

Municipal Planning and Economic Development

Poster Display

Seth Jensen, MPA Candidate.

Problem Statement: In 2011, the Vermont State Legislature amended the Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act to require Municipal and Regional Plans to contain an “Economic Development Component.” While many plans addressed economic development prior to this requirement, the treatment of this important issue varied greatly across Vermont. This new requirement has been fairly easy to address in larger communities with large commercial/industrial bases. Two years after the Legislature created this new required element, it is unclear how well more rural communities have addressed it. Many rural communities have not begun the process of identifying economic development goals and policies, despite that fact that many key decisions related to economic development are made at the local level.

Methods: I will examine existing and proposed language related to economic development found in Municipal Plans in Lamoille County and surrounding areas. Lamoille County is selected due to its predominately rural nature. I will examine commonalities of these Plans and will attempt to evaluate how well they meet the above quoted statutory component.

Results: All Plans address the basic issue of economic development. However, many Plans primarily list existing demographic data related to economic development (wages/income, unemployment, and industry/occupation). Some will list the desired form of economic development, but will primarily be focused on “type,” with little attention to “location” and “scale.” Few will list detailed policies, projects, and programs to foster desired development. Few specify specific actions that should be undertaken to further economic development goals.

Conclusion: Many decisions related to economic development are made at the local level. Sound economic development requires strategic decisions related to infrastructure investments, regulatory structures, and workforce development. Absent strategic planning at the local level, the economy of rural Vermont is likely to stagnate. While many communities have begun to address this issue, more work is needed to develop a strategic approach for economic development in rural areas.