

Town of Bennington, Vermont Scenic Resource Inventory



December 2004



Prepared by the **Bennington Planning Commission**
with assistance provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission

Scenic Resource Inventory of Bennington, Vermont

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This report was prepared by the Bennington Planning Commission with assistance provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission. All photographs were taken by Jim Sullivan, BCRC, between April and November 2004 using an Olympus Camedia C-50 digital camera. The aerial photo used as base map on page 2 is a composite of orthophotos obtained from the Vermont Department of Taxes, Division of Property Valuation and Review. Digital images are maintained at the Town of Bennington's Planning Department.

Scenic Resources of Bennington, Vermont

Introduction

The scenic quality of the landscape is one of Bennington's most important assets. The visual appearance of the Town's natural and built environment, and the quality of life that it represents, is important to residents, tourists, businesses, and to future economic development. An understanding of the features that make Bennington such a unique place will allow the Town to plan for the protection and wise use of its scenic resources.

The Town has recognized the value of its scenic resources, dedicating a section of the 2000 Bennington Town Plan to the subject. That document offers a general overview of the features that contribute to the community's scenic character and identifies specific landscape elements that are of special significance. The Plan also enumerates a set of policies designed to promote scenic preservation through public and private action.

In this report we will attempt to expand upon the discussion contained in the Town Plan by providing a context for describing the Town's scenic character and by identifying the critical elements that make the local scenery unique and valuable. We will observe that the features which provide the Town with its scenic character are the same assets that have attracted settlement and economic vitality to the community since its founding. A town-wide inventory of scenic views from public vantage points will provide specific examples of those features and the visual qualities that give special value to them.

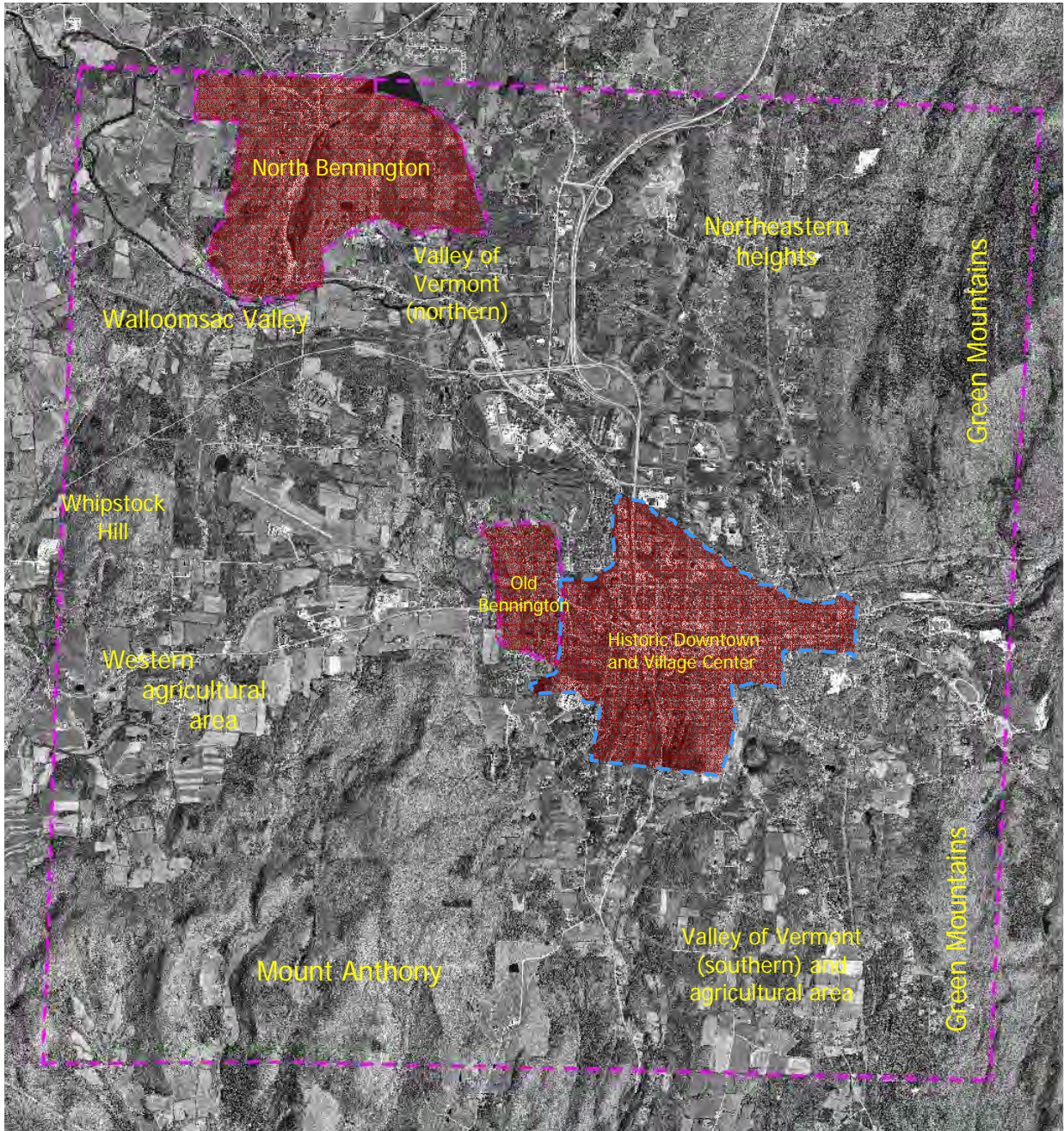
The final section of this report will identify strategies for protection and enhancement of scenic resources. The guidelines used in the development of this report are taken largely from Vermont's Scenic Landscapes: A Guide for Growth and Protection, published in 1991 by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. That document acknowledges the complexity of attempting to inventory scenic resources as well as the need to integrate any such effort with effective land use planning. This report is intended to provide a solid locally-driven framework for future planning, regulation, and decision-making.

Overall Landscape Context

Bennington was attractive to early settlers because of its location at the convergence of two valleys: the "Valley of Vermont" which runs north and south between the Green and Taconic Mountain Ranges and the broad valley of the Walloomsac River that stretches westward into the lowlands of eastern New York State. These valleys facilitated access to the area and provided a substantial amount of arable land among the surrounding mountains. The mountains themselves provided timber and mineral resources as well as the water power that drove early industries.

More than any other town in the region, Bennington is defined by its expansive valley that has been able to support a rich variety of rural and urban development. That development has occurred in close proximity to distinctive upland features which have themselves limited and channeled the direction of such growth. The varied nature of the valley landforms and built environment juxtaposed with wild and abrupt mountainsides gives Bennington its unique sense of place.

According to the Town Plan, approximately 61 percent of the land in Bennington can be classified as "valley," lying below 1,200 feet in elevation. Natural landforms in the valley include low hills interspersed among wide and level (by Vermont standards) ground, streams, ponds, and wetlands. This area was obviously very attractive to early farmers who cleared most of the land and to



Bennington's scenic context is shaped by its unique geography. The north-south Valley of Vermont runs through the center of the Town and intersects with the broad valley that follows the Walloomsac River west toward New York. The Town's historic center is located at the base of these valleys near the confluence of several streams. The forested Green Mountains line the Town's eastern border and Mount Anthony juts into the Town from the south. A broad plain extends north from the western flanks of Mount Anthony, interrupted by occasional landforms such as Whipstock Hill. Much of the Town is forested, with agricultural land found in the southern and western lowlands.

early manufacturers and tradesmen who established their businesses, homes, and civic buildings in distinct village centers and neighborhoods. While those areas have changed over time, many of the important historic structures remain and many of the neighborhoods and business districts have retained much of their unique character.

As development in the Town's center expanded, active agricultural lands persisted primarily in the western valley and in certain areas south of the densely developed central village. These open and cultivated fields, and the viewsheds they give access to, are today a defining feature of the rural valley landscape of the Town.

Principal roadways and important businesses tend to locate along rivers and streams and those water features have therefore become a critical part of the overall landscape context of the community. These watercourses cascade out of the highlands east and south of the Town and then begin to merge and organize as they flow westward through the valley. As such, they reflect the overall landscape character of wild peripheral highlands flowing into a broad and more cultivated valley to the west.

It is quite nearly impossible to stand anywhere in Bennington and not feel the presence of the surrounding mountains. From many points in the valley the Green Mountains appear as a solid wall delineating the east side of Town. The backdrop provided by this mountain range – its form constant, but with colors changing from season to season – puts the other visual elements in Town into the context of the natural world of Vermont's mountains.

A very different mountain landform dominates the skyline south of the Town's center. Mount Anthony is a north-south oriented ridge protruding from the Taconic Range into Bennington's valleys. An interesting forested ridge when viewed from the southeastern part of Town, it is its dramatic north face that dominates southward views from the central and northern parts of Town. The close proximity of the mass of the mountain to the downtown area, the Bennington Battle Monument, and to many other important cultural features makes Mount Anthony a compelling visual presence long treasured by townspeople.



Mount Anthony and the Bennington Battle Monument are two defining features of the town's landscape.

The Valley of Vermont extends north from Bennington, and the distant vistas of the valley framed by the Taconic and Green Mountains are spectacular when viewed from several key vantage points on the west side of Town. Because of the area's topography these views up the valley are evident only from a limited number of locations in the central, southern, and eastern parts of the Town (Southern Vermont College, Carpenter Hill Road, and points along Middle Pownal Road, for example).

A very different landscape presents itself as one looks to the west from most locations in Bennington. The horizon opens up north to south, offering a wide panorama of low-lying hills, the most prominent being Whipstock Hill which crests just east of the New York State border. Perhaps because a foreground of open and developed valley lands against a backdrop of steep mountains is characteristic of northern, eastern, and southern views in Bennington, the relative openness of some of the western vistas – for example, the sunset views from Harwood Hill – are especially striking. The presence of these scenic views reinforces the contextual sense of a valley town flanked by mountains, but open and connected to the west.



Sunsets from Harwood Hill reveal the open western skyline.

Critical Scenic Elements

Many individual factors come together to create Bennington's unique and special visual landscapes. An appreciation of those scenic elements will improve our understanding of each view and will help determine how those resources can be protected.

Bennington contains such a rich variety of natural and cultural landscapes that efforts to distill them into specific elements can seem quite intimidating. Scenic views that are widely appreciated and enjoyed do clearly have a number of common elements, however, although not all may be present in every view and some may dominate more in some views than in others.



Those scenic elements in Bennington reflect both characteristics that are unique to Bennington and certain features that are widely recognized as adding visual interest to a landscape. The elements discussed in the following sections include: open fields, mountains, water, distant views, gateways, historic sites and districts, scenic roads, and the Bennington Battle Monument. In some scenes the presence of a single critical element is the feature that makes the view memorable and in others it is the way in which the individual elements are integrated in a complex landscape.



Open fields and meadows are perhaps the most obvious, but ironically most overlooked, of our scenic elements. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, much of the Town was cleared for agriculture. Today, trees cover most of the valley and virtually all of the mountainsides. The open fields that break this forest cover have an intrinsic appeal and provide visual access to other scenic elements.

The area’s agricultural heritage is important in its appeal to both residents and tourists. Fields and meadows offer a strong visual reminder of this heritage while at the same time providing diversity to the landscape and affording access from public

roadways to views of mountains, valleys, farms, and other important features of the landscape that would otherwise lie concealed behind forests or buildings.

Some of these fields and meadows are part of active farming operations and others are maintained by residential landowners. They may be cultivated, grazed, or just regularly mowed to keep them open.

The nature of a scenic view that includes an open field is determined by factors such as the size of the opening and how closely it relates to nearby or distant landscape features. A field may be small and closely integrated with surrounding features such as woods, wildflowers, stone walls, and farmsteads. Some large fields, on the other hand, may provide a broad open foreground for a view that draws the observer’s eyes to distant hills, mountains, or valleys.

Good examples of open fields as the enabling element of valuable scenic resources can be found in most parts of Bennington. The most prominent open fields in the area are probably those lying along Route 9 West, between Old Bennington and the New York State line. From the highway, views of Pleasant Valley to the south and the Valley of Vermont to the north define the visual character of this part of the Town.

Local roadways in this same area offer interesting views as they pass by smaller fields with varying views which depend on the direction of travel. Fields in Pleasant Valley, for example, are bounded by attractive trees, farmsteads, and relatively close views of the surrounding mountains. North of the highway, open fields around the W.H. Morse State Airport provide more distant views of surrounding hills and mountains.



Open fields along Route 9 in the western part of Town provide open views toward Pleasant Valley to the south and of the Valley of Vermont and the Taconic and Green Mountains to the north.

North Bennington Village and Bennington College lie in the northwestern part of Town where local roads wind through residential neighborhoods, farmland, and woodlots. Views across small fields near the college highlight wildflowers, glimpses of the Battle Monument, and distant hills. Agricultural fields in the Walloomsac River Valley provide a pastoral setting for attractive views of rolling hills and valleys. The public use trails that crisscross conserved fields near North Bennington showcase some of the best rural views in southern Vermont.

The southwestern section of Bennington is dominated by Mount Anthony, which is largely wooded, but fields scattered around its lower slopes are ideally situated to provide glimpses of meadows bordered by steep wooded slopes. A circuit around Mount Anthony, via Mount Anthony Road and Carpenter Hill Road — with a side trip up Skiparee Road—provides a range of scenic views across small and large fields that may be unsurpassed anywhere in the area.

The rural area east of Route 7 and south of Route 9 includes considerable active agricultural land, especially along South Stream Road and Niles Road. In these areas, the open fields are closely tied visually with the elements of the farming operations such as houses, barns, livestock, and fences. Large open fields on high ground adjacent to Middle Pownal Road and Gore Road, on the other hand, reveal panoramic views stretching from Mount Anthony in the west to the Green Mountains in the east.

The northeastern section of Town includes extensive heavily forested mountain slopes with a limited number of cleared fields. Looking across scattered lawns and fields along East Road and Chapel Road reveals the dramatic escarpment of the Green Mountains looming close by. The views over the center of Town from maintained lawns and fields at Willow Park and the new Middle School are noteworthy as well.



A mix of open fields interspersed among woodlots and forested mountainsides is characteristic of many rural areas in Bennington, as seen here in Pleasant Valley.



Mount Anthony from Pleasant Valley; mature trees complement the open fields and more distant vistas.



Whipstock Hill is especially striking from this hayfield adjacent to the airport runway.



Farm fields along the valley of the Wallomsac provide fine views of the hills to the west.



This field of wildflowers is typical of many in the north-western part of Town (note the Monument in the distance).



Panoramic view from the trails atop McCullough Fields near North Bennington Village.



Small fields along Mount Anthony Road flow into steep wooded hillsides on both sides of the roadway.



Fields along Skiparee Road provide interesting views into the hollow located southwest of Mount Anthony.



One of several beautiful fields on the east side of Mount Anthony, with agricultural buildings and the mountain as a perfect backdrop.



Rolling hills and attractive barns along South Stream Road.



Spectacular vistas are enhanced by a diverse foreground on the high fields along Middle Pownal Road.



Active farms such as this one on Niles Road are responsible for many maintained open lands.



View from fields high above Town on Gore Road.

The mountainsides and high ridgelines of Bennington have retained their natural forested appearance. Even those upland areas that were once cleared for pasture have reverted to forest cover. The sense of undisturbed nature that emanates from the mountains sets an important tone for the visual character of the Town.

The mountains contribute to the Town's sense of place as a community that is closely connected to the natural world. They provide a dramatic backdrop to rural open lands and an important contrasting element in scenes which include a foreground of the built environment.



As noted earlier, the dominant mountain landforms in Bennington are the Green Mountains to the east and Mount Anthony, which rises dramatically in the southern part of Town. Almost any view to the east is set against the impressive wall of the Green Mountains. These mountains are especially striking when entering Bennington from the west on Route 9 and Route 279, but can be seen from the center of Town as well. The varied forest cover types, undulating ridgeline, and distinctive features such as the White Rocks give added visual interest to this mountain range.

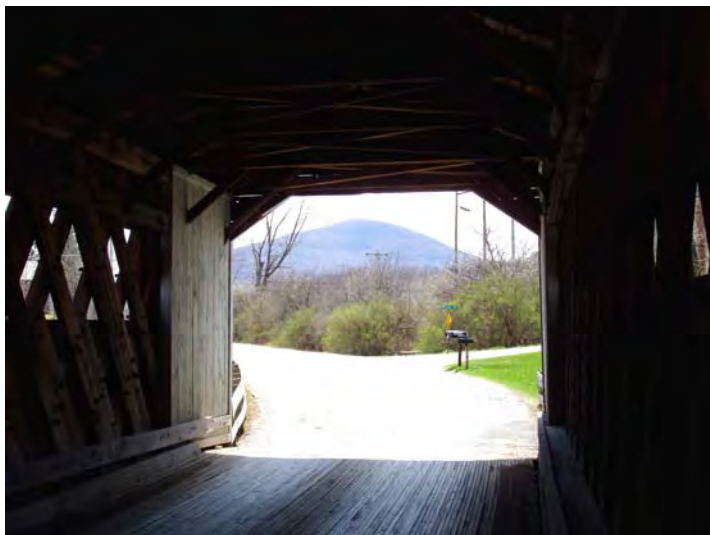
Mount Anthony is probably the single most prominent landscape feature in Bennington. It is an important component of scenic views from numerous vantage points in Town. Much of the land on the mountain is conserved, thus aiding in the preservation of the mountain's slopes in their natural condition. Telecommunication towers at the summit are not very evident from below and the Town has been careful to restrict the height of any new towers.

A number of lower hills and ridges within the Town are also very important scenic elements in a more local context. Whipstock Hill, marking the western edge of the Town, is the largest of these. Although some development has occurred on the slopes of Whipstock Hill, much of the hillside and the ridgeline is protected from further development. Smaller hills and ridges are scattered throughout Town and, even when developed, can provide a pleasant backdrop when they contain mature trees and do not have large obtrusive structures altering the natural appearance of the ridge-

line. An example of such hills are the steep slopes that rises directly south of downtown.

Bennington's geography also allows for views of mountains that stretch well beyond the Town's boundaries. Views of Mount Greylock towering over the Berkshires in Massachusetts and of the north-south running Taconic and Green Mountain Ranges are important to the Town. Viewpoints that highlight these distant mountains are located along Route 9 West, at Southern Vermont College, atop Carpenter Hill Road and Middle Pownal Road, and on Skisparee Road.

Some of the most spectacular



Mt. Anthony sometimes seems to appear around every bend in the road; here it is framed by the Silk Road Covered Bridge.

views of mountains, valleys, and of the Town itself, are obtained from scenic vantage points along hiking trails high in the Green Mountains. The views from White Rocks on Bald Mountain and the burned clearing on Harmon Hill are especially dramatic because the mountainsides drop down to the valley so steeply below them. Harmon Hill is located on the Long/Appalachian Trail and maintained trails lead to the White Rocks, which is located in the Green Mountain National Forest.



The Green Mountains form a beautiful natural backdrop along the entire east side of the Town.



Mount Anthony dominates southern views throughout much of Bennington.



Mountains stretch across the horizon in this view from high on Carpenter Hill Road; this angle focuses on the Taconic Range, with Mount Equinox in Manchester the highest peak on the right.



Steep mountain slopes provide an attractive backdrop for many rural scenes like this one along Skiparee Road.



Mount Anthony appears as a long ridge when viewed from the east, very different from the mountain's much more abrupt northern face.



The Green Mountains are especially prominent as one enters Town from the west on Route 279 or Route 9.



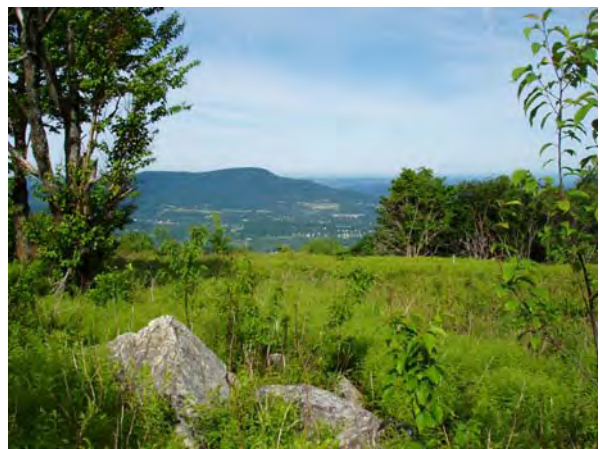
The Green Mountains add visual interest to important public buildings such as Mount Anthony Union High School.



Autumn's colors are displayed most impressively on the forested mountains and hillsides.



Whipstock Hill is an important landmark on the western side of Bennington.



A pleasant hike leads to this clearing on Harmon Hill and some spectacular mountain and valley views.



There is no single large body of water in Bennington that is a dominant landscape feature, but rivers, streams, ponds, and wetlands are found throughout the Town and play a key role in defining its scenic character. Water is an important component in many rural scenes, but because waterways have strongly guided and influenced development, these features also are critical elements in views of the built environment.

Numerous streams of diverse origin and character intersect in Bennington. South Stream and Jewett Brook flow northward through the southern lowlands to merge just

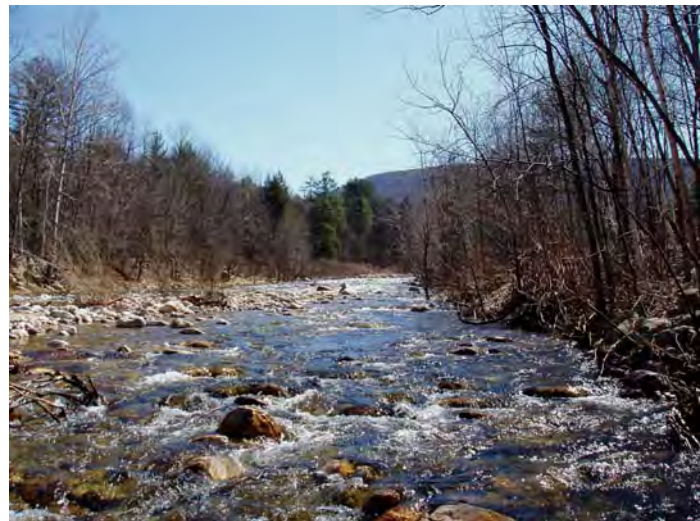
outside of downtown. The Roaring Branch and Barney Brook cascade down from the mountains east of Town while Furnace Creek and Paran Creek drain the northeast and northwestern parts of Town, respectively. The result of this convergence of waterways near the center of Town is the rather sudden appearance of a substantial river, the Walloomsac, in the valley west of Route 7.

In rural parts of the Town, watercourses vary in character from turbulent mountain streams to calm and quiet waterways in the valley. Smaller streams cascade through deep forests on the mountainsides and most maintain a strong current through the center of Town. The water power generated from these streams promoted settlement and early industrial development near today's downtown; the sight and sound of the fast-flowing waters still can be enjoyed from walkways and streets in this bustling historic area.

In years past, the utilitarian value of these mid-town streams far exceeded their aesthetic value. Vegetation was cleared from and buildings constructed up to the stream banks. In places streams were buried in underground pipes to make way for development. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to obtain access to and along streams. The Town has made an effort, through construction of a walkway and other development initiatives, to make these resources more visible and accessible and thus enhance the downtown.

Bridges not only provide a way across a river or stream, but also provide an excellent vantage point to view the water. And in the case of historic bridges, like Bennington's three covered bridges over the Walloomsac, they are a unique scenic asset themselves. Many visitors to the area specifically seek out the covered bridges and some effort has been made recently to improve parking and access at the bridges.

Lake Paran, lying partially in Bennington, North Bennington, and Shaftsbury, is the only body of water that might be referred to as a "lake" in Town. An impoundment of Paran Creek, it is an important recreation site and views of and across the lake from the dam, boat launch, park, and the old rail spur are unique in the area.



The Roaring Branch cascades out of the Green Mountains and flows through the center of Town.

Smaller ponds and wetlands are scattered throughout the Town. Many ponds are adjacent to roadways and add visual interest for passing motorists, and some large wetland complexes, such as the Bradford-Putnam Wetlands or the large complex of wetlands along Jewett Brook are best explored on foot or by kayak. All of these small water bodies add variety to the landscape, are an important foreground in many views of fields, farms, and hillsides, and harbor a variety of bird and wildlife species.



Many small streams are easily accessible from public roads and trails. After flowing through upland forests, rural fields, and the historic town center they converge to form the Walloomsac River that drains west toward the Hudson. Pictured below is the Paper Mill Covered Bridge, one of three such historic bridges over the Walloomsac in Bennington.





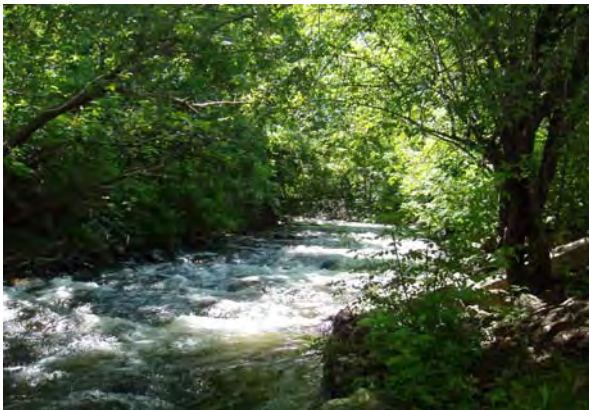
Lake Paran is a peaceful and scenic retreat in the northwestern part of Bennington.



The Town's Bradford-Putnam wetlands were originally part of a public water supply system; today they are the centerpiece of a nature preserve.



Small roadside ponds can be an important component of many scenic rural views.



A riverwalk helps connect the historic downtown with the mountain streams.



Exploring waterways and wetlands by kayak or canoe gives access to unique views of the Town.

Bennington is a town of mountains and valleys. A vantage point that gives a clear view from high on a mountain or at the edge of a valley will reveal spectacular views of the distant countryside. Some viewpoints offer broad panoramas stretching along the entire horizon while others are more narrowly focused along a single mountain range or up a long narrow valley.

Evident from any of these viewpoints in Bennington is an appealing mix of forested mountainsides above a patchwork of valley landscapes. The most expansive views of the surrounding countryside seen from major highways are found along Route 9 and Route 279 on the west side of Town. The view north up the Valley of Vermont from Route 9 is especially striking, as is the beautifully framed vista of hills and fields as seen over Bennington College from Route 279.

Local roadways that wind up into the hills offer some memorable views as well. An example of a long view that focuses attention in a particular direction is the view south from Skiparee Road on the “back side” of Mount Anthony. A sweeping panorama of mountains and valleys surrounds travelers on Middle Pownal Road where it crosses the high ground in the valley between Mount Anthony and the Green Mountains. The view north and east from near the top of Carpenter Hill Road, amidst sprawling apple orchards, is one of the most dramatic anywhere in Bennington.

Of course, not all of the best views in Bennington can be reached in an automobile. An elevator takes visitors to the viewing station in the Bennington Battle Monument that sits atop a hill in Old Bennington, very near the center of Town. Walkways and trails winding around the Southern Vermont College campus lead to wide-open views over the Town from the lower slopes of Mount Anthony.

A bit more effort is needed to access the two most spectacular views of Bennington. White Rocks, located near the summit of Bald Mountain in the Town’s northeastern corner, can be reached from hiking trails that begin on North Branch Street or from Harbour Road in Woodford. A steep



Bennington College sits on a knoll against a background of mountains and fields in this view looking north from Route 279.



The view to the west from the clearing on Harmon Hill.

climb on the Long/Appalachian Trail brings hikers to the ridge that runs just beyond Bennington's southeast border and eventually to the maintained clearing at Harmon Hill. The views from both of these mountains include vistas that cover the western horizon from Massachusetts, across eastern New York, and to the north along the range of the High Taconics. Because the escarpment of the Green Mountains drops so steeply from these mountain lookouts, the Town appears to lie directly below, and hikers enjoy identifying buildings, streets, and other familiar features of the local landscape.



A pleasant place to stop and enjoy the view at Southern Vermont College.



Looking over the orchards from Carpenter Hill.



View south from Skiparee Road. The viewer's eyes are drawn down the length of the open field and toward the linear mountain range stretching to the distance.



A distant view to the north from Middle Pownal Road. From the high point on this road, near the Pownal town line, the views open up in all directions.



The hike up the Long Trail to Harmon Hill ascends rock staircases and then meanders through a lovely forest along the ridge top, before finally arriving at the summit of the hill. Periodic controlled burns are necessary to maintain the open clearing and summit views.



The hike up Bald Mountain, with a stop at White Rocks, is a local favorite. The view of Bennington and the surrounding countryside from the white boulders perched high on the side of the mountain is spectacular.



A visual “gateway” can be described as a point along a public highway where it becomes evident that the traveler is arriving at a unique place. Very often gateways are located at a point of transition between the rural countryside and a more developed historic town or village center. In other places they are found where a view that includes locally significant visual elements first appears. Gateways offer an important first visual impression to a town.

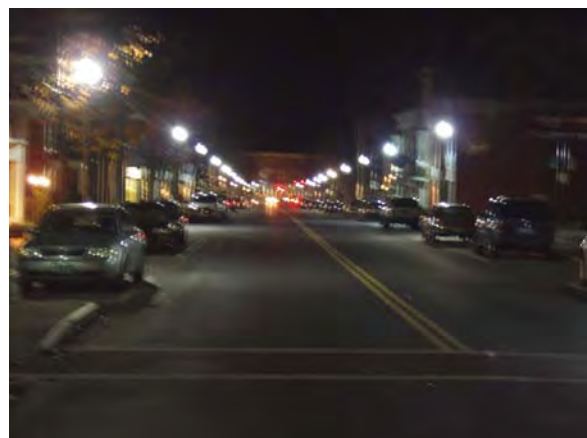
The exact location of a gateway along a highway is somewhat subjective and is much easier to pinpoint along some corridors than others. Well-defined gateways enhance the character of the community and are an important scenic resource in and of themselves. Gateways can be improved by effective land use planning and integration of site features such as landscaping or historic district signs.

There are a number of gateways in Bennington. Some are located near the outskirts of Town and feature views that include important elements of the local landscape such as the Battle Monument and/or surrounding mountains. Other gateways are located nearer the historic center of Town and offer views of important parts of the cultural landscape framed in a distinctive manner.

Particularly important gateways are those located along the major state highways entering Town. Gateways along Route 9 from the east and west and along Route 7 from the north and south greet thousands of travelers every day. The recently opened Route 279 is another important entry point to the Town with natural gateway scenes.

Route 9 enters Bennington from the east after traversing the Green Mountains. A long descent to Woodford Hollow takes travelers along the Roaring Branch and toward downtown Bennington. A well-positioned “Historic Bennington” sign welcomes people to Town just as Mount Anthony comes into view. A short distance down the road, a second gateway point reveals the edge of downtown set against the mountains.

From the north, as Route 7 sweeps around a bend and begins to descend toward the valley, a



Gateways to Bennington from the eastern approach on Route 9. An attractive sign welcomes travelers to the town just as the singular form of Mount Anthony appears framed above the roadway. A short distance beyond this point, the highway enters the downtown area—where the historic streetscape welcomes travelers day or night.

gateway scene featuring the Battle Monument set against Mount Anthony comes into view in dramatic fashion. This sweeping view is one of the most distinctive in Bennington. The commercial buildings adjacent to the intersection at the bottom of the hill are not particularly attractive, although they do create an abrupt change from the rural to the developed landscape of Town.

There are now two highways that provide primary western approaches to the Town, Routes 9 and 279, and both include more than one gateway scene. Route 279 traverses a shoulder of Whipstock Hill near the Town's western border. As the highway clears the hill, a beautiful view of the Green Mountains serves as a very well-defined gateway. Further along, the road begins to drop toward the Route 67A intersection, with a view framed between Harwood Hill and the Bennington Battle Monument. The alternate approach to Town along Route 9 includes a spectacular gateway at the point where the Battle Monument comes into view against the Green Mountains. Two additional gateways along Route 9 welcome travelers first to Old Bennington, at the First Church, and then to Bennington's historic downtown from the hill adjacent to the Bennington Museum.



The signature northern gateway on US Route 7: Mount Anthony and the Bennington Battle Monument.

The southern gateway to Bennington is less well-defined. The first visual break as one travels north out of Pownal is the commercial development near the base of Carpenter Hill Road. When the southern leg of Route 279 is constructed in this area, an intersection feature with attractive landscaping and appropriate signs, would greatly enhance the gateway to the Town. Further north, a clearer gateway is seen as one approaches the historic downtown. Proposed traffic calming in the highway at this location will reinforce this transition point.



Gateway to Bennington on Route 279.



This view of the Old First Church tells travelers on Route 9 they are entering a historic New England village.



Bennington's downtown begins to come into view against the backdrop of the Green Mountains at this entry point to the Town on Route 9.



The Town should seek opportunities to enhance the southern gateway to Bennington.



Historic buildings help define the southern gateway to the downtown.

Much of Bennington's character and visual appeal derives from its historic resources. These buildings, structures, and sites are an attractive and important part of the fabric that gives the Town its unique character.

Bennington's historic architecture reflects styles and patterns from various periods dating to the Town's founding in the mid-18th century. The design and organization of buildings, as well as their setting in the surrounding natural and cultural landscape, contributes to the visual quality of historic scenes throughout the Town.

Historic districts have been established in the downtown and in the villages of Old Bennington and North Bennington. The greatest concentration of historic buildings is found in and around downtown where business and industry flourished on the level ground and along the many waterways in the area. Many types of buildings—commercial, industrial, residential, and churches and other public buildings—come together to create a diverse architectural history that creates a character unique to Bennington.

Outlying areas also include important historic features that are the focal point of many attractive rural scenes. Foremost among these are the Town's three covered bridges over the Walloomsac: the Silk Road, Paper Mill Village, and Henry Covered Bridges. All three are sought out by visitors to the area and small parking areas have been created to allow people to safely admire and photograph the structures.

A number of other visually important historic buildings and sites are scattered around the Town. Cemeteries, rural churches and farmhouses, and historic site markers all add to Bennington's sense of place. Well known historic structures such as the Battle Monument, the Everett Mansion (now Southern Vermont College), the Jennings Estate (at Bennington College) and North Bennington's Park McCullough House are important scenic assets as well.



Downtown Bennington contains many distinctive historic buildings. Some now house commercial establishments such as the art gallery on the left; the county courthouse and town office building are pictured in the center. Street trees and other site features complement the historic buildings.



Downtown's historic buildings are enhanced by landscaping and appropriate site features such as attractive signs and period lampposts.



The Old Mill on Benmont Avenue is an important commercial building and connection to the town's industrial past. Its significance is emphasized by its prominent position at the end of County Street.



A pedestrian-friendly environment and historic building facades are critical to downtown's visual appeal.



The Henry Covered Bridge—one of three spanning the Walloomsac River in Bennington.



Bennington Potters occupies an important historic site just outside of downtown.



Distinctive stone architecture at Southern Vermont College.



White Chapel Church and Cemetery in rural northeastern Bennington.



Historic cemetery on Middle Pownal Road.



Historic site overlooking Mount Anthony from Monument Avenue.



Scenic Roads and Public Places

A town is most often viewed from its public places, and the most visited public places in a community are its roads. As such, public highways are extremely important to a town's overall scenic character. Other public places such as parks and public trails serve a similar function in providing access to a town's scenic resources.

The significance of gateways along principal highway corridors has been discussed in a previous section. Roadways also can be scenic features in and of themselves. A winding country lane lined by a stone wall and a village street passing under a canopy

of mature trees are distinctive scenic resources. Roadways also provide visual access to scenic view; indeed, most of the photographs displayed in this report are taken from the side of a public road.

It can be argued that most roads and streets in Bennington have significant scenic qualities. Instead of attempting to list all of the scenic roads or road segments, however, this section will provide examples of elements that contribute to a road's scenic qualities.

In general, narrow local roads that blend harmoniously with the surrounding countryside are more scenic than wide roads that don't follow natural or historic elements of the landscape. Landscape features that are adjacent to a roadway become a part of the road corridor: without stone walls, fencelines, trees, and similar elements the overall scenic value of a roadway can be significantly diminished. Some scenic roads also draw the traveler's eye along the centerline of the road to a unique view or distinctive landscape feature in the distance.

Of course, the views from roadsides are often just as important as the scenic character of the road itself. Some local roads offer delightful forays into deep forests while others bring motorists, bicyclists, and other travelers to views of fields, farms, mountains, or historic buildings. In these instances, scenic viewpoints are open to the principal view and are not blocked or disrupted by incompatible structures or other objects in the foreground. At the same time, attractive foreground objects can greatly enhance roadside views.

Parks and trails also are important public places where people are exposed to scenic views. Willow Park is the largest piece of public open space in Bennington and its location on a hillside overlooking the Town makes the views from the park especially attractive and significant. There are a few public use trails in Bennington such as the river walkway near downtown and the trail network near North Bennington, both of which were discussed in other sections. The rail spur line that runs between Bennington and North Bennington is owned by the State of Vermont and very attractive views can be enjoyed from the right-of-way. The future use of this rail line is uncertain, but its scenic value is considerable whether it serves as an active rail line or a bicycle-pedestrian pathway.



A particularly striking roadside feature is this folded rock formation along Route 279.



Roadside vegetation— wildflowers and a canopy of trees— can greatly enhance a road’s scenic character.



Mature trees lining a rural roadway create an attractive and colorful canopy.



Some narrow unpaved local roads, such as Mount Anthony Road, that wind through quiet woodlands, are especially scenic.



Main Street, lined by street trees and historic buildings, and offering occasional views of the nearby mountains, is a scenic in-town road.



One of many scenic views along Harrington Road.



View toward the Monument and mountains from Mattison Road.



Some roads are oriented in a way that focuses the view on a distinctive landscape feature.



Niles Road passes through scenic farmland on the south side of Town.



The four mile long rail spur passes through quiet forests and skirts streams and wetlands on its way from Bennington to North Bennington.



The playgrounds, fields, and pavilion at Willow Park enjoy beautiful views over the town.



Tree-lined back roads form colorful passageways in the autumn. The drive along Mount Anthony Road is especially scenic when the leaves are ablaze with color.

The Bennington Battle Monument is of singular importance to the Town's scenic character. The Monument is located near the center of the Town, overlooking the valley, and is visible from numerous public roads, parks, and other vantage points. Its distinctive shape makes it a natural focal point for scenic views throughout Bennington.

When seen from the center of Town or from the northern hills, the Monument is often set against the backdrop of Mount Anthony. This combination of the perfectly proportioned dolomite obelisk and the natural color and shape of the mountain is especially appealing. Indeed, the combination has come to formally represent the Town as it is displayed on the official municipal logo.

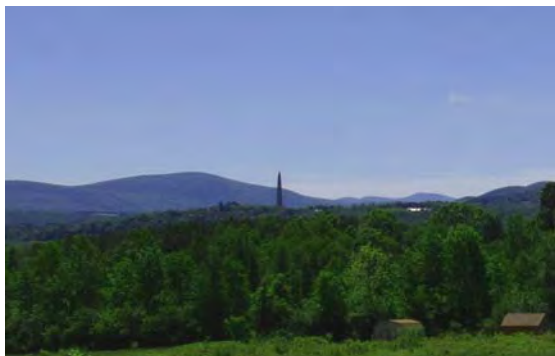
From roadways, parking lots, and other public spaces near the center of Town, the Monument seems to tower more than its 306 vertical feet would suggest. At the same time, its gently curved lines and natural color do not overwhelm, but rather complement, the foreground features. The presence of the Monument reinforces views that include historic structures while adding important

positive visual interest to more contemporary and less distinctive structures. The Wal-Mart and Price Chopper Plaza, for example, is unique and interesting visually largely because of the presence of the Monument.

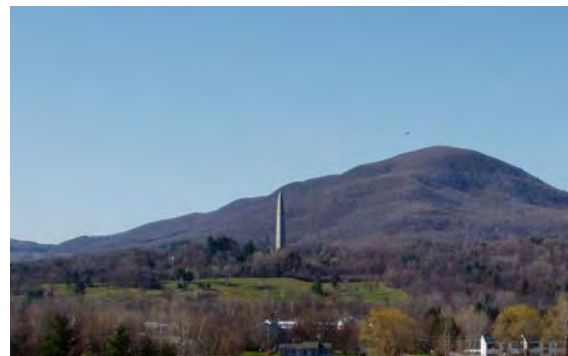
The Monument also adds a great deal of scenic value to many of the Town's sweeping mountain and valley views. Whether viewed from the mountains in the east or from a roadway in the Town's northwest corner, it stands out in the middle of nearly every view, the dominant feature of the valley landscape.

Many everyday local scenes and activities are, in fact, enhanced by the prominence of the Monument—which may appear suddenly as one rounds a bend in the road or looks through an opening between buildings or trees. The Monument also is visually connected to many public venues, appearing to stand watch over events at local school athletic fields and public parks.

The Monument may have been built to honor an important moment in history, but it has come to symbolize much more. It is Bennington's icon and a part of everyday life in the Town; the ideal visual and symbolic focal point for some of the area's best scenic views.



The Monument seen from Mattison Road.



Mount Anthony and the Battle Monument.



Defining the center of the valley when viewed from Harmon Hill.



Viewed over orchards from Harwood Hill at the north end of Town..



A perfect focal point for the view up the Valley of Vermont from the trails on Mount Anthony at Southern Vermont College.



Not just any shopping plaza.



Silhouetted at sunset from athletic fields at the high school.



The Monument frequently comes into view for a moment when driving the Town's rural roadways.



View of the Monument from near the Route 279/Route 67A intersection.



The Monument as seen from Walloomsac Road on the approach to Monument Circle.



Understanding the particular qualities that make a view more attractive, and important, than others will help in subsequent efforts to preserve and enhance the Town's scenic resources. The publication, Vermont's Scenic Landscapes: A guide for Growth and Protection, identifies several specific attributes that make landscapes distinctive and appealing. Many of those features are displayed in the photographs displayed earlier in this report. In this section, scenic views will be presented that illustrate those qualities in the context of Bennington's overall scenic character.

Landscape contrast refers to the natural visual contrast between different elements in a view. Rural scenes may have contrasting types of vegetation or a mix of distinct foreground, middle distance, and background landscape features. Water creates a vivid contrast in any landscape, as do other natural features such as rock outcrops, wildflowers, or stands of a single tree species. In a more developed environment the contrast between structures and natural features, either in the background or as integrated landscape elements, can create pleasing visual effects.

While contrasting elements add interest to many scenes, it is important that the built environment retain a certain **order and harmony**. A clear distinction between developed areas and open countryside helps promote this sense and is a defining characteristic of Vermont. Scenic qualities are enhanced in built environments when structures are sited in an orderly fashion, with architecturally related structures organized in traditional development patterns. Rural buildings and groups of buildings are more pleasing to look at when they are sited in manner that subtly complements the surrounding natural environment.

Visual **focal points** can add meaning and even dramatic effect to a scene. Important civic buildings or prominent natural features can serve as focal points, drawing attention through a wider scene to that particular point. In a rural setting, a distant mountain peak or a distinctive structure such as the Bennington Battle Monument can add important context to a scene that is otherwise quite ordinary. In the center of Town, attractive buildings situated at the end of a long straight street (such as the Old Mill at the end of County Street), important civic buildings, statues, or churches can serve as visual focal points.

Scenic views are enhanced by a **spatial quality** that includes contrasting elements which frame or define a view. An open space such as a field or view over a valley is more attractive when framed by contrasting elements such as a stonewall, wildflowers, or mature trees. Distant landforms such as mountains also can serve to frame a scene. Tree-lined streets often provide spatial quality for views in developed town and village locations. Historic buildings can provide an interesting contrasting element that frames a background view of the surrounding countryside.

A landscape that has preserved its traditional pattern and architectural forms can be considered to be visually **intact**. A historic farmstead set against a background of hills and fields, with no intrusive modern buildings, has retained its character and is visually pleasing. A new house sitting in a clearing carved out of a hillside above such a traditional rural scene would significantly diminish its scenic quality. Along village streets, a row of similarly scaled historic buildings is visually appealing while a contemporary building that is inconsistent in scale or architectural style set among those buildings can disrupt the visual quality of the scene.



The open and ordered planted landscape in the foreground contrasts nicely with the forested backdrop of Mount Anthony.



Water provides vivid contrast to many landscapes. This small pond is located along Gore Road.



A foreground of open fields contrasts with the trees that occupy the middle distance of the scene and the mountains in the background. This view is from the trails through the McCullough Fields near North Bennington.



These rural scenes along Middle Pownal Road and Mount Anthony Road illustrate how rural structures can complement the natural environment when properly ordered in the landscape.



A pleasing sense of order and harmony is apparent when looking west down busy Main Street. The stone church and monument provide a complementary background for the brick structures in the downtown historic district. At the same time, attractive landscaping contrasts well with the roadway and adjacent built environment.



These commercial buildings on Main Street, as seen from School Street, form an important focal point for this approach to the downtown.



The clock at the Four Corners is a distinctive focal point for views of downtown streets and buildings.



Bennington's premier focal point, the Bennington Battle Monument, as seen from the grounds of Southern Vermont College. The trees in the foreground provide an attractive asymmetrical natural frame for the view, and the straight lines of the stone wall offer an interesting contrast to the natural landscape.



Spatial quality: the apple blossoms on Carpenter Hill form a bright and colorful contrasting frame for the view of distant mountains.



In this instance, the spatial quality of the scene is enhanced by a historic building which provides a contrasting foreground for Mount Anthony.



A foreground of wildflowers and a backdrop of mountains to the left and right provide excellent spatial quality for this agricultural scene.



A visually intact rural scene in Pleasant Valley.



Much of Main Street's historic character has remained intact.



A rural scene (not in Bennington) that has lost its intactness, and much of its visual appeal as a result.

The scenic quality of a landscape can be affected, positively or negatively, by change. Removing an architecturally incompatible building from an historic district, adding attractive landscaping to a property, or clearing a view to an important focal point are examples of actions that can enhance the visual quality of a landscape. On the other hand, construction of an incompatible building in the center of a natural or historic landscape or erection of a new power line across a scenic vista can adversely affect an important resource. A number of land use planning tools are available that can help the Town protect and enhance its scenic resources.



Before beginning a brief discussion of these tools, it is worth noting the features that render some existing scenic resources particularly vulnerable to negative change. Attributes that make a landscape especially sensitive to change include:

- Views across open fields, especially when those fields form an important foreground;
- Prominent ridgelines or hillsides that can be seen from many public vantage points and thus form a natural backdrop for many landscapes;
- Historic buildings and districts and gateways to historic districts;
- Scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water.

The map that follows this section highlights a number of scenic views, roads, and areas, but the Town should consider the presence of identified critical elements and the overall visual quality of any landscape when assessing appropriate protection strategies.

Bennington’s **comprehensive plan and zoning regulations** are designed to limit development in outlying areas and encourage development in designated growth areas near the center of Town. The effect of such land use planning will be retention of a rural landscape surrounding the more densely developed historic Town center. This development pattern enhances scenic character by defining a clear line between village and rural areas, thus reducing the adverse consequences of unsightly sprawl and promoting natural gateways to the Town’s center.

In some rural areas, it may be appropriate to further reduce the level of development to protect important agricultural or forest resources. Reducing the allowable **building density** or requiring



Scenic easements can be used to protect important views—such as this one of Mount Anthony.



Conservation easements protect scenic fields near North Bennington.

planned residential development, also known as **clustered development**, will protect those natural resources and at the same time maintain important scenic values. Such regulations have been implemented in the western part of Bennington where agricultural and open space is particularly important, and open rural views are especially prevalent.

Many towns also include **ridgeline and hillside protection** provisions in their zoning and/or subdivision regulations. In particularly sensitive areas developers can be required to site buildings and roads in a manner that minimizes the disruption of the natural appearance of a hillside or ridge. Locating buildings and paved surfaces at the edge of fields or in wooded areas can protect important vistas for the public and for owners of the newly developed property. In a similar way, limits can be placed on removal of natural vegetation and the color and type of building material can be prescribed.

Even in areas outside of hillside and ridgeline protection zones, it may be possible to guide development in a way that promotes and protects scenic resources. **Subdivision reviews can include designation of building envelopes** to ensure that structures do not encroach on open fields or scenic roadside views and the Town Plan can clearly describe the desired character of new development.

Bennington has established **historic district and design control regulations** to maintain and enhance the character of the Town's center. **Historic preservation and community development grants** can be accessed to help maintain and re-use historic structures.



Bennington's downtown contains historic and design control districts.

Local and state environmental regulations also limit encroachment on rivers, streams, and wetlands. Protecting these valuable waters from incompatible development also preserves visual access to the resources.

Of course, it is neither possible nor appropriate to rely on local and state land use regulations to protect all of a town's scenic resources. In many areas, it may be necessary to acquire **conservation easements** to prevent or strictly control development of an area. These easements are purchased from, or donated by, the landowner and are usually held by a conservation organization such as the Vermont Land Trust. A considerable amount of agricultural and wooded land near North Benning-



Environmental regulations protect wetlands and other surface waters from encroaching development.



Attractive landscaping and signs can greatly enhance a commercial corridor such as Northside Drive. Extensive tree plantings in shopping plazas, such as at the Price Chopper plaza, can soften the appearance of the large buildings and parking areas and support overall visual quality of the developed landscape.

ton has been protected in this way.

Land also can be **purchased in fee simple**; in Bennington this has been accomplished in large part by the United States Forest Service—a great deal of land along the Town’s eastern border has been added to the Green Mountain National Forest. Of course, the Town’s public lands at Willow Park, neighborhood parks, and at the schools provide access to important scenic views as well. The Town also is interested in formalizing public access along the state-owned, but idle, rail spur that runs between Bennington and North Bennington.

Scenic easements can be acquired, much like conservation easements, but are designed specifically to protect a particular view. Development may be precluded from land covered by a scenic easement or the location and size of buildings may be clearly delineated to ensure that incompatible development does not intrude on an important view. The Transportation Enhancements program, administered by the Vermont Agency of Transportation, provides funding for many types of projects, including acquisition of scenic easements for critically important views from public highways. Scenic easements may be an appropriate way to protect the valued views of Mount Anthony from Route 9 west, for example.

Towns also can formally identify **scenic roads**. Locally designated scenic roads cannot be substantially altered in a way that would damage their scenic character without a significant level of public review. In addition, a state and federal **scenic byway** program has been established to help communities identify ways to protect and promote important scenic or historic highway corridors. Route 9 has been legally designated a Vermont Byway—*The Molly Stark Trail*—through this program and a corridor management plan for it has been developed. The Town participates in the Molly Stark Trail Byway Council and will continue to work toward national designation and implementation of key elements of the management plan.



This newer home is set against the treeline and does not detract from the view of the mountain.

Roadway projects can and should include features that promote visual quality. It may be possible

to construct features that reinforce or create gateways at appropriate locations or to add landscaping, scenic pull-offs, or other streetscape elements that complement the visual environment that the road passes through. The Town should carefully review all new state and local highway projects—road reconstruction, paving, bridge replacement, and intersection redesign— and request appropriate treatments.

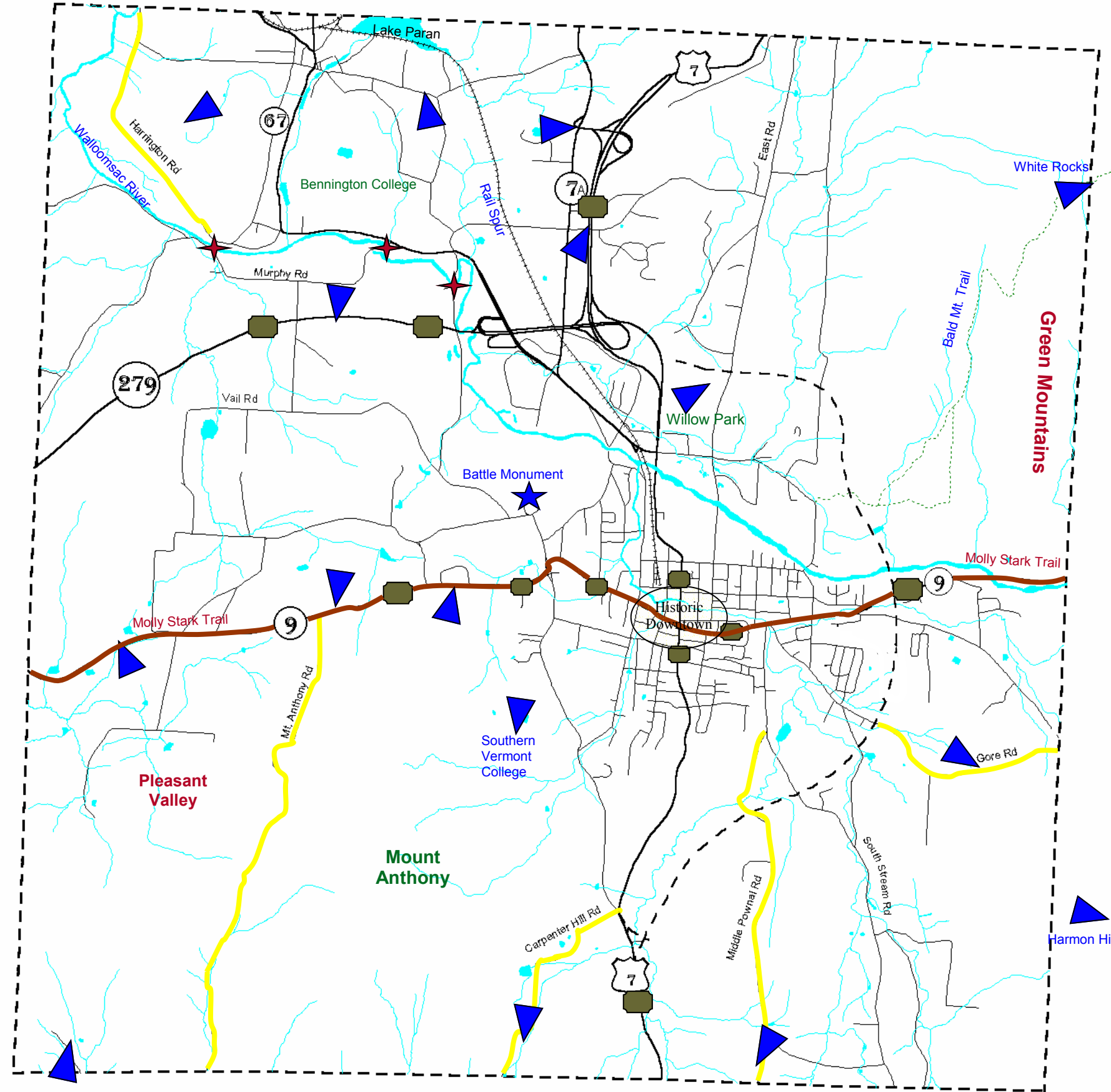
A section of Vermont’s Scenic Landscapes: A Guide for Growth and Protection includes design considerations, suggestions, and illustrations that show that new development can be integrated into the landscape in a way that preserves scenic qualities.

Bennington’s scenic resources define the Town’s character, create a sense of place for residents, and attract visitors and new businesses. The Town should periodically review this inventory to determine if the important elements that form the basis of the Town’s scenic character are being preserved and assess whether protection measures are maintaining the visual quality of important landscapes throughout the community.








Most of the Town’s scenic views are enjoyed from its roads—the scenic qualities of those roads should be protected as well.





Overview Map of Scenic Resources

This map identifies a number of especially important scenic resources in Bennington. The map is by no means all inclusive, nor do the symbols represent the exact or only locations of a particular scenic view or resource.

-  Scenic View (arrow indicates direction of primary view)
-  Gateway location (smaller symbols represent downtown gateways)
-  Scenic Roads
-  Covered Bridge
-  Molly Stark Trail Scenic Byway