Gres-Enosburg-Wareham soils all have poor potential for development, poor to good for agriculture and poor to good for forestry uses.

There are some substantial areas of Windsor-Missisquoi soils in the southern end of town and pockets of Georgia St. Albans soils from south to north in central Georgia. Many of the soils in the south end of town have already been developed for residential uses. Some of these soils also have the highest potential for significant groundwater (aquifers). These areas should be protected for future use as water supplies.

Soils in the foothills of the Green Mountains are generally composed of glacial tills (Carlilse-Terric-Medisaprists, Woodstock-Tunbridge, Peru-Stowe and Cabot-Westbury). Of these soils only the Peru-Stowe series has potential (fair) for development. The rest have poor to good potential for agriculture and forestry uses. There are very few areas in the foothills which appear to have good development potential.

Because Georgia relies on site septic systems for disposal of sewage and ground water for our drinking water supplies, soil types are very important considerations in locating developments.

Two major factors are important in the treatment of sewage; the breakdown of pathogens and bacteria and the filtering of solids from the wastewater. If the soil does not adequately treat the effluent before it mixes with groundwater then groundwater contamination results. A concentration of inadequate septic systems leaching improperly treated effluent into the groundwater presents serious problems for the provision of safe sources of drinking water. It is essential that septic systems be designed and constructed according to minimum standards in order to protect groundwater supplies.

**Summary**

Soils are a finite resource. We require suitable soils for food production, building materials, waste water treatment, drinking water, renewable and non renewable energy sources, and as a medium on which to place our homes. Given these factors, the proper development of soils is enormously important to consider when protecting the public health and welfare and providing safe homes and services to our residents. Primary agricultural and forestry soils are a very finite resource, which because of their unique chemical and physical properties are capable of producing food, energy and fiber for our use. Once converted to other uses they are essentially lost for food production.

**<u>Soils Goals and Policies:</u>**

**Goal:**

**To maintain and improve the quality of important soils, such as agriculture and forestry soils, when considering the future development of the town.**

**Policies:**

~ Conventional on site septic systems should be constructed in accordance with the Environmental Protection Rules.

~ Slopes in excess of 8% may be highly subject to erosion, depending on soil type, and consideration should be given to the use of acceptable soil erosion control measures. Vegetative cover should be established and maintained as soon as possible after construction.

~ Development on poorly drained soils should be avoided wherever possible and strict regard to soils testing and septic system design should be required.

~ The use of accepted agricultural practices and/or best management practice is encouraged as a way to protect valuable soil resources.

## C. EARTH RESOURCES

In 2006 the Town of Georgia purchased approximately $45,000 of processed and unprocessed aggregate to maintain town roads. With the availability of a quarry in Georgia, the town is purchasing its aggregate from a combination of in-town and out-of-town sources.

If possible, the town should secure additional economical sources of gravel from a location close to town to meet future road construction and improvement needs. A local gravel inventory should be taken to determine if local sources are available.

Gravel and sand pits can be located and designed to reduce the negative impacts of excavation and operation. With well designed reclamation plans, sites can be restored and used for other purposes including: agriculture, residential, commercial or recreational. This requires careful planning and engineering; local regulations should include performance standards for extraction, noise, dust, hauling, reclamation and bonding to insure adequate protection to residents and wise use of the resource.

Sand and gravel are finite resources; they are important to the continued growth and economy of the town and should be protected from incompatible uses, until needed.

### Earth Resource Goals and Policies:

**Goal:**
**To protect local earth resources until needed for future use for the benefit of the community; and to minimize the impacts of extracted earth resources on the environment.**

**Policies:**

~ Extraction of earth resources should be permitted when it has been demonstrated that the activity will not have an adverse impact on the Town of Georgia and its residents.

~ All proposed earth extractions must have a plan for reclamation of the site, acceptable to the Planning Commission, to ensure the wise use of resources. Guarantees may be required of the developer to assure that the site is properly reclaimed.

~ The town should secure an adequate, economical source of gravel from a location close to town, to meet future road construction and improvement needs. A local gravel inventory could be undertaken by the town to determine if local sources are available.

## D. CLIMATE AND AIR QUALITY

Georgia's climate is humid and continental, with precipitation relatively equally divided between rain and snow. The influence of Lake Champlain has moderated Georgia's climate, giving it a longer growing season than in other parts of the county. In the eastern quarter of the town, where agricultural land does not dominate the terrain, the vegetation is the northern temperate deciduous forest typical to Franklin County.

The quality of the air we breathe is an essential requirement of continued good health and should be protected from degradation in the interest of the public good. Our climate has a great effect on our lives, including social, economic, natural resource, and energy considerations. As such, climatic factors should be considered in future planning to insure the appropriate and efficient provision of housing, services, energy needs, food production and the like.

### Climate and Air Quality Goals, Policies, and Objectives:

**Goal:**
**To consider climatic factors and to protect the quality of the air when planning for future development.**

**Objectives:**

~ Climatic conditions prevalent in town should be considered when planning for future growth, including development, energy needs, siting, design, and construction of roads, utilities, and services.

**Policies:**

~ Development which degrades air quality should be strongly discouraged.

~ National, state, regional, and local efforts to improve and protect air quality should be supported and encouraged.

## E. WATER RESOURCES

Georgia's hydrology is largely a function of Lake Champlain and its tributaries which pass through Georgia. Mill River drains the largest watershed area in Georgia since Rugg Brook empties into Mill River as it passes through the productive agriculture lowlands. Some of the most densely developed areas in Georgia are adjacent to Stone Bridge Brook and Arrowhead Mountain Lake. Wetlands are scattered consistently throughout the rest of Georgia. There are three Wellhead Protection Areas: one which serves Rhodeside Acres, one which serve Sherwood Forest, and one which serves the South Georgia Fire District (see Facilities and Service Map).

Arrowhead Mountain Lake was formed by the impoundment of water by the Central Vermont Public Service Corporation power dam at Milton Falls. The lake that was formed has provided significant new areas for wildlife over the years. The water levels fluctuate based on need for water in the plants turbines. The levels are regulated by the State of Vermont and the Federal Government. Arrowhead Mountain Lake also provides a valuable source of water for the Georgia Dairy Industrial Park. Water is drawn from the Lake, treated at the Park, used for industrial processing, re-treated and discharged back into the lake.

Wetlands are abundant throughout Georgia. Many wetlands receive some protection through State and Federal regulations. Wetlands serve many useful functions and should be protected. Some of these functions include: filtration, treatment, and storage of groundwater (provides us with drinking water), storage and retention of flood waters (mitigates impacts of floods), provides wildlife and rare plant and animal species habitat, biological diversity, and provides recreational and educational opportunities. Wetlands are an important part the overall ecosystem and an important water resource.

The Town also has many small brooks and streams and the Lamoille River. This network of brooks and streams are an important part of the Towns hydrology and are closely linked with the wetlands, lakes, and ponds in Town. Protection and improvement of water quality is integral to the overall quality of all water resources.

Most Georgia residents obtain their drinking water from ground water resources. The management of all our water resources has a direct impact on the present and future quality of the water we consume.

### Lake Champlain

The Lake environment is characteristic of the northern reaches of Lake Champlain. Water quality varies because it is a function of weather and currents, water recharge and lake bottom and shore conditions. Georgia has over 7 miles of lakeshore frontage and is part of the Lake Champlain watershed. Georgia forms the easternmost shore of St. Albans Bay and holds, within its waters, several small islands, the largest of which is Lazy Lady Island. To the west, St. Albans Point and Burton Island form a peninsular which separates the northerly half of Georgia's waters from the broad lake.

The Bay has distinct hydrological and limnilogical characteristics. Recent studies related to St. Albans Bay pollution abatement initiatives describe and cite a range of water quality conditions resulting from human activity and natural processes.

The most recent record floods of spring 1993 demonstrate both the unpredictable impacts of climate and weather. Several identified floodplain areas also exist, north and south of the Mill River Delta, in the vicinity of Melville landing and to the north of the Landing, and south of the Landing area where there is a stream system draining to the lake and just to the south of this location as well.

The shoreline, characteristic of many Champlain Valley lakeshore sections, alternates between bedrock shales, limestones and loamy bank conditions, (Lordstown is a predominant soil type in this area). Several areas along the shore are subject to erosion.

The topography adjacent to the lake ranges in altitude from just above the ordinary high-water mark of 94 feet to 103 feet above sea level. At several points, outcroppings which are perhaps remnants of one "wave" of the Champlain Thrust Fault emerge, most notably at Lime Rock Point, 35 to 40 feet above the Lake. Georgia's shorelands slope to the lake from a distinct south to north trending, which is the Champlain Thrust Fault line, and which tops out at almost 500 feet and creates a distinct, narrow sloping lake edge 1/4 to 1/2 mile in width. The Mill River delta flows into the lake in the northern section of town, creating an important wetland environment and habitat. There are several sections of low lying wet or wetland areas, and thus subject to periodic flooding and exposure, depending upon season and weather.

The soils adjacent to the lake in the north are frequently perched silts and clays, particularly around the Mill River drainage and delta area. To the south the soils of the Lordstown Association predominate. Groundwater flow is westerly through these soils to the lake.

Georgia and its lakeshore lands are also characterized by surficial geological processes which add to the complexity of the geology and landforms in general. The entire basin was overlain by continental glaciers and a valley glacial sheet both of which scoured the landscape and bedrock and left numerous depositional areas as they receded. The resulting lowlands and scarp of the Thrust Fault delineate the Georgia Lakeshore.

The Lakeshore in Georgia is relatively open with typical grasses and cultivated fields running adjacent to the shore itself, typically to the east of Georgia Shore Road, particularly in the central part of the lakeshore in town. In the northerly section there are more wooded areas in the vicinity of Melville Landing, Lime Rock Point and the Mill River mouth.

The entire lakeshore forms an important visual and aesthetic resource for the Town of Georgia. Besides the obvious recreational opportunities, the presence of the lake is a resource. The lake changes with weather, season and time of day. The distant mountains provide long distance focal points and backgrounds from both shoreland and lake viewing locations alike in Georgia. Likewise, those lands which lie immediately adjacent to the lake itself are visual and aesthetic resources and represent unique conditions sensitive to human and natural change.

An immediate viewshed exists from the lake and its shoreline to the westerly height of land formed in the south by Bradley Hill and then moving closer to the lake creating the narrow shoreland-ridge environment. This landscape, with its open quality and vegetated ridge, is highly sensitive to visual and aesthetic change. Noise and smell are secondary concerns as well.

The Lakeshore is relatively consistent topographically and perhaps less dramatic than further south in Milton, where the Thrust Fault emerges in the bedrock hills of Milton such as Eagle Mountain, creating a more elevated and cliff-like environment. The exception to this in Georgia is at Lime Rock Point, an area slightly elevated above the water level, and which contrasts with the Mill River Delta, much of which is at Lake level or below Ordinary High Water.

Land use along the Lake in Georgia has typically been of three basic types: 1) agricultural; 2) year-round residential; and 3) seasonal residential.

It is interesting to catalog some recent trends, particularly with regard to residential development. The 1871 Map of Georgia from the Beers Atlas shows about 10 lakeshore dwellings and farms. One hundred ten years later, there were approximately 175 camps, or seasonal dwellings along the lake in concentrations along Mills Shore, White's Shore, Rhodes Shore, Sweeney Shore, Hayden Shore, The Cedars, the Pines and Pelletier Shores. Residential development was at a level of 55 homes along Georgia Shore Road, including farmsteads. By 1991 there were 186 seasonal homes and 84 residences on Georgia Shore Road. As of 2005 there are approximately fifteen additional residences on Georgia Shore Road. In addition, a substantial number of existing seasonal cottages have been improved and updated.

Although much of the lakeshore is densely developed, there are notable open sections at Lime Rock Point, the Mill River Delta, Rhodes Shore, and White Shore. This is contrasted dramatically by the extensive open space to the east of Georgia Shore Road, and indeed pressure is mounting to develop these lands with their views and potential access to the lake.

Access remains an issue. The Town Beach is the primary means of access for the public to the lake. The bulk of shoreland is in private ownership which limits the use and enjoyment of the lake for the citizenry as a whole. The town should investigate ways to increase public access to the lake.

Water quality is another issue along this section of the lake and in particular, St. Albans Bay. Runoff from agricultural activities affects the shore waters as so much agricultural lands drain into the Bay. Sewage disposal along the lakeshore also has the potential to degrade water quality. In 2005 an extensive study was completed looking at different options to improve wastewater disposal along the Georgia shore. Regional solutions were examined and found to currently be cost-prohibitive. However, alternative individual system options, now permitted by the State of Vermont, are working to improve the waste disposal issue for several shore owners. As they become more generally applied, these will substantially reduce this as a problem.

Visual and scenic qualities are also affected by land use, primarily in two ways: increased physical development and structures, and changes in land cover. Removal of vegetation along the shoreline and inland along the ridgelines and forested areas are the direct result of landowner activities related to opening up views, logging, or land development. Conversely, as agricultural uses decline pastures decline, this also has a visual impact.

Lake Champlain is a sensitive resource. It is sensitive environmentally, aesthetically and in terms of its ability to absorb development. The area's "carrying capacity" and development requires extensive oversight and planning initiatives to ensure its long term health and viability.

Georgia is part of an important international watershed which has been designated as the Lake Champlain International Biosphere Preserve. This designation points to the importance and fragility of the resource, a resource that warrants wise stewardship.

Land development should occur within parameters developed to preserve environmental and visual quality, as well as the accessibility of the resource for the community. Clustering, screening, sensitive siting and site development are all standards which should be applied by the Planning Commission, when reviewing development. The Planned Residential Development and Site Plan Review processes should be used to protect this fragile resource.

The Lakeshore District definition and purpose could be further articulated and addressed: 1) setback and siting criteria, 2) vegetative management, 3) lakeshore stabilization and access, 4) water and sewage management, 5) utility layout and specifications, 6) landscaping and open space requirements, 7) road and driveway development, 8) maximum density requirements, 9) phasing of development, and 10) lake access.

Agriculture and forestry efforts must be carefully considered and managed within the context of supporting these activities, facilitating their operation and ongoing viability, while at the same time ensuring that the land and water resource is not further undermined.

Finally, lake access, visually and physically, should be maintained and enhanced. The town might explore the purchase of additional lands or obtaining easements which maintain the open spaces. These steps could be an integral component, for example, of a PRD process.

**Summary**
Abundant clean water is a basic need for public health and economic and community development. Protecting these resources from pollution and inappropriate use is of paramount importance to the citizens of the town and is the public good. Because these resources do not follow municipal boundaries, it is also important to coordinate and cooperate with adjacent municipalities to see that the resource is wisely managed.

**Water Resource Goals, Policies, and Objectives:**

**Goal:**
**To maintain, improve, and protect the quality of Georgia's water resources, including groundwater and surface water.**

**Objectives:**

~ Future development near water resources should be carefully permitted to help ensure that the septic loading does not exceed the treatment capabilities of the soil.

~ Accepted agricultural practices, best management practices, and accepted management practices for logging jobs are strongly encouraged as a means of protecting water resources.

~ Future development near surface waters should be low density and low impact.

~ The town should investigate the possibility of obtaining additional access to Lake Champlain and other water resources.

~ The natural flow of water to water bodies should not be disturbed.

~ As much as reasonably possible, streams, ponds, rivers, and wetlands should be maintained in a natural state and protected from pollutants so they can provide their natural functions. Buffer strips should be encouraged so as to protect these natural functions.

**Policies:**

~ Development in the Well Head Protection Areas shall be very low density. Soil testing and septic system design by a licensed professional engineer is required. The storage of hazardous wastes, chemicals, or other toxic substances is prohibited in the Well Head Protection Area. These areas are identified on Well Head Protection Area maps.

~ Soils testing and septic system design by a licensed professional engineer is required for all development.

~ Development which degrades water quality shall not be allowed.

~ No permanent habitation should be allowed where depth to groundwater is less than allowed by the Vermont Environmental Protection Rules.

~ Development within shoreland and streambank areas should, where reasonable, maintain existing vegetation, prevent soil erosion, prevent pollution of the water body, and be set back in accordance with established buffers so as not to detract from the natural beauty or cause harm to the environment.

1) National Flood Insurance Program, Federal Emergency Management Agency, 1981.
2) The Ordinary High and Low Water Marks are set by the Army Corps of Engineers at 96 and 93 feet, respectively.
3) Sources: 1981 and 1991 Georgia Town Maps, Vermont Orthophotos Series, and the 1871 Beers Atlas Map of Georgia.
4) The St. Albans Bay Pollution Abatement Feasibility Study, TWM Northeast, Williston, VT 1991.
5) The Georgia shore Wastewater Feasibility Study, Stone Environmental, Inc. Montpelier, VT 2005.

## F. FRAGILE, UNIQUE AND SENSITIVE AREAS

All three physiographic regions contain sites for natural, unique, and fragile areas/species. These locations are primarily in those places where recent development has been minimal. Georgia is home to a variety of bird and wildlife habitat areas.

The 1992 Non-game and Natural Heritage Program Report identified five sites in Georgia as Biological Areas of State-Significance. The Program, part of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, determined the sites on the basis of uncommonness of the natural community type, ecosystem integrity and lack of major disturbance, and the presence of rare species. State significance implies that a site is one of the best examples of its natural community type in the state, or that it is the site for at least one rare species. These sites are:

~ A 60 acre ecosystem containing four rare plant species and a good example of floodplain forest. This area is located at the mouth of Mill River was conserved in 2002 and is currently owned by the State of Vermont with the Lake Champlain Land Trust holding the easement.

~ A nesting site for the state threatened common tern (Sterna Hirundo). This site is Rock Island and has been conserved by the Lake Champlain Land Trust.

~ A site hosting a large population of state threatened northern stickseed (Hackelia Americana) and a good example of upland northern white-cedar (Thuja occidentalis).

~ A short length of dolomite ledge hosts a population of northern stickseed.

~ An uncommon east-facing dolomite ledge hosts a population of northern stickseed, as well as a rich northern hardwood forest containing two uncommon species, American ginseng (Panax quinquefolius) and walking fern (Asplenium rhizophyllum).

The 2006 Non-game and Natural Heritage Program Report identified one site in Georgia as Biological Areas of State-Significance. The Program, part of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, determined the site on the basis of uncommonness of the natural community type, ecosystem integrity and lack of major disturbance, and the presence of rare species. State significance implies that a site is one of the best examples of its natural community type in the state, or that it is the site for at least one rare species. The site is:

~ A dolomite bluff composed of a mixture of young cedar and mature oak-hardwood forests hosting a rare, state threatened short-styled snakeroot, and the uncommon long-fruited snakeroot. The Limestone Bluff Cedar - Pine Forest occurs primarily along the shores of Lake Champlain. The area in Georgia is very unique in that it is located about 1500' east of the lakeshore. Cedar Bluff Forests are highly threatened by development as they occur on low cliffs with commanding views of Lake Champlain. This Cedar Bluff Forest is part of a larger block of contiguous forest running North from Bradley Hill road to Polly Hubbard Rd.

Other sites, not included in the Biological Natural Areas of State-Significance, exist within the Town of Georgia.

~ A 50 acre deep inland marsh is a habitat of unusual significance for waterfowl. The Lake Champlain Basin Study identified the marsh as a site for unique, rare, or endangered species.

~ A 50 acre hilly area contains fossils which are used as indicators for the Cambrian Geologic Period.

~ A rare plant, animal, significant natural community or state fragile/natural area exists at a shoreline.

~ A brook has been identified as a site for unique, rare, or endangered species by the Lake Champlain Basin Study.

Habitats for rare and endangered species constitute an important resource for the Town of Georgia. Not only are they sites for future biological study, but they also serve as examples and focal points for Georgia's natural character. These habitats should be considered when the Planning Commission evaluates the appropriateness of development in a particular area.

**Summary**

These areas serve unique functions which are very sensitive to human interference and deserve a level of protection. They are usually unsuited for human habitation but ideally suited for wildlife habitat and have significant ecological, recreational, scientific, and scenic value. They represent a dwindling resource which, with careful planning, this generation may be able to offer as a gift to the next.

**Fragile, Unique, and Sensitive Areas Goals, Policies, and Objectives:**

**Goal:**
**To encourage the protection of fragile, unique and sensitive areas from the adverse affects and encroachments of development**.

**Objectives:**

~ Buffer strips should be encouraged to prevent harmful effects of development from affecting these areas.

~ Investment of public funds that would lead to inappropriate development shall not be allowed.

**Policies:**

~ These areas should be protected from adverse effects of development. Proposed developments which might affect these resources should be referred to the appropriate state agency for comment.

~ Development in or near wetlands are subject to the Vermont Wetlands Regulations and possibly the Army Corp of Engineers Regulations. Notice to the Wetlands Division is required.

~ Flood Hazard areas may be developed in accordance with duly adopted flood hazard regulations.

**Sources:**
Lake Champlain Atlas: Water Quality and Shoreland Use, Lake Champlain Basin Study, 1978
Vermont Rivers Study, Vermont Agency of Environmental Conservation, 1986
Biological Natural Areas of Western Franklin County, Non-game and Natural Heritage Program, Department of Fish and Wildlife, 1992
Vermont Natural Area Inventory
Significant Habitat Map, VT Department of Fish & Wildlife
Limestone Bluff Cedar-Pine Forests of Vermont: A Statewide Inventory, Non-game and Natural Heritage Program, Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2006
Comprehensive Regional Plan, Franklin County, VT Dubois & King, 1969
Comprehensive Municipal Plan, Franklin County, VT Dubois & King, 1969
St. Albans Bay Pollution Abatement Feasibility Study TWM Northeast, 1991
Report on Preliminary Engineering for New Water System for the Town of Georgia, VT Webster-Martin, Inc., 1975
1988 Vermont Recreation Plan-Assessment and Policy Plan Recreation Division, Dept. of Forest, Parks and Recreation
Note - The most recent reports should be used when delineating these areas.

## SECTION IV. UTILITIES, FACILITIES, AND TOWN SERVICES

### Overview

In a growing town, community facilities and services are often in transition. Existing facilities and services become inadequate as growth occurs. In Georgia, it is apparent that both population growth and the increasing expectations of Georgia residents regarding community services have resulted in facility and service expansions and improvements over the past few years. While town budgets have not increased substantially, the prospect of future service and facility improvements, as well as need for new services, will undoubtedly have fiscal effects.

This plan section contains an overview of town facilities and services from two perspectives: 1) What is the current state of the facility or service? Are there current deficiencies? and; 2) What changes are expected over the next five to ten years? Further, it is the goal of this plan section to aid the town in anticipating changes over the next few years, and to establish priorities for facility and service improvements during that period.

## A. PUBLIC SAFETY

### Police Services

Georgia's police protection system currently is handled by both the Vermont State Police, who respond from St. Albans, and by contract services with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office. Georgia residents or businesses typically call the State Police directly in the event of a need for police services.

Given the amount of growth which has occurred in town, several arrangements for increased police services have been considered by the Selectboard, including a contract with the Vermont State Police, and the creation of a local police department. Based on investigation by the Selectboard and Town Administrator, the most cost effective option is a contract services with the Sheriffs Department. The cost and liability exposure to the Town from having its own Police Department is seen as prohibitive at

this time.

In 2005, the Selectboard put an article in the Town Warning to see if voters would renew a 20 hour-per-week contract with the Sheriff's Office. This was approved and has been implemented. While this approach appears to be adequate, concerns about issues like speeding and potential for property break-ins will likely increase in residents' expectations for higher levels of service in the future and will result in additional town expenditures in this area. At this time, the contract with the Sheriff's Office will be carefully monitored for effectiveness.

**Fire and Emergency Services**

The Georgia Volunteer Fire Department is a volunteer force, which serves the entire Town of Georgia, as well as maintaining mutual aid agreements with several adjacent towns. The department's financial needs are primarily supported by the town budget. In addition, several developers have contributed toward major equipment purchases. Fire fighters are not paid for any of their time involved in department work. However, training costs are covered by the department budget. "911" emergency dialing is available in all of Georgia, and dispatch services are handled by St. Albans.

Georgia First Response is part of the Fire Department, which responds to emergency situations in town. First Response relies principally on emergency equipment which the town contracts for on an annual basis. Georgia contracts with Am-Care from St. Albans for ambulance services. Am-Care responds to all emergency situations in Georgia. Emergency response is a significant issue in Georgia because of the presence of several major industries. Future growth, both residential and non-residential, will eventually make it cost effective for the Town to acquire its own emergency equipment. When this occurs, a place to house it will be needed, and this will influence both the timing and the plan for expanding the Town Garage/Fire Station.

During the past few years, the numbers of fire calls responded to by the department have increased significantly. While town-wide growth has been a factor in the increased workload, it appears to be primarily older structures which have resulted in more fire calls. The department currently has a volunteer roster of 35 persons, which has remained stable within +/- 10% for the past several years and includes both long-term and new residents of Georgia. This is a positive development, as many towns in the state are having trouble maintaining their volunteer forces. However, it is important to note that training and equipment costs have increased considerably in recent years, and that the larger force and workload has resulted in higher town expenditures.

The Fire Department shares a building with the Highway Department. At present that building is used to capacity. In 2004 the department added a Spartan fire engine to its fleet of fire protection vehicles, so space has become very tight. There is, also, limited space available for training without moving vehicles outside.

In 2005 a "Municipal Exploration Committee" was formed and charged with recommending solutions to current over-crowding of facilities in several municipal departments. This committee has completed its work and has submitted their preliminary findings to the Selectboard, who will review the findings in more depth.

## B. TOWN SERVICES AND FACILITIES

**Highway Department**

The Georgia Highway Department maintains responsibility for town highways and bridges (see Transportation Section). The Highway Department is based in the town garage facility and has 4 full-time employees and no seasonal employees. Department equipment consisted of three medium trucks, one tandem dump truck, one small truck, two backhoes, a grader and, a roadside mowing tractor, as well as miscellaneous equipment. Since 2000 they have added 1 pick-up, 1 grader, 1 backhoe, and a pressure washer.

Growth and development have increased the department's workload substantially. Much of this increase has occurred as town road mileage has increased. Town road mileage has increased by approximately 33 percent during the past 20 years, primarily as subdivision roads have been taken over by the town.

Workload has also increased in response to the increased service expectations of Georgia residents. Residents now expect their roads to be plowed sooner, and expect road surfaces to be maintained at a higher level, than they did in past years. In response, the Town has added a tandem plow/dump truck, a 1 ton roller and trailer, a paving machine, a street sweeper, and a brush chipper. A seasonal employee has been added and the department has increased its annual resurfacing of paved roads.

The Highway Department shares a building with the Fire Department. The building contains a total of 6,820 square feet, allocated approximately equally between the two departments. At present the building is used over its capacity.

In 2005 a study committee made recommendations to the Selectboard addressing the space and location problems of all municipal departments including the highway department. (See fire and emergency services for more on this study).

The Town's fleet of highway vehicles is adequate for current needs. At an average growth rate of 35 new dwellings per year, assuming the same relationship between new dwellings and new road miles, the current fleet size should be adequate until about 2008, when the new facility should be well on-line.

The following are likely to be required during the next few years:

~ Regular replacement or rebuilding of major equipment as existing pieces reach the end of their useful life. Replacement will accelerate as department workload increases.

~ Additional expenditures for re-surfacing, paving, and reconstruction of Town Highways.

~ Utilize existing technology and services to prioritize highway construction and maintenance project in the most cost effective way.

~ Increased service demands and road mileage may result in a need to employ an additional full-time person during the next five years.

~ The existing highway/fire department building is now full. Further, there is limited land to expand on the current site. As such, expected increases in equipment will result in a need to acquire land and construct a new facility, or add on the existing facility to the extent possible.

**Transportation Facilities Recommended for Improvement:**

1) **Sand Hill Road** (TH #33) is being used more and more as a Minor Arterial for residences off Stonebridge Rd to access the Interstate.
2) **Oakland Station Road** (TH #4) is used extensively by residents of other towns as a Minor Arterial to access Rte. 7 and hence the Interstate.
3) **Cline Road** (TH #10) is in need of sub-base repair and repaving.
4) **Arrowhead Lake Road** (TH #1) is in need of sub-base repair and repaving.
5) **Skunk Hill Road** (TH #31) from RR tracks to bend in road should be rebuilt.

**Administrative Functions**

Georgia's administrative functions have gradually expanded over the years, including both personnel and facility needs. A decade ago, administrative personnel included only the Town Clerk/Treasurer and a secretary who served as an assistant to the Selectmen.

Town personnel now include the Town Clerk, Town Treasurer, Assistant Town Clerk, Town Administrator, a part time Zoning Administrator, a part time Planning Assistant, and a part time Lister Clerk. Additionally, the Town has contracted services for our assessor and assistant assessor positions.

Elected and appointed officials perform important functions in Georgia. The town's five elected selectboard members are responsible for overseeing all of the town's affairs, the town budget, Capital Budget and other business and policy issues which arise from time to time. The Selectboard appoints all other officials except the Planning Commission, which is elected under the provisions of Title 24 VSA Section 4323(c). The Selectboard is also the Board of Health for the town.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) and the Planning Commission oversee planning and development issues in the town. The Planning Commission is responsible for the preparation of the town plan, zoning and subdivision regulations, and subdivision reviews. The ZBA is responsible for reviewing conditional uses, variances, appeals and interpretation of the by-laws. There are several other elected or appointed officials and boards which perform important functions for the town such as the First Constable , Delinquent Tax Collector, Auditors, Lister Board, Animal Control Officer, Health Officer, Board of Civil Authority, Justices of the Peace, Conservation Commission and Historical Society.

The Town Administrator position handles numerous administrative functions ranging from dealing with concerns and inquiries, applying for and administering grants, loans and programs, investigating and implementing cost control measures, reviewing and responding to Selectboard correspondence, responding to state and federal requirements and mandates, reviewing expenditures and billings, acting as liaison between town boards and citizens, etc, etc. The Administrator attends all Selectboard meetings and performs whatever duties required by the Board.

The Planning Assistant serves as staff planner to the Planning Commission, This involves reviewing all development proposals, attending all meetings, preparing Planning Commission correspondence, working on plans and by-laws and any other tasks required by the Commission.

The Zoning Administrator handles all zoning related issues. This involves attending all meetings of the Zoning Board, reviewing permits, issuing permits, investigating complaints and violations, varying engineered water and wastewater certificates, assisting the public answering questions, etc.

The Town Clerk's Office has also experienced a major increase in workload over the past ten years. Deed and document recording and research, issuing various licenses, birth and death certificate recording, tax billing, concerns and general inquiries have all increased dramatically as the population and the number of new houses, businesses and properties has increased. As mentioned before, the change from a small rural town to a more suburban town has resulted in a population more used to a higher level of services.

The increased staff and equipment needs have brought the current Town Office Building to (or slightly beyond) its comfortable capacity. The building was built in 1989 and contains 2,400 square feet of finished floor space.

A municipal exploration committee has recommended that the basement of the town hall be converted to meeting space. The Planning Commission, as well as other boards, need a larger meeting space as residents and applicants needs grow. With the current usable space at approximately 2400 square feet, an additional 1,440 square feet (i.e.: 60% of the basement) would give a total of 3,840 square feet for the entire building. This would be adequate for a total population of 5,300, which would serve the Town until the year 2010 at a growth rate of 35 dwellings per year.

**Library**

The Georgia Public Library is available to Town residents, and is primarily supported by the town budget. The aging and undersized library was replaced when the Town took over the former Northwest Regional Library building in 1997. The agreement between the Town and the State specifies that at least 50% of the space must be used for library purposes.

The Library currently utilizes most of the building. There are two meeting rooms available for the public to use. These community rooms are used about 4 to 5 times each week. The library serves the population of Georgia, as well as seasonal residents and people from surrounding communities. Many of the regular patrons are children. The total number of items loaned out in 2005 was 20,258. The library employs three part-time staff members and has two regular volunteers. The library's collection, however, is very limited. Compared to towns serving similar populations, the Georgia library has 2.18 volumes per capita when the average of Vermont libraries is 6.36. Collection development must be a priority to provide the citizens with an adequate library. In 2006 the Town installed a new septic system to support the building. The Town should investigate ways of generating revenue from the building to help reduce the taxpayer burden of maintaining the building and to better utilize the Library budget.

**Recreation**

The people of Georgia based on results of the town-wide survey, desire additional recreation facilities, particularly in the southern sections of town. There are currently two major recreational facilities in Georgia, which accommodate a variety of recreational activities.

1) The Town Beach - facilities include the Beach, Fishing Access, Multi-Purpose Athletic Field, Tennis, Volleyball and Basketball Courts, Pavilion with Public Facilities and a Playground, which was replaced with an extensive array of equipment suitable to a wider age range. The Town Beach facility is maintained and operated by the Georgia Recreation Committee, while the responsibility for facilities at the school lies with the school district. During normal operations, the Town Beach is used for summer outings, Little League, company picnics, Fresh Air family picnic, swimming, fishing and boating access. While there are limitations, options for expansion and/or improvement of the Town Beach Facility should be investigated.

2) The School Property - facilities include the Gymnasium, a Soccer, Softball and Babe Ruth Field, a Walking Path Inside and Outside of the School, and Limited Playground Equipment.

Though the town currently has exceptional recreation facilities that are well utilized and maintained, Georgia should research opportunities for acquiring additional land when possible, particularly when these lands fill an expressed recreational need. To that end, the town should investigate possibilities for better utilization of existing recreation areas set aside from approved subdivisions, and encourage comprehensive recreation planning for all new developments.

**C. SOLID WASTE**

The Georgia Solid Waste Committee was formed to address solid waste issues in town. It coordinated solid waste disposal and recycling efforts in town. The Committee offers disposal options for several types of solid waste, such as Green Up Day activities, and Household Hazardous Waste Collection events.

Georgia is a member of the Northwest Vermont Solid Waste Management District. The district sponsors collections for Household Hazardous Waste and Special Trash throughout the District that are open to residents of Georgia, including collections within the Town of Georgia itself. Recycling is mandatory within the District, and all haulers are required to provide curbside pick-up of recyclables as well as trash.

**D. WATER AND SEWER**

The Town does not own or operate its own water or sewage treatment facilities. The South Georgia Fire District owns and operates a water system which currently serves approximately 175 users. There are also several small public water systems in housing developments. The vast majority of all water systems and sewage disposal systems are private and on site. This fact further supports the need for adequate design and construction of systems, in accordance with State standards.

Most townspeople get their drinking water from groundwater sources, whether from a deep well or a shallow well. Given this fact, it is extremely important that septic systems be properly designed and constructed to eliminate contamination of groundwater resources that are also used for our drinking water. This cannot be overstated. Pathogens and bacteria from improperly treated waste water can remain "alive" for up to <u>five</u> years <u>or more</u> and travel for miles from their source if they mix with the groundwater.

The lakeshore presents unique concerns for sewage treatment and potable water supplies. In 2003 the State approved several new and innovative waste disposal systems some of which work very effectively in conditions as found along the lake such as small lots and poor soils. These have been installed in about a dozen homes and cottages in this area.
In 2004 a wastewater disposal feasibility study was conducted to determine the practicality of implementing regional systems for disposal. A proposal incorporating four regions along the shore was shown to be feasible. However, the costs for such a system proved prohibitive at this time. So alternative individual systems were recommended and have already been implemented in some cases. As byproducts of the study, we now have complete inventories of well water and septic tank locations, sizes and ages along the entire shore for reference as needed. As more owners implement these recommended solutions as replacements concerns for septic pollution will be greatly alleviated.

The southern end of Town is also an area that has been studied for wastewater disposal alternatives and for potential community water systems. A comprehensive study of feasible options for wastewater and water was completed in 2005. Alternative locations for disposal of collected wastewater were identified that could be implemented as development occurs in the region around the intersection of U.S. 7 and I-89. As for a recommended source for water, the most practical solution would likely be connection to the Champlain Water District which currently extends through most of Milton. These will have to be given serious consideration if any significant portion of the “South Village” portion of the proposed GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN is implemented.

**E. EDUCATION**

Georgia's growth during the past few decades has resulted in changes in the local educational system. The Georgia School District and the Franklin West Supervisory Union currently take responsibility for providing the public education system for Georgia's school children. Georgia's schools have evolved from multiple school districts and school buildings within the town, to a centralized system, which was created in 1959, when the Georgia Elementary School opened. Within 10 years, this facility was so crowded that a second school was rented in St. Albans to handle grades 5 through 8. In 1973, the "Big School" was opened. Finally, in 1991, the two schools with a new addition became the Georgia Elementary and Middle School. Georgia's elementary and middle school aged children now utilize the Elementary and Middle School for grades Kindergarten through 8, as well as the Early Education Center for Franklin West Supervisory Union. Secondary students (Grades 9 through 12) attend the area high school of their choice on a tuition basis, with individual families responsible for handling transportation. In recent years, most Georgia students have chosen to attend the Bellows Free Academy in St. Albans, Bellows Free Academy of Fairfax, or the Essex Junction Educational Center. Each year, a few students are enrolled at approximately five other area high schools.
The Georgia Elementary and Middle School facility was built in 1991 and was planned to accommodate fifteen to twenty years of growth. The facility was financed by a twenty year bond. Total capacity is 900 students. Enrollment has been remarkably stable

over the past ten years going from 727 students in 1995 to 671 in 2004. This is not surprising as the town population is aging with a lower percentage of families with children than in the past. As it is projected that current trends will continue for the balance of the decade, the current facility should suffice for the foreseeable future.

While the School District maintains control over the budget for the Georgia Elementary School, it is important to note that several aspects of the total school budget remain out of local control. These include: 1) Vermont State Aid to Education funding; 2) Tuition levels paid to out-of-town high school facilities and; 3) Vermont State educational mandates which have not been fully funded. The impact of the Equal Education Opportunity Acts (Act 60 and 68) on the town's ability to raise education funds remains dependant on State legislation and is therefore out of the Town's control.

Overall, the school district intends to maintain a quality educational product for Georgia's children. Georgia continues to have an enviable reputation for high education standards.

Since the addition of 1991, there has been a significant increase in the use of school facilities by community groups and area agencies. The Georgia School District supports this growth in utilization of facilities and only asks that all requests for space be directed to the school secretary, so proper scheduling may occur.

**School Enrollment**

Public school enrollment is directly related to town-wide growth and is of critical importance in any Vermont town. Simply put, educational services are the major set of local expenditures facing most Vermont taxpayers. This is certainly the case in Georgia. **Table XXII** below shows trends in public school enrollments in Georgia, broken down between elementary and middle school levels (includes Grades Kindergarten through 8) and secondary school level (includes Grades 9 through 12.

**Public School Enrollment Trends in Georgia, 1995-2004**

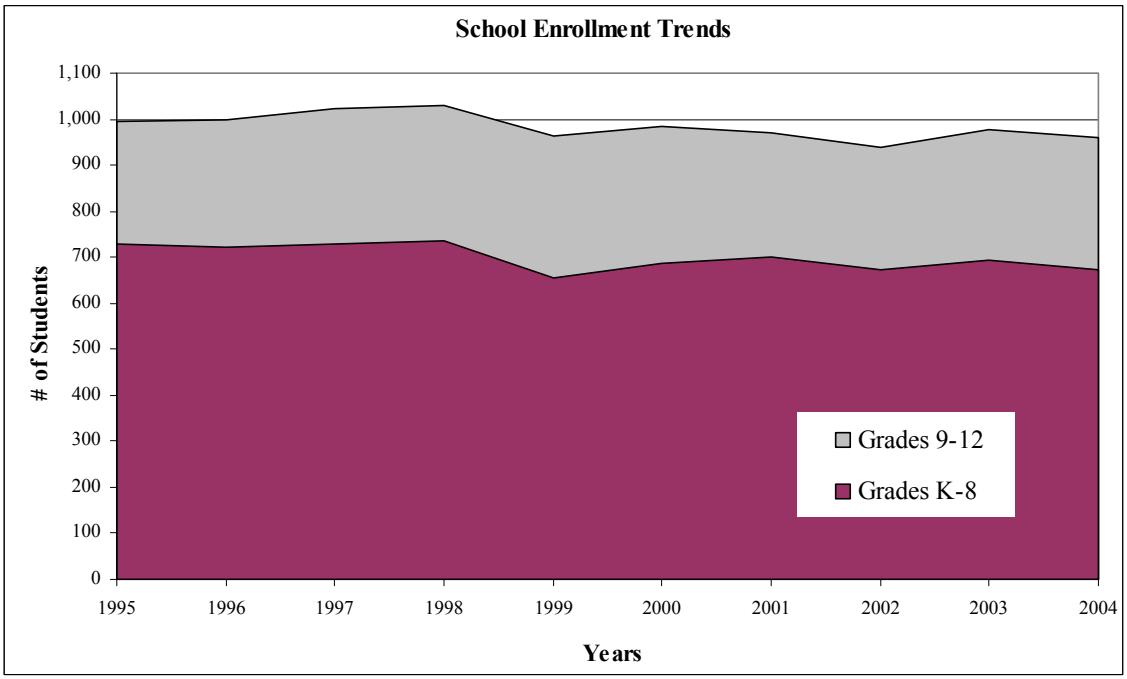



TABLE XXII - Source: Franklin West Supervisory Union & Georgia Town Reports

Students in grades 9 - 12 are tuitioned to area high schools of their choice. Enrollment has hovered just under 300 students with the range from a low of 268 in 2002 to a high of 307 in 1999. Tuition costs for area schools have become a more significant factor in the total educational budget than in years past as charges for tuition has increased rather dramatically. As seen in **Table XXIII,** Georgia invests very generously in education as evidenced by its level of overall spending per pupil.

In 2003 Georgia spent approximately $8,000 (actual $7,986) per student which makes Georgia the third highest investor in education in Franklin County.

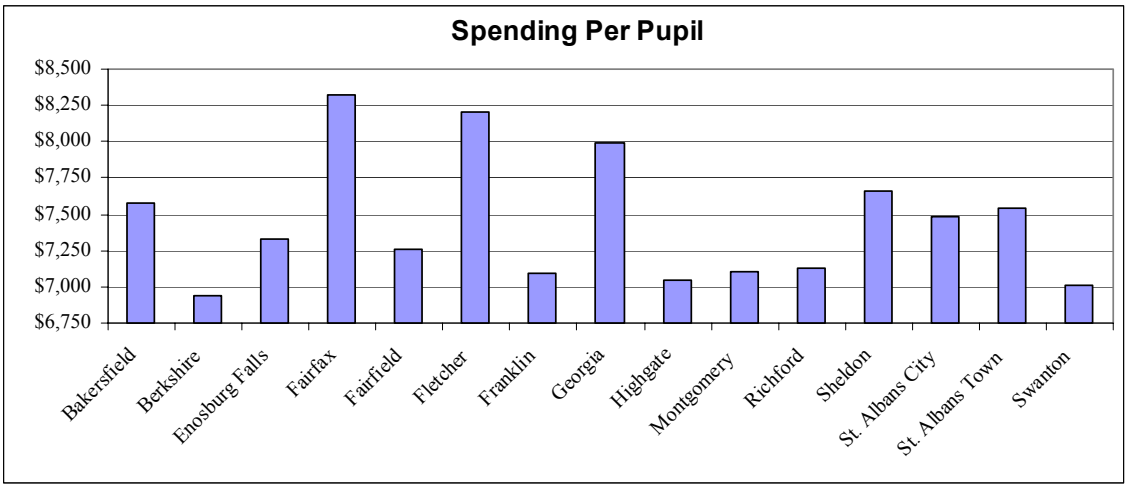



TABLE XXIII - Source: St. Albans Messenger, June 2003

**Education Goal and Objective:**

**Goal:**
**Quality educations for citizens shall be a priority of the Town of Georgia.**

**Objectives:**

~ Expand education and vocational training for adults and non-traditional students by informing them where educational and training opportunities may be accessed.

**F. PRIVATE UTILITIES**

Georgia is served by several utilities which provide needed energy, power and communication services. Vermont Electric Power Company owns and maintains a major 115 KV transmission line, which bisects the Town in a north/south direction, as well as numerous substations and fiber optics cables. These lines serve as a major transmission link for the power grid from Canada to the Northeast.

Central Vermont Public Service Corporation serves much of the residential and commercial electrical needs of the town, with Vermont Electric CO-OP serving up the rest. Vermont Electric CO-OP owns approximately 13.2 miles of overhead and underground lines, while C.V.P.S. owns app. 77 miles. CVPS serves approximately 1700 residential, commercial and industrial customers and Vt. Electric CO-OP serves approximately 100 customers.

CVPS estimates they will have ample supplies of electrical energy in the near term for both residential and commercial/industrial usage. Three phase power is available for commercial and industrial purposes along Rte 7 from the Georgia Elementary school south to the Milton line; along Ballard Rd from Rte 7 south to the Manor Rd.; along Manor Rd.; and along Rte 104A from Rte 7 approximately 1/2 mile. Three phase power enhances growth potential of the commercial/industrial base.

Vermont Gas Systems has a major north south transmission line and provides gas service to approximately 160 residential, business and industrial customers in Town. The system presently consists of 6.9 miles of transmission lines and 5.9 miles of distribution lines. Natural Gas is a clean fuel source of energy used for heating, hot water, cooking, clothes drying and industrial/commercial processing. The presence of this energy source near the B-1, I-1 and I-2 Zones enhances commercial industrial development potential.

There are several utilities providing communication services to Georgia, including: Verizon, Sprint, Adelphia Cable, and Champlain Cable. Fiber optic cables are available for telephone service and the cable companies are providing greater coverage for Georgia each year. It is expected that technological advances will continue to fuel the fast growing field of information and communication, which may present a range of increased opportunities for Georgia.

**G. TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

The field of commercial telecommunications has many implications for land-use in the Town of Georgia. Telecommunications have become increasingly important as a tool for economic activity. Moreover, the technology enables people to "telecommute," and thereby live a long distance from where they work, which may have the affect of populating more rural areas. Currently, the Town of Georgia contains one telecommunication tower.

Commercial towers and related infrastructure require careful consideration. Since wireless communication facilities emit electro-magnetic radiation which may affect human and animal health, and towers (and supporting facilities, e.g.: roads,

transmission lines and fences) create aesthetic and wildlife impacts, telecommunications has emerged as a form of land-use which has significant impacts on a wide area around its location, and therefore is a planning concern.

Telecommunication towers tend to be located in highly visible locations, for example on mountaintops and ridgelines. Furthermore, the technology is evolving quickly. While the use of such technology has increased dramatically within the past ten years, it could be replaced by another technology within the next ten years.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 (federal statute) placed certain limitations over municipal control of telecommunication structures. With these confines, however, Georgia can use land-use regulations to protect the town's rural nature, historic character, and scenic beauty.

Toward that end, when siting new facilities or upgrading existing facilities, there must be clear evidence that the proposed facility and location are necessary. The Zoning Regulations should incorporate appropriate guidelines and regulations governing at least the following areas: integrity of residential zones, protection of scenic areas, protection of wildlife areas, preferred locations, and co-location or clustering of tower facilities.

**Telecommunications Goals, Objectives and Policies:**

**Goal:**
**To support the enhancement of the telecommunications network when such facilities do not have a significant adverse health, environmental or scenic impacts.**

**Objectives:**

~ The Georgia Zoning Regulations should be amended to include a section on Telecommunication Towers and/or Wireless Facilities.

~The Georgia Planning Commission should identify and map existing and potential locations for commercial wireless communication facilities. The Commission should solicit assistance from engineering consultants to accomplish this task.

**Policies:**

~All commercial telecommunication facilities shall be located in appropriate areas, respecting the integrity of residential areas, aesthetic concerns, and natural resource issues. As noted elsewhere in this Plan, the protection of scenic and natural areas is very important to the Town of Georgia.

~Wherever possible, new facilities shall be co-located on or near existing structures, unless the Planning Commission determines that separate facilities will create less visual and aesthetic impact. Co-location is the favored alternative. In order to minimize tower proliferation, it is the policy of the Town to require applicants to exhaust all reasonable options for sharing space on existing towers or tower sites prior to proposing new towers or tower sites.

~Unless required by the FAA, towers shall not be illuminated. Where required, lights shall be shielded in order to minimize aesthetic impacts, and so that light is cast only where needed. Towers shall be non-reflective, and of a neutral color.

~Electric or transmission lines and access roads shall be installed so as to minimize aesthetic and ecological impacts.

~Structures shall be designed in order to minimize aesthetic impacts. Equipment sheds and fences shall be hidden in trees or screened with landscaping.

~Equipment shall be downsized as technology permits, and removed when no longer used or needed. Surety bonds may be required to ensure that funds are available to accomplish these purposes.

## H. HEALTH SERVICES

The closest hospital to Georgia is the Northwestern Medical Center in St. Albans, and the nearest trauma center is at Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington. Georgia has several health service providers, including the Georgia Health Center on Highbridge Road and the Georgia Eye Center on Highbridge Road. Georgia residents also are served by providers in St. Albans and Milton.

## I. CHILDCARE.

Childcare can be a growing concern for existing and prospective families, whether it means finding quality services or securing the costs of services. High quality, available childcare is a critical component supporting a stable workforce.

According to state data, Georgia currently has 20 registered childcare homes and 2 childcare centers, with a total capacity of 183 children. The 2000 U.S. Census indicates that there are 1,149 children from birth to age 14 living in Georgia. Data on other options, such as siblings, stay at home parents, family care providers, un-registered childcare homes or other opportunities are not available. Therefore, there is currently no data on how the needs of the 1,149 children are being met.

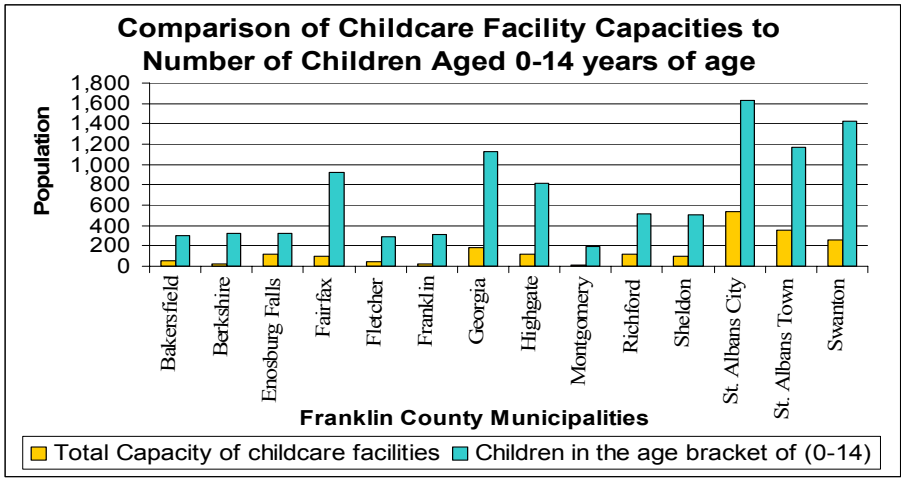



TABLE XXIV - Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Georgia's population of children under the age of 14 is among the highest in the County, it competes with Fairfax, St. Albans City, St. Albans Town, and Swanton Town. In all Franklin County municipalities there are not enough registered facilities for the number of children living in the town, suggesting most child care needs are met through other means.

**Childcare Goal:**

**Goal:**
**Ensure regulation of land development in Georgia does not negatively impact the availability of safe and affordable childcare.**

**Utilities, Facilities and Town Services Summary:**

As the Town of Georgia grows, the demand for municipal and educational services will also grow. In some cases growth will carry with it demands not only for more service, but also demands for technically higher quality services and often a broader array of services. As a result, Georgia will face demands to not only expand traditional services (general administration, zoning administration, road maintenance, etc.) but also to provide some new services such as police patrol. This will bring added expenses for staff and equipment, as well as needs for larger facilities.

The discussion in this section has indicated how each of the municipal and educational services has or will respond to the demands of growth. In general, it is apparent that this Town Plan is based on an annual population growth rate well below that associated with the construction (on average) of 35 new dwelling units per year. More rapid residential growth may cause the Town's facilities to exceed their useful capacities sooner than anticipated.

**Utilities, Facilities and Town Services Goals, Policies and Objectives:**

**Goal:**
**Development and growth in Georgia should occur at a rate which can be accommodated by reasonable expansion and/or improvement of facilities and services.**

**Objectives:**

~ Update the current Capital Budget and Program to reflect the most recent assessment of capital facilities and utilities and the planned residential growth and development targets.

~ Encourage an overall development pattern, both in terms of development location and type, which will moderate and stabilize property tax increases in Georgia.

~ Determine what locations and types of non-residential development are most appropriate in Georgia. Examples might include professional offices, retail and service businesses, and additional industry.

~Provide for controlled expansion of public facilities and services in order to manage growth and maintain adequate capacity.

~ Develop a master plan and strategies for the GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN areas of Georgia Center and South Village.

~ Encourage the utilities to work with the school system and town government to introduce new technologies to benefit the town and its' citizens.

-Consider the findings and recommendations of the report "Town of Georgia Sewer Feasibility Assessments" produced in April 2005 by Stone Environmental, Inc. and Forcier, Aldrich & Associates

**Policies:**

~ Review projects based on their individual impact, as well as their conformance with the overall rate of growth and facility/service capability planned for the town.

~ Locate facility and service improvements in existing development areas and areas which are designated for future growth.

## SECTION V. LAND USE

### Overview

The use of land, both historically and currently, defines the physical make-up of the Town, providing not only a sense of place, but an insight to how the town functions economically, physically and socially. Current land use trends in Vermont are often inconsistent with local historic patterns of development. To some extent that has happened in Georgia. An example is the Interstate highway, which represents a national land use/transportation initiative which has altered traditional or normal development patterns that did or may have occurred in Georgia.

All of the factors discussed in this plan have to be reconciled with the community's short and long term goals for itself...does Georgia want to remain rural?...does Georgia want more industrial development? What will be the future of the Town Center? These are questions which a Land Use Plan attempts to answer.

The land use plan must be responsive and directive, and yet flexible. On the one hand, it must respond to conditions as they now exist. Ideally, the location and form of natural landscape features should dictate patterns and location of future growth. The land use plan must respond to existing patterns of development, enhancing their value and utility, and not alienating them, or rendering them obsolete. On the other hand, the land use plan must direct future development to take place in ways that will serve goals and objectives as we now understand them. Land use patterns in the future should enhance Georgia's scenic, cultural and natural resources. Land use patterns in the future should ensure that Georgia continue to function as a viable community.

### Historic Development Patterns in Georgia and Their Relation to Natural Features

Historically, Georgia was an agricultural community with several village centers. The population centers were at Georgia Plains, West Georgia Village, Georgia Center and East Georgia at the north end of Arrowhead Lake. Each of these centers had their own post office, and oftentimes, schoolhouses, and thus functioned somewhat as self contained villages and municipal units. In fact, there were 16 school districts, each with their own individual schoolhouses, testimony to the fact that Georgia's development pattern was dispersed yet of similar density throughout the town, the village centers notwithstanding. The dispersed development patterns were evidence of Georgia's abundant open lands, rolling to level topography, agricultural soils, and moderate climate in relation to the rest of the state. Its dependence on and orientation to agriculture was typical of the entire Champlain Valley at the time, and to some extent, the rest of Vermont's rural areas. In fact, maps as recent as the U.S.G.S. map of 1916 show a town which was 90% open land: pasture and cropland.

In the 1800's the railroad was a strong determining factor in Georgia's connection with the rest of the world, and the Depot at Oakland Station was an important destination. The railroad delineated a north-south corridor through the town, which coincides with a prominent land feature, the Hinesburg Thrust. The valley and the lake environs are linear in nature, bordered by the steeper, less accessible and thus less developable, lands to the east.

Georgia's physiography, geography, geology and climate have determined past development, and will, in part, continue to do so into the future. The presence of more amenable soils in the southern end of town have promoted more dense development patterns here, as has the placement of an exit off the Interstate. This accessibility to more distant markets and locations has, in turn led to the development of the Georgia Industrial Park, a private Industrial Park and many homes and businesses. The South Georgia Fire District has been formed to address chronic water problems in the development area north of Arrowhead Lake. Gas service is in place through the central portion of town and in the southern development area.

Georgia Center in many ways remains the functional, historical and cultural center of the community, with its school,

Town Hall, Historical Society Museum, and Town Garage. Georgia Plains, West Georgia, and East Georgia still retain elements of their historic character and pattern as settlement centers.

**A. PRESENT LAND USE**

The location of major transportation corridors through the town, the most significant of which has been I-89, has brought change to the community. Industrial and service oriented developments have recently become a part of the town's development environment. The presence of transportation facilities has had an obvious and major influence on Georgia's development over time, but the characteristics of the land itself have also played a key role in this process.

The Champlain lowlands have seen the most development in the past, and are the most logical place for future development. The soils are of mixed types, and depending on specific location, can accommodate varying levels of development.

The Georgia Plains area represents a subregion, with its own soil types and topography. The soil in this region is generally composed of clay and silt, rather than sand and limestone, and thus drains more poorly. General soil conditions present limits to the future development of the Georgia Plains.

Lake Champlain and its shoreline are a valuable resource to the town. The land uses along the lakeshore and adjoining lands are primarily seasonal-residential, residential, and agricultural. General soil conditions are not favorable to high density development.

The lake is also used for passive and active recreation by town residents and visitors. Vermont generates significant revenues from tourists, boaters, fishermen, and others due to Lake Champlain. It is probable that Vermont and Georgia would not be so attractive to these people if the lake and environs were to degrade in quality.

Arrowhead Mountain Lake and its surrounding wetlands in the Champlain lowlands are another valuable resource, and are hosts for several important wildlife habitats. Much development has already taken place near the lake, especially in more recent subdivisions. Future development should pay more attention to the value of Arrowhead Mountain Lake as a resource for the town.

The foothills of the Green Mountains begin east of I-89 and Arrowhead Mountain Lake. Steep, wooded hillsides are a valuable scenic resource for the town, and are highly visible both from the highway and from the lowlands to the west. The forests also have potential commercial value, and should be managed wisely to that end. General soil and slope conditions are not favorable to extensive development. The area is also isolated from town services because of lack of roads.

Historically, the most significant elements of development in Georgia have been its residential and agricultural bases. Historic settlement patterns show much of the residential and commercial development has taken place in two village centers, Georgia Center and Georgia Plains, and more recently in South Georgia around the Interstate access. More than half of the town's population lives in these villages, along the southern edge of town, and in the clustered development near Arrowhead Lake. While St. Albans has long influenced development in Georgia, the construction of I-89 has more recently placed Georgia within the reach of Chittenden County commuters. Today, more than half of the town's working population commutes to Chittenden County. This is most pronounced in the town's southern tier, where most new development has taken place.

It is not a coincidence that higher densities of development have occurred in the southern tier. The soils, topography and water have been conducive to development. Access to services and transportation has also been a major factor.

In 1998, a number of technical memorandums were drafted for the Town of Georgia. Technical Memorandum #1 (Analysis of Current and Expected Fiscal Conditions & Needs) suggested capping the number of building permits issued per year at 35. This was enacted to stabilize growth before the increase of industry in neighboring towns could over stimulate growth in Georgia.

Agriculture has long defined the landscape and character of Georgia; in part, the quality of life in Georgia depends on the existence of working agricultural land. The topography, climate, and soil of the Champlain lowlands are well suited for hay, corn, and pasture. Studies show that agricultural and forested lands provide more revenue in taxes than they require in services. This type of land use has been shown to be even better for the local tax base than industrial/commercial property.

Agricultural and forestry uses of land are winners from a tax base perspective. They are both land intensive, which decreases the need for expensive town and school services. Agriculture and forestry are the least burdensome land uses from a tax base perspective.

Agriculture and forestry also provide many side benefits for residents and visitors. The working landscape has been the defining factor in making Vermont a different and unique place. Vermont generates significant revenues from tourists, hunters, bikers, boaters, fishermen and a multitude of other recreation enthusiasts. It is more than probable that these people would not be nearly so attracted to our state if the landscape were not maintained by the presence of a working agricultural and forest related populace.

Various methods exist for preserving agriculture as an active resource for the town. The Vermont Housing Conservation Trust Fund has provided funds for the purchase of development rights for one farm in Georgia. These funds provide landowners with the money needed to keep their farms intact and in business, and allows the town to rely on the agricultural base as a permanent resource.

One area of concern to farmers and large landowners is taxation policy. Current tax policy makes it difficult to pay the

taxes on working land. It is critical that tax policy be revised on working lands to help reverse the trend of conversion of farm and forest land for development. There are several state tax rebate programs for agricultural and forestry land.

More recently, industry has come to Georgia. Located next to the interstate and the railroad, the Georgia Industrial Park brought jobs to the town and diversified its tax base. Industrial development should continue to be an element in Georgia's overall land use plan. Due to the potential impacts of large scale developments, care should be taken to contain such development to suitable areas, and to minimize environmental impacts on the rest of the town. There is also a private Industrial Park located off Route 104A in South Georgia. This park offers a variety of employment opportunities for the area.

In recent years a service economy has developed to serve Georgia's expanding industrial and residential bases. If properly located, this type of development can enhance the quality of life in Georgia. A community ceases to function when people must go elsewhere for day to day goods and services. Future efforts should encourage a suitable amount of service industry development, and should encourage it to locate so as to enhance the vibrancy and desirability of living in Georgia Center and Georgia Plains.

## **Implications for Planning**:

### The Southern Tier

The forces at work in Georgia, dominated by the location of the I-89 interchange, Route 7 running north-south, the industrial parks and the villages of Georgia Center and Georgia Plains, indicate that the Southern Tier of the town is the primary development area. Further development will logically take place within this zone and continue to promote higher densities where they are most suited and most convenient, while preserving the rural character of most of the town.

Compared with the rest of the town, the topography and geology of this area is best suited to higher densities. Soils in this area could absorb both additional septic systems and wellheads. Unlike the foothills to the east of I-89, the slopes in this area are more suitable for building on smaller lot sizes. Since the bulk of new development, residential and small business is planned to be to the west and north of I-89, it will be insulated by the highway from potentially negative effects of the industrial park.

While it is important to contain industrial development within the area to the north of Arrowhead Mountain Lake, it is also important to locate the majority of new residential construction within the primary development corridor. A danger facing Georgia is not the diminished property values people have often associated with high densities, but the pressures to town services brought about by suburban sprawl. Only by containing the majority of residential development to a limited geographical area within the town can Georgia achieve the twin aims of remaining a functional community in its own right while preserving its rural and historic character.

Maintaining the primary development area in the southern part of town will build on existing development and infrastructure of roads and services. Focusing future development to this area will make for more effective, efficient, and affordable expansion of this infrastructure while capitalizing on its presence. Future subdivisions should be developed with an eye toward their connectivity with the rest of this section of town, making for better interaction within the community and eliminating self-contained subdivisions. Focusing development here also relieves some of the pressure elsewhere in town, leading to different planning goals and results for distinct sections and characteristics.

In 1999 the Town collaborated with the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) staff to undertake an analysis of the remaining build-out capacity of the zoning districts in the Town's Southern Tier. The analysis made use of NWRPC's Geographic Information System (GIS) capacities, and proceeded as follows.

First, a series of five zoning districts were included in this study:

1. AR-2 North
2. Proposed AR-2 (Route 104A)
3. AR-2 Georgia Plains
4. AR-2 Georgia Center
5. AR-3

Second, the total land area in each district was calculated, classified by limitations to development (soils, slopes, flooding, elevation, wetlands, agricultural potential, distance from Class III or better roads, etc.). Limitations were classified as "none to slight", "slight to moderate", "moderate", "moderate to severe", and "severe".

Third, land already developed was removed from the analysis by deducting a lot size of approximately 1.5 acres around the location of known dwelling units. This resulted in estimates of undeveloped land in each district, again classified by limitations to development.

Fourth, potentially developable land was estimated by deducting land classified as having "moderate to severe" or "severe" limitations to development, and then by reducing the remaining balance by 30% to account for remaining limitations as well as needed roads.

Finally, the build-out potential for each district was estimated by dividing the potentially developable land area by the minimum lot size as specified in the Town's Zoning Regulations. The results are summarized in **Table XXV**.

**Estimated Build-out Potential of the Southern Tier**

| Zone Name/Description | Total Acres | Undeveloped Acres | Developable Acres | Buildout Potential |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. AR-2 North | 241 | 194 | 125 | 45 |
| 2. Proposed AR-2 -Rte 104A | 29 | 22 | 15.4 | 6 |
| 3. AR-2 Georgia Plains | 605 | 421 | 231.4 | 84 |
| 4. AR-2 Georgia Center | 748 | 631 | 362.6 | 131 |
| 5. AR-3 South Georgia | 1,497 | 1,130 | 576.1 | 314 |
| TOTALS | 3,120 | 2,398 | 1,310.8 | 580 |

TABLE XXV - Source: Northwest Regional Planning Commission

This table clearly shows that these areas have considerable remaining build-out potential. Even if 100 percent of the anticipated future residential development (35 units per year) occurred in these areas, the region could accommodate over sixteen years of development. Limited developable land in these areas will not be a serious constraint on the Town's rate of future residential growth.

It is here noted that Northwest Regional Planning is currently working on an update of this build-out analysis which will likely alter the data included in **Table XXV** and perhaps expand the depth of data. This study is expected to be complete by mid-2006 and should be taken into consideration in future Town planning.

In 2003 a study was completed by Lamoureux & Dickinson, Consulting Engineers, that expanded on the ideas for development of the southern tier area in a "main street" sort of theme. The result was the GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN, A Vision for the Future, accommodating a mixture of public services, private business, professions, and a variety of housing opportunities intermixed with a substantial amount of green space, and recreation. In support of this concept, the town wishes to ensure that the trend of most residential development being located in the Southern Tier continues. Throughout this Town Plan, this area is designated as the "South Village" area of Georgia.

To achieve the intent of making the Southern Tier the primary development area in the Town, it will be appropriate to encourage development in that area, and to limit development outside of the Southern Tier to approximately forty percent of total new development each year. With an annual target of 35 new dwellings per year, this limits development outside of the Southern Tier to 14 units per year.

**Traditional Village Centers**

A potential Secondary development area exists in and around the village of Georgia Plains. While the soils in this area drain less well than those in the primary development corridor, the area contains fewer natural resources than either to the east or west. Most of the development here would be residential, although a certain amount of service base might be viable at or near the Georgia Plains crossroads in order to provide a place for people to congregate and interact, an essential element of a strong community. This area should remain compact, surrounded by open space.

Other crossroads and historic village centers have been identified. Zoning should allow for mixed use in these areas, strengthening their role as sub-centers in the town and communities which are identifiable. This pattern of denser development would, as in the preservation of Georgia's rural/pastoral qualities, require refinement as well as distinct changes to Georgia Zoning and the development of a Future Land Use Plan which reflects this historic settlement pattern.

The town must be prepared for increases in its residential, industrial, and service bases. Proper guidelines for development will funnel such development to the development corridors where it is most appropriate. Requiring master planning of new subdivisions will allow town officials to assess the impact of new residential development on the current quality of life in Georgia.

While zoning minimum lot sizes can achieve part of the differentiation of densities between the development areas and the outlying countryside, the more important and more difficult means of containing development to the historic center and Southern Tier will involve taking those steps that make the higher density areas the more desirable places to live, work, and play. Carefully planned and implemented landscaping, preservation of historical and cultural resources, and close attention to the provision of desired services within these areas will be essential.

A population which reaches its homes by automobile each evening is less likely to need or recognize the services of village centers. If Georgia is to maintain its rural character, its distinction between village and countryside, and its spirit of community, it must take special pains to enhance the quality of village life to make living there as desirable as possible. Without vibrant village centers in Georgia Center and Georgia Plains, scattered development, with higher impacts on natural resources and greater demands on the town's budget, will prevail.

**Municipal Center**

Georgia needs and should explore a municipal center that will contribute to its character as a community. This should include municipal services and facilities, other facilities, such as a post office, and a central "green" with amenities like trees, a band stand, memorials, and walkways.

The aforementioned GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN was developed with these concerns in mind. For the "South Village" area, this 100+ page document is replete with creative, innovative ideas including town greens, neighborhood parks, river walkways, and bike paths in concert with public meeting facilities, commercial and residential areas in a traditional mixed use format. The citizen survey showed substantial majority support for development of this nature.

This GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN also includes prospective future growth plan for the Georgia Center area including expansion of the municipal and educational facilities, multi-family and senior housing, and modest commercial together with ample greenspace and parks.

The next steps in implementing this plan are formation of an Economic Development Leadership Committee and preparation of a master plan for the areas. These are underway as this Town Plan is being written.

**Rural Character and Agriculture**

Guidelines for development and requirements for master planning of subdivisions are two important ways a land use plan can influence future land development. The traditional agrarian uses of Georgia's more rural areas should also be maintained and promoted. Large lot zoning can only be partially effective here; in fact large lot zoning can often be more detrimental than beneficial. Creative and innovative ways to encourage the retention of valuable agricultural and forest lands as part of the working landscape need to be explored.

It is important to recognize the economic realities of agriculture and forestry when making decisions about land use. Farming and forestry require large areas of land which may be taxed at values which exceed their revenue producing ability. Both activities operate on small profit margins yet require substantial investments of capital and equipment. Put simply, farming and forestry are highly susceptible to market forces.

Changes to land use regulation should recognize the economic frailty of the industries and reconcile the need of an individual landowner to realize a reasonable return on their investment with the need to retain valuable farm and forestland for production.

While it is essential to recognize the need of the individual, it is also important to look at the whole. Important resource lands, such as prime and statewide agricultural and forest soils are a unique and limited resource. They are and will be essential for food and fiber production. Once lost to other uses they are nearly impossible to reclaim.

Agricultural and residential uses don't mix well together. It should be understood by people locating residences in agricultural areas that agriculture is the predominant use. Farmers have the right to use accepted practices in the operation of their farms even when they conflict with residential use.

Georgia has seen a few farmlands preserved via Land Trust means and conservation easements. This activity should be encouraged. Another creative method for preserving agricultural lands is the enactment of a Transfer of Development Rights Ordinance. This would allow developers to increase their densities in areas desirable for development if they purchase and set aside agricultural lands or open space elsewhere in Georgia. This would allow zoned open areas to "send" their allowable number of units possible to the more developed sections of town, or "receiving" areas.

Performance standards for rural agricultural and open space areas in the town would also help to ensure that open space is not cut up or unduly impacted. These standards can address siting, clustering, size and scale of structures and provide general guidelines to ensure that development is consistent with the stated goals of the district. This is another element which should not be overlooked: The Zoning Regulations should be amended to provide further descriptions and purposes for each district. This will provide the Town with additional tools to guide and direct development so as to minimize impacts which are not consistent with the overall intent and purpose of the Town Plan.

Facilitating growth in the development areas will not happen on its own, but will require the town to employ a number of tools. The cumulative effect of the tools must be to make the identified development areas the more desirable areas of town to live, work, and play - balanced effectively with those areas that are more open and agricultural in nature - providing a suitable and contrasting backdrop to contain and ameliorate the growth which will inevitably occur.

**B. PROPOSED LAND USE**

This plan is introducing a future overlay zoning district identified as M-1, mixed use, to be implemented only after a master plan for the area has been completed and adopted through the public hearing process and a revised zoning map approved. This district will cover the southern tier of the Town as outlined in the study, GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN, A Vision of the Future.

Until M-1 is adopted, this Plan does not contemplate major shifts in the proposed land use map from previous plans. Zoning Districts will be adjusted slightly in certain areas, primarily to make more logical Zoning District boundaries based on physical or built features of the land. The only alteration of significance would change t he Industrial District (I-1) north of I-89 and east of Route 7 to the Business District (B-1)

Other goals and policies of this plan may be implemented through Zoning and Sub-division Regulation amendments, either as development criteria or "overlay" zoning districts. Overall, however, the Zoning Districts are proposed to stay substantially the same.

Changes in use, which increase septic system demand, should be controlled and only allowed when compliance with septic system design criteria can be met.

There are several methods by which the Town can influence development in ways which meet the proposed land use goals. Some of these are Planned Unit Developments, Planned Commercial and Industrial Developments, Flexible Zoning Provisions, Transfer of Development Rights, and Purchase of Development Rights. Some of these provisions already exist in the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations, but may need to be modified to meet the goals for a particular Zoning District, and others would have to be added. This process will involve considerable thought and public input.

## Land Use Districts

**Residential Districts:**

**AR-1 Agricultural/Rural District:**

This District is comprised of those areas of Town best suited and primarily used for agricultural and or silvicultural purposes. The general soil conditions, topography, location and present land uses favor the continuation of agriculture as the primary land use in this District. Other uses should support the continuation of agriculture and forestry uses. Residential and other uses should be very low density, capable of supporting onsite water and sewage, and should not interfere with the agricultural rural nature of the District.

It should be understood by anyone establishing residential uses in this District that agricultural and residential uses do not generally mix well. Certain farm practices may cause noise, odors, and other activities that residential owners may find offensive. Accepted Agricultural Practices are essential to the continued vitality of the agricultural community and should take precedence over the residential uses in this District.

While the numbers of farms have decreased over the years, the amount of land area actively used for agricultural purposes remains significant. In order to insure protection of the land base itself, the Zoning Regulations should ensure that efforts are made to preserve the best farmland. Overall density of dwelling units in this District should remain low; only developable land should be considered in the density calculations.

Currently, the lot size is large (five acre minimums) and requires road frontage or access off a right of way. The net effect of this leaves Georgia exposed to large lots along Town highways being created. This is often also the best farmland, which is lost for production. This practice may hinder the preservation of some of the best farmland by taking it out of production.

A carefully designed Planned Unit Development provision, created specifically for the AR-1 District can serve the purpose of allowing reasonable levels of development for farmers and large landowners, protecting the long term viability of farm, the land base itself, while not placing undue burdens on municipal services or taxpayers.

**AR-2/AR-3 Residential Districts:**

There are two residential districts, AR-2 and AR-3, which have been designated for medium and higher density development, respectively. The soil conditions and or general location of these Districts provides the greatest opportunities for higher density development which can be furnished municipal and other services most economically and efficiently. These two Zones follow existing development patterns and provide a reasonable separation from other land uses in Town. It should be noted that the intensity of development is based in part on the availability of services and facilities, either private or municipal. The Town does not currently operate water or sewage facilities, therefore density should be considered accordingly. Residential development not served by municipal sewage facilities should be able to support on site water supplies and sewage disposal. Density and phasing of development should also be based on the ability of the Town and therefore the taxpayers, to provide other Town services such as highways, recreation, police, fire and education. Developers should be required to defray the costs associated with the provision of services required from their development.

Planned Unit Developments are allowed as a Conditional Use and encouraged as a means of providing reasonable levels of development, protection of important resources, reduction of curb cuts, economic provision of services, provision of open spaces and recreation areas, planning and coordination of pedestrian and vehicular access, and creativity of design and layout.

**AR-2 Residential District:**

This District is the medium density Residential District. Overall residential development density is higher than the AR-1 District but less than the AR-3 District and based on land capability and services. Single and two family dwellings, multi tenant elderly housing, and associated services are allowed. Limited business and commercial activities and medium sized residential developments are allowed as Conditional Uses in this District. Planned Residential Developments and Planned Unit Developments are allowed as Conditional Uses to promote the overall goals of the Plan.

**AR-3 Residential District:**

This District is the highest density Residential District. One to four family housing and multi tenant elderly housing and associated services are allowed uses. Larger scale developments, limited commercial and business uses are allowed as Conditional Uses. Planned Residential Developments and Planned Unit Developments are allowed as Conditional Uses and encouraged to promote overall planning goals.

**Industrial Districts:**

There are also two Industrial Districts, one designated for heavy industry and the other for light industry. They have been located adjacent to one another to reduce negative impacts on other land uses. These districts are located with respect to access to important transportation links, water and septic capability and are set apart from agricultural and residential districts. These districts are located in close proximity to Georgia's I-89 Interchange and should allow us to take advantage of this transportation link while minimizing industrial traffic throughout town.

Suitable industrial/commercial land is a valuable asset to a community. Every effort should be made to utilize this land to the utmost efficiency and benefit to the community while at the same time protecting valuable resources. Planned Unit and Planned Unit Developments are the preferred method of achieving that goal. Because of the nature of industrial commercial development and the lack of municipal services for same, community septic and water facilities should be allowed, where appropriate.

**I-1 Industrial District:**

This is the heavy industrial district and supports those Permitted and Conditional Uses that are consistent with the general good of the Town. Proposed industrial development must be reviewed by the Planning Commission. The town should investigate the feasibility of working cooperatively with the GDIC Board to add new land to the Georgia Dairy Industrial Park or new lands for Industrial/Commercial Development.

**I-2 Light Industrial District:**

This district is the light industrial commercial zone, provides good access to highways, and does not create a large impact on the surrounding areas or require substantial town services. A goal of this district is to create light industrial uses in unified centers.

**Business Districts:**

**B-1 Business District:**

The B-1 District is a high traffic area with good access to major highways. There is a mix of commercial uses and residential development in the area. This zone also serves as a transition from the Industrial Districts to the Residential Districts.

While this district offers many opportunities for commercial development to serve the needs of the public, caution must be exercised not to allow "sprawl" or strip development. A goal of this district is to create retail uses in unified locations. This is a highly visible district and is served by a major north/south transportation link (Route 7) as well as the interstate (I-89). Controlled access to the highways, screening and landscaping, and creative design and layout will be essential to keeping this district aesthetically pleasing as well as functionally operational as a transportation corridor.

Some of the soils in this district are suitable for higher densities; however the development of sewer and water infrastructure may be necessary in order for this area to be developed to its potential. The lack of this infrastructure will ultimately have an effect on location and density of development. The development of this infrastructure can allow for more controls over how the area develops and is worth considering for future plans, if economically feasible.

In future, the Industrial and Business Zones would be the most appropriate areas for a locally designated "growth center". This local possible designation should not be confused with a regionally designated growth center. It is not the intent of this plan that the Town serve as a regional growth area.

**B-2 Business District:**

The B-2 District is envisioned as allowing complementary business and residential uses, and is located along Route 7 just south of the St. Albans Town line. Heavy soils in this area will be a limiting factor for extensive development. The goal for this area is to be a “mini-growth center.”

**Recreational & Resource Protection Districts:**

**R-1 Recreational District:**

These areas have been designated recreational because they generally have severe limitations for development. Limitations include: slope, soil suitability, elevation, cost of services, and proximity to natural features or areas most suited for recreational and non-residential uses. Large lot sizes are proposed to keep residential density to a minimum place minimum

demand on the land and prevent substantial alteration to the landscape. Flexible Zoning and conveyance of development rights should be considered as a way of further enhancing the protection of these resources permanently. Essentially these provisions allow the development of a lot of less than the minimum lot size, provided that the balance of the land necessary to meet lot size requirement is permanently protected through mechanisms such as removal of development rights.

**N-1 Natural Area District:**

These areas are designated because there are significant natural areas or features which are unique or irreplaceable and should be protected for the public good. These areas should remain in their natural state, to whatever degree possible, for current and future generations. It is the purpose of this zone to encourage the preservation of these natural assets. The town should work with and encourage landowners to reach this goal.

Large lot sizes are required as a method of keeping overall density of residential development low. Flexible Zoning provisions should also be considered for this district.

**Lakeshore Districts:**

The Lakeshore is one of the most significant natural features of the town. This is complicated by the fact that the town does not have jurisdiction over the waters of the lake itself, but all land uses adjacent to the lake have a profound affect and impact on the lake. This plan recognizes both the unique features of the lake and its' shoreline as a resource and the desire to use the lake for residential and recreational purposes. Clearly the lake is a very sensitive resource and must be protected and managed carefully and wisely.

The Lake District has been delineated in two Zones, L-1 and L-2 to better address these important issues.

**L-1 Lakeshore District:**

The L-1 District is described as an area beginning at the Milton town line and proceeding northward to the St. Albans town line, having a uniform width of 500' from the waterline of Lake Champlain. The "waterline" shall be the mean water level as established by the Army Corp of Engineers (95.5').

A primary purpose of this District is to maintain and improve the shoreline when considering new development and to gradually improve existing conditions as well.

The present land use is primarily a mix of year-round residential homes and seasonal cottages located on small lots in close proximity to Lake Champlain. This presents limited options for on site sewage disposal and drinking water sources.

A potential long term goal is to provide off site sewage treatment for the existing dwellings. A Georgia Shore Wastewater Disposal Feasibility study completed in 2005 concluded that a regional solution would be cost-prohibitive for the near-term future. However, the study recommended some new, innovative systems for individual properties which dramatically reduce the land area needed for leaching. These systems have been approved for use by the State of Vermont and a few have already been installed successfully. The Town should find ways to encourage more wide-spread use of these systems to best protect the lake from runoff. Any new development should give due regard to waste water treatment and water supplies, location of structures, landscaping and screening, storm water runoff and drainage, and removal of shoreline vegetation.

**L-2 Lakeshore-Recreation District:**

This District is adjacent to the L-1 District and varies in width according to natural features and geological formations. This zone is also very sensitive where land use may have a dramatic affect on the Lake. Soil conditions vary from moderately good soils to very poor soils for on site water and sewage capability. Overall density for this district should be low and low intensity.

Planned Unit Development standards should be developed as a method for retaining open land and preserving the natural beauty of the remaining open lands. Strict regard to development suitability and developable land should be considered in any proposed developments for this zone. Undevelopable land should not be used to calculate overall density for residential development.

Development should be carefully reviewed with strict regard to water supply and waste water disposal, structure placement and lot layout, landscaping and screening, scenic and aesthetic qualities, impacts on services, storm water runoff and drainage.

**Other Districts:**

**M-1 Mixed Use District (a future overlay zone):**

The M-1 district is an overlay zone whose dimensions will depend on the outcome of a South Village Master Plan currently being prepared from the GEORGIA VILLAGE PLAN concept proposal. It will not go into effect until the South Village Master Plan has been adopted and zoning map appropriately altered.

The district will include appropriate mix of all manner of residences, businesses, professional services, light commercial, public facilities, all among ample greenspace, nature trails, etc. in a Vermont community type setting.

**F-1 Flood Hazard Area:**

This Zone is described according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Maps and criteria for Flood hazard Areas. The Town of Georgia has adopted a Flood Hazard Regulation, in compliance with State and Federal requirements, and participates in the Federal Flood Insurance Program. The purpose of this Zone is to prevent damage to public and private property and to maintain eligibility in the insurance program.

## SECTION VI. ENERGY

Energy is critical to almost every aspect of our society. We are enormously dependent on reliable inexpensive sources of energy for all our needs from food production to leisure activities. We often take our energy requirements and use for granted because we have had relatively cheap energy sources available for some time.

This is Georgia's first Plan update to consider energy issues. This Section is not intended to be an in depth study of town wide energy issues, rather, it is an attempt to recognize the need for energy planning and develop some general policies to promote and encourage energy conservation in a land use planning context.

We do need to become more energy conscious for a variety of compelling reasons, not the least of which is diminishing supplies of cheap energy. There are also great environmental consequences to our present patterns of energy use, such as air pollution, greenhouse gases, ozone depletion, acid deposition from emissions, nuclear contamination risks and radioactive material disposal, to name a few.

In the absence of clear Energy policies from the federal and state level, what can a Town do to promote conservation of energy resources? Direct impacts may be small and hard to measure, but there is still much that we can do. The Town can review all of its own energy needs and purchase equipment and materials that are energy efficient. We can perform energy audits on Town buildings to determine energy efficiency and institute cost efficient energy practices or modifications.

The biggest area of impact could come from land use planning policies. According to the Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan, it is estimated that simple, inexpensive energy conservation measures employed in new construction could result in energy savings from 20 to 30%. Couple these with an additional 10% savings for conservation measures applied to existing homes and businesses and you can see that a real energy savings could be realized over a ten year period.

Energy use is generally broken down into four categories, residential, commercial, industrial, and transportation. Residential use involves all sources of energy use in the home from water heating to space heating. The commercial and industrial categories involve all energy use directly used for service, wholesale and retail trade, and manufacturing or products. Transportation involves all energy used in moving people and things from one place to another.

Vermont defies the national average in percentage of energy use devoted to these categories. Transportation shows the most significant difference. In Vermont, transportation accounts for 46% percent of total energy use, as opposed to 27% nationwide. Residential use in Vermont accounts for 30% of total use as opposed to 27% nationwide. Commercial and industrial accounts for 12% and 14% respectively, as opposed to 16% and 36% nationwide.

The differences are indicative of a rural state with a small manufacturing base and a disperse population that relies heavily on the private automobile for its transportation needs. Looking at these differences in percent of energy use, it is easy to see that greater efficiencies in the residential and transportation sectors would result in decreased energy consumption.

In Vermont, transportation and residential uses consumed 75% of all energy used, with commercial and industrial consuming the balance. This percentage is probably about the same for the Town of Georgia, given the number of farms, businesses, and light industry that is located here.

In terms of residential energy use statewide, almost 80% goes for water heating and space heating, with the rest for lighting, refrigeration, air conditioning, cooking, etc. Of that 80%, approximately 52% was from oil fuels and significantly, almost 34% was from wood or wood products.

Of all energy used in Vermont, it estimated that 80% is obtained from out of state sources. It is also estimated that over 85% of the money spent on those energy sources leaves the state of Vermont and provides jobs and profits for people elsewhere. Therefore, anything Vermonters can do to reduce their dependency on imported energy resources will also show significant benefit to the states economy.

From a land use planning perspective, it is sensible to encourage the development of village centers, clustered housing, energy efficiency in design, location and construction of buildings, and the development of more efficient transportation networks.

The most logical time to look at energy conservation is at the time of construction, renovation, or replacement of equipment. Simple practices incorporated into new construction could save from 20%-30% in energy use. Upgrading water heaters, heating systems, windows and doors, insulating and sealing cracks and drafts can save an additional 10% for existing homes.

We should begin to look more seriously at alternative energy sources for our future needs. Emphasis should be placed on renewable energy sources such as wood, methane, ethanol, wind, solar, and hydro. Co-generation should also be considered where it is economically feasible to do so. As these energy sources become more viable, we should be able to reduce our dependency on dwindling fossil fuel resources and improve the environment at the same time.

Georgia was proposed as a site for several co-generation projects in the past. One of these would have used natural gas to fire steam driven electrical turbines with the excess steam being sold the Vermont Whey Plant to be used in the manufacture of whey products. This project was denied by the Vermont Public Service Department as being too expensive for the power it would generate. There are claims on both sides of the issue as to the cost benefit analysis of this project. It may well be that Georgia will again be considered as a site for Co-generation.

Residential transportation accounts for 51% of all transportation energy used in Vermont. Once again, this indicates that we are highly reliant on the private automobile for our livelihoods. Land use planning efforts should consider this reliance on private use of the automobile and encourage development patterns that reduce the need for travel.

Energy is a basic need of modern life which we are very dependent on. The cost of energy use represents a major expense in both the private and public sector. Many energy sources also contribute to environmental degradation and decreased quality of life. Therefore, it is important to reduce our use of polluting expensive energy sources through conservation technological advances and increase our use of renewable and non-polluting energy sources.

**Energy Goals, Policies and Objectives:**

**Goals:**
**To reduce the use of and dependence on expensive and polluting energy sources.**

**To promote energy efficient use and conservation of local and outside energy sources.**

**To promote the use of renewable energy sources, where appropriate.**

**Objetcives:**

~ To promote educational opportunities which increase energy awareness of students, local officials and townspeople.

~ To adopt appropriate land use policies which encourage conservation of energy sources for transportation.

~ To adopt appropriate land use policies which encourage conservation of energy sources relative to placement of buildings and land development.

~ To encourage the use of car and van pools for commuters and others.

~ To encourage the use of energy efficient designs in residential, commercial and industrial development.

**Policy:**

~ To consider energy costs and energy efficiency as a criteria for the purchase of Town equipment and facilities.

## SECTION VII. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout the plan many goals and objectives have been proposed and policies stated to help Georgia continue to develop as a strong community. A cooperative effort will be required between town officials, developers, and town citizens to successfully implement the goals, objectives, and policies as set forth in the plan. Several tools are available to help with implementation.

**Zoning Regulations** - The Zoning Regulations are used to control development type and location. By detailing standards for conditional use approval, etc., the Zoning Regulations can give the community a chance to work with developers to mold proposed land uses to achieve planning goals. The Georgia Zoning Regulations will have to be modified so that they can be used as a tool to help with implementation of the goals, objectives, and policies of the Town Plan.
The Town has established a Residential Growth Management process which is designed to limit the rate of new residential construction to 35 new dwelling units each year, and which limits residential construction outside of the Southern Tier to forty percent of that number, or fourteen dwelling units, per year.

**Subdivision Regulations**- The Subdivision Regulations allow for community participation at the subdivision stage of a development. All subdivisions can be reviewed to help ensure that they follow the Town Plan. The Georgia Subdivision Regulations need some modifications so that they can be better used to help ensure that a subdivision is compatible with the Town Plan.

**Other Town Ordinances/Policies**- In some cases, such as sewage disposal, highways, and impact on municipal services, other Ordinances and Policies can be used to help implement the goals, objectives, and policies of the Town Plan. Town Ordinances and Policies are a valuable tool to address some complex issues. Examples of these are: Sewage Ordinance, Capital Budget

Program, Impact Fee Ordinance, Road Policy, and Animal Control Ordinance.

**Capital Budget and Program**- The Town should update its Capital Budget and Program to reflect the most recent assessment of needed utilities and facilities and residential growth targets.

**Local Participation**- There are many active boards and committees in the Town of Georgia. Within these boards there is a wealth of knowledge about Recreation, Town Services, Conservation, Energy, Transportation, Housing, Farming, Natural Resources and other topics discussed in the Town Plan. The Planning Commission should utilize this knowledge and experience to help implement the plan.

**Other Towns**- The Planning Commission has reviewed numerous other Town Plans in the process of re-writing our own. This has resulted in different ways of looking at similar problems towns face. When implementing this plan, Georgia should review how other Towns have addressed similar challenges. It may be wise to take a "Don't Reinvent The Wheel" philosophy and attempt to use things that have worked successfully in other towns. At the same time, Georgia should be able to learn from mistakes that other communities have made and attempt to do it better. The Town of Georgia has a goal to work with adjoining municipalities to best implement this plan.

## SECTION VIII. GEORGIA'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE REGION AND ADJACENT COMMUNITIES

Georgia lays at the southern end of Franklin County, adjacent to the Chittenden County Town of Milton to the south, the Franklin County Towns of St. Albans to the north, and Fairfax to the east. The town of Fairfield has a point of land that touches Georgia in the northeast corner but provides no real physical connection or any conflict in land use.

To the west of Georgia is Lake Champlain, which provides a physical separation between the Grand Isle County communities of South Hero, Grand Isle and North Hero. While it may be argued that land uses between these communities have an affect on water quality and that their plans should be reviewed for compatibility issues, we have chosen to review those communities with a direct land link. Issues dealing with water quality and land use are addressed in our plan. They may be more adequately addressed on Regional scale, such as through the Lake Champlain Basin Study.

Compatibility of this plan with those of adjacent municipalities and the Region was undertaken by reviewing those plans and zoning districts along the borders of Georgia. A review by community follows.

### St. Albans Town:

St. Albans Town's Town Plan was adopted and was approved by the Northwest Regional Planning Commission in 2005.

There are three primary "areas" related to the compatibility of land use between Georgia and St. Albans: land use districts, the shoreline, and transportation.

*Land Use Districts*

In the main, land use districts in both towns are compatible. Georgia and St Albans both have "lakeshore" districts. See below for more detailed discussion of shoreline issues.

Moving east to Bronson Road, Georgia has a Lakeshore/Recreation District, a Recreation District, and the AR-2 Medium-Density Residential District. Throughout this area, St Albans' Rural District is described in the Town Plan as primarily rural, nevertheless it has potential for more intense development because of the relatively small (~ 1 acre) minimum lot-size allowed in the Zoning Bylaws.

From Bronson Road to Route 7, Georgia has the AR-1 District and the B-1 District. St. Albans has an Industrial District (offset from the Georgia town line by 500 feet). While there have not been any problems in the past with regard to industrial development in this area, there is potential for some conflicts, for example an increase in truck traffic, if the district is extensively built-out.

Eastward to the Fairfax line, Georgia has a Natural Areas District and an AR-1 District, and St. Albans has a Conservation and Rural Lands Zone. While minimum lot sizes are considerably smaller in both St. Albans Zones (10 acres and 1 acre respectively as opposed to 20 acres and 5 acres respectively) it is unlikely that either area will see much intensive development due to physical limitations of the land.

*Shoreline*

Development along the shoreline of Lake Champlain must be closely regulated to ensure protection of lake water quality standards. New wastewater options for residents now offer better methods to protect against wastewater runoff. These should be applied whenever development applications are presented.

The St. Albans plan states: "All permitted uses in this district would be subject to special considerations given to improving sewage disposal and preventing unnecessary clearing and shoreline erosion". Georgia supports this view and further believes, if properly regulated, development along the shoreline can lead to improved pollution control, shore beautification, and

enhanced revenue for our communities.

*Transportation*

The following roads "connect" Georgia and St. Albans: Interstate 89 (by way of Fairfax and Fairfield), Route 7, Bronson Road, Ferrand Road, and Georgia Shore Road. Additionally, train tracks and a bus shuttle run through both towns. I-89 and Route 7 function as "major arterials" in both towns. Georgia Shore Road functions as a "collector" in both towns, especially during warmer months. Bronson and Ferrand Roads serve as "local streets" in both towns. Since all of the roads which connect the two towns have the same functions, there is no inherent conflict regarding these roads.

The main concern regarding the road system is access management on Route 7. St. Albans' Town Plan and Zoning Bylaws include language regarding access management. Access management is important on Route 7 since this road serves as a major arterial, and failure to control access will result in lessening its effectiveness.

Georgia and St. Albans would benefit from cooperating with regard to provisions for public transportation since both towns have largely commuting workforces.

**Milton:**

Milton adopted its latest Comprehensive Plan on March 24, 2003. As with St. Albans Town, there are three primary "areas" related to the compatibility of land use between Georgia and Milton: land use districts, the shoreline, and transportation.

*Land Use Districts*

Starting from Lake Champlain, Milton and Georgia both have shoreline districts. Each of these districts proposes resource protection measures and generally low intensity of development.

Eastward of the shore districts to Stonebridge Brook is a combination of Lakeshore/Recreation, AR-1, and AR-2 Districts in Georgia and a Rural Development Zone for Milton. Milton has a lower density requirement (larger lot size requirement) than Georgia for this zone.

From Stonebridge Brook to Arrowhead Mountain Lake encompasses the most intensely developed region of Georgia, the AR-3 District, as well as the Recreation District in a 500 foot swath around Arrowhead Mountain Lake. Milton adjoins with the Agricultural/Rural Residential and the Transitional Residential Districts. The Transitional Residential District has a density of one dwelling unit per ten acres of land with strong incentives for clustering, whereas Georgia's AR-3 currently has a one unit per two acres, but is proposed to change to one unit per acre.

To the east, Georgia has Natural Area and Recreational Districts whereas Milton has Transitional Residential, Agricultural/Rural Residential, and Forestry/Conservation Districts. These districts primarily provide for low intensity development and are compatible.

Milton and Georgia have much in common with each other. Both towns have experienced high rates of residential growth and retain significant agricultural and natural resource areas. However Milton has more commercial and industrial development along Route 7, and also more public infrastructure, such as municipal water and sewer. In general, the Milton and Georgia Town Plans are compatible with regard to the adjacent land use districts.

*Shoreline*

Milton and Georgia share the shoreline of Lake Champlain. The Milton Town Plan makes reference to the problem that existing septic systems are frequently undersized and in poor condition resulting in lake pollution but does not include any specific policies regarding this issue. As expressed elsewhere Georgia and St. Albans Town share this concern.

*Transportation*

The following roads "connect" Georgia and Milton: I-89, Route 7, Old Stage Road, Hibbard Road, Stonebridge Road, Bullock Road, North Road/Arrowhead Lake Road, and Georgia Shore Road. Additionally, railroad tracks also run through both towns.

I-89 and Route 7 function as "major arterials" in both towns (although the Milton Plan classifies Route 7 as a "minor arterial"). Old Stage Road, Stonebridge Road, and North Road/Arrowhead Lake Road serve as "collectors." Hibbard Road, Stonebridge Road and Georgia Shore Road in vicinity of the town boundaries serve as "local streets."

The Milton Plan indicates a proposed bridge over Arrowhead Mountain Lake from the Husky campus to Route 7. The construction of the bridge (and expansion of Husky) will probably result in additional traffic on Route 7 south of the Interstate exchange in Georgia, as this will become the fastest route to Husky from either north or south.

There is a "Route 7 Corridor Study" underway (co-sponsored by the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Northwest Regional Planning Commission) which is examining the corridor from Winooski to the Interstate exchange in Georgia. The study will hopefully provide recommendations which will address the above issue as well as others.

**Fairfax:**

Fairfax adopted its Town Plan on August 24, 1998. The two main areas related to the compatibility of land use between Georgia and Fairfax are land use districts and transportation.

*Land Use Districts*

The boundary between Georgia and Fairfax includes a significant amount of natural areas that serve as wildlife habitat. Georgia and Fairfax use similar names for their respective land use districts along the border, e.g.: Low Density Residential, Conservation, Agricultural Resource Land, Forest Resource Land, and Shoreland Zone (on the Fairfax side), and Agricultural-Rural Residential, Recreational, and Natural Areas (on the Georgia side). It should be noted, however, that Fairfax's Zoning Bylaws allow for much smaller lot sizes (usually two acres), which therefore could result in fairly intensive development along the Georgia border.

*Transportation*

The following roads "connect" Georgia and Fairfax: I-89, Route 104A, Goodrich Hill Road, Blake Road, and Georgia Mountain Road. Route 104 runs along the border of the two towns for .13 miles.

I-89 functions as a "major arterial" in both towns. Route 104A serves as a "minor arterial," and is notable for its scenic quality due to its proximity to the Lamoille River and Georgia Mountain. Route 104 serves as a "collector" where it joins the two towns. Goodrich Hill Road, Blake Road, and Georgia Mountain Road are "local streets." Goodrich Hill Road and Georgia Mountain Road are Class 4 roads on the Georgia side, but turn into Class 3 roads on the Fairfax side.

Although most of these roads currently function similarly in both towns, and so are not a cause for concern at this time, as discussed above, intensive development along Route 104 or Route 104A in Fairfax could create traffic impacts in Georgia on Oakland Station Road, Route 7, and Route 104A.

**The Region:**

Georgia belongs to the Northwest Regional Planning Commission. The Commission is comprised of two appointed commissioners from each of the 24 member municipalities and a support staff. The Commission provides technical assistance in matters of land use and development and develops a Regional Plan similar to our Town Plan. The Northwest Regional Planning Commission adopted a Regional Plan on May 31, 2004. There are many topics in the Regional Plan which are pertinent to Georgia, however three main areas related to the compatibility of the Regional Plan and this Town Plan are: growth center designation, transportation, and shoreline protection.

*Growth Center Designation*

The Regional Plan identifies one "regional growth center" and five "sub-regional growth centers," neither of which includes Georgia. The Regional Plan describes the attributes of a sub-regional growth centers as 1) moderately large size compared to other towns in the region, 2) retail and commercial services adequate to serve neighboring towns, 3) densities that enable the area to serve as a transportation hub for neighboring towns, and 4) access to government services.

Georgia is identified as a "Potential Sub-Regional Growth Center" in the Regional Plan because it does not have the characteristics listed above, but could have if appropriate planning is accomplished. The Regional Plan does indicate that the Georgia could benefit from "local growth center" planning. This characterization is compatible with this Town Plan, in that the town's commercial center currently serves primarily local needs.

The southern portion of Georgia has the potential for becoming a sub-regional growth center, because of its access to the Interstate, the Route 7 corridor, and the existing and potential for additional industrial and commercial development. This area also has a fire district which provides water to 175 residences, and has capacity for expansion. However the lack of municipal sewer and a more extensive water distribution system, and the requisite governmental services to administer both means that for the time being this area cannot be considered a sub-regional growth center.

It is not likely that Georgia will invest in sewer or water infrastructure in the near future. It would take a tremendous capital investment to develop this type of infrastructure and the town does not have a large enough population or tax base to support the investment at this time. The town has investigated the possibilities and implications of this infrastructure, and has identified potential practical solutions if this is the direction townspeople wish to go.\

*Transportation*

The Regional Plan describes the multi-faceted transportation network in the region, and includes goals, policies, objectives and strategies for this network. The Interstate, Route 7 and the rail line are important components of both the local and regional network.

Both the Town Plan and the Regional Plan support the minimization of curb-cuts on Route 7, especially in the vicinity of the Interstate exit ramps, in order to maintain the arterial function of Route 7. The Town Plan and the Regional Plan also support public transportation in the Route 7 corridor, and support improvements in the vicinity of Exit 18 to consider the needs of pedestrian travel.

*Shoreline Protection*

The Lake Champlain shoreline is both a local and a regional resource. Protection of this resource is a high regional and local priority.

The Regional Plan indicates that one strategy for protecting and improving the water quality along the shoreline is to improve the quality of wastewater treatment. Additionally, the Regional Plan indicates the importance of coordinating growth management and wastewater management. This Town Plan supports both of these strategies.

**SECTION IX. MAPS**

**1) LAND USE/LAND COVER**

**2) PROPOSED LAND USE**

**3) PRIME AGRICULTURE SOILS & STATEWIDE IMPORTANCE SOILS**

**4) SIGNIFICANT HABITATS, HISTORIC AREAS, GEOLOGIC AREAS, & SCENIC AREAS**

**5) DEVELOPMENT SUITABILITY**

**6) FACILITIES AND SERVICES**

**7) TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM**

**APPENDICIES:**

**I. SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES**

**II. TOWN SURVEY**

## Appendix I

### Summary of Survey Responses

**The following is a compilation of the most significant findings from responses received from the Planning Commission survey of property owners conducted between October 15 and December 1, 2005. A total of 484 surveys were returned from approximately 1750 sent out. This represented a return of 27.7% and included a total of nearly 15,000 data points.**

**The most prominent reasons for living in Georgia:**

- **.small town atmosphere**
- **.scenic beauty**
- **.near family and friends**
- **.quality schools**
- **.friendly and quiet community**
- **.country feel yet easy access via I-89**

**The most prominent concerns about life in Georgia:**

- **.high property taxes**
- **.no post office/zip code**
- **.lack of stores, services, amenities**
- **.lack of quality jobs**
- **.lack of recreational facilities (southern tier)**
- **.lack of affordable housing**

**Some recommended goals for Georgia:**

- **.protect natural environment**
- **.preserve agricultural and forest lands**
- **.preserve historic assets**
- **.provide basic shopping facilities**
- **.more recreation, bike paths, walkways, etc.**