



GEORGIA
VERMONT

TOWN OF GEORGIA, VERMONT

2024 TOWN PLAN



[PLACEHOLDER COVER PHOTO]

PREPARED BY:

Town of Georgia Planning Commission

ADOPTED BY:

Town of Georgia VT Selectboard [DATE]

MAY 2024
DRAFT Version 0.3

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Georgia Fire & Rescue for hosting many of our community meetings, Town Administrator Cheryl Letourneau, Northwest Regional Planning Commission, [others] as well as the town staff and volunteers whose assistance was instrumental in helping to organize this planning effort.

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[PHOTO CAPTION HERE]

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Town 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 implementation strategies from which to make decisions regarding land use, economic development, energy, 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 eight 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 implementation strategies 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 on January 9th, 2017. This 2024 plan has been developed by the Georgia Planning Commission with assistance from a consulting planner, the Northwest Regional Planning Commission and with input from other Town boards,

municipal offices, private citizens and the Town Administrator. The plan has been developed to conform to current state statutes, including 24 VSA Chapter 117.

As part of the 2024 plan update, the Planning Commission sought to further engage the public in an open discussion to identify what issues were most important.

This Town Plan included considerable public involvement and effort. Demographic and economic data from the U.S. Census 2020 Decennial Census as well as the more recent American Community Survey was utilized, as well as a review of past Town reports.

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 and 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 South Georgia Fire District, and the Conservation Commission, to name a few. *[update to include others?]* 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.”

“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 over fifty years ago when it adopted zoning in 1967. The first town plan was adopted in 1972 and was updated in 1986, 1995, 2001, 2006, 2011 and 2017. 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.”

~ 20xx Town Plan

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



Public Outreach. Open House event held at the Georgia Fire & Rescue Building in Georgia Center on October 24, 2024.

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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, policies and implementation strategies 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.

The Planning Commission

This Town Plan update was overseen and guided by the Georgia Planning Commission. In July of 2023 the Planning Commission advertised a Request for Proposals (RFP) to planning consultants who could assist the town with the update. A consultant was selected in August, and work began in September of that year. From that point forward, the Planning Commission met regularly once a month to coordinate with the consultant, provide input and review materials as part of the update, including review of the draft and final plans as they were developed.

The Planning Process

The process of identifying updates for the plan began with an effort to reach out to the public to inform them that the update was taking place, and gather public comment. This began with the creation of a dedicated webpage for update materials and announcements, followed by an Open House event and presentation, which was used to collect preliminary info for the design of a community survey. The community survey was instrumental in gathering public input on the plan update across a variety of topics, and the results were then presented and discussed in a public meeting, along with some preliminary ideas

for plan recommendations. Outreach was also conducted at the 2024 Town Meeting Day to provide an additional opportunity for people to be informed about the update and invite comment. Throughout this process, the public could review materials on the project webpage, and submit comments through an online comment form. A more detailed summary of this process, and the feedback collected as part of the outreach process, is provided in Part II - Issues & Opportunities.

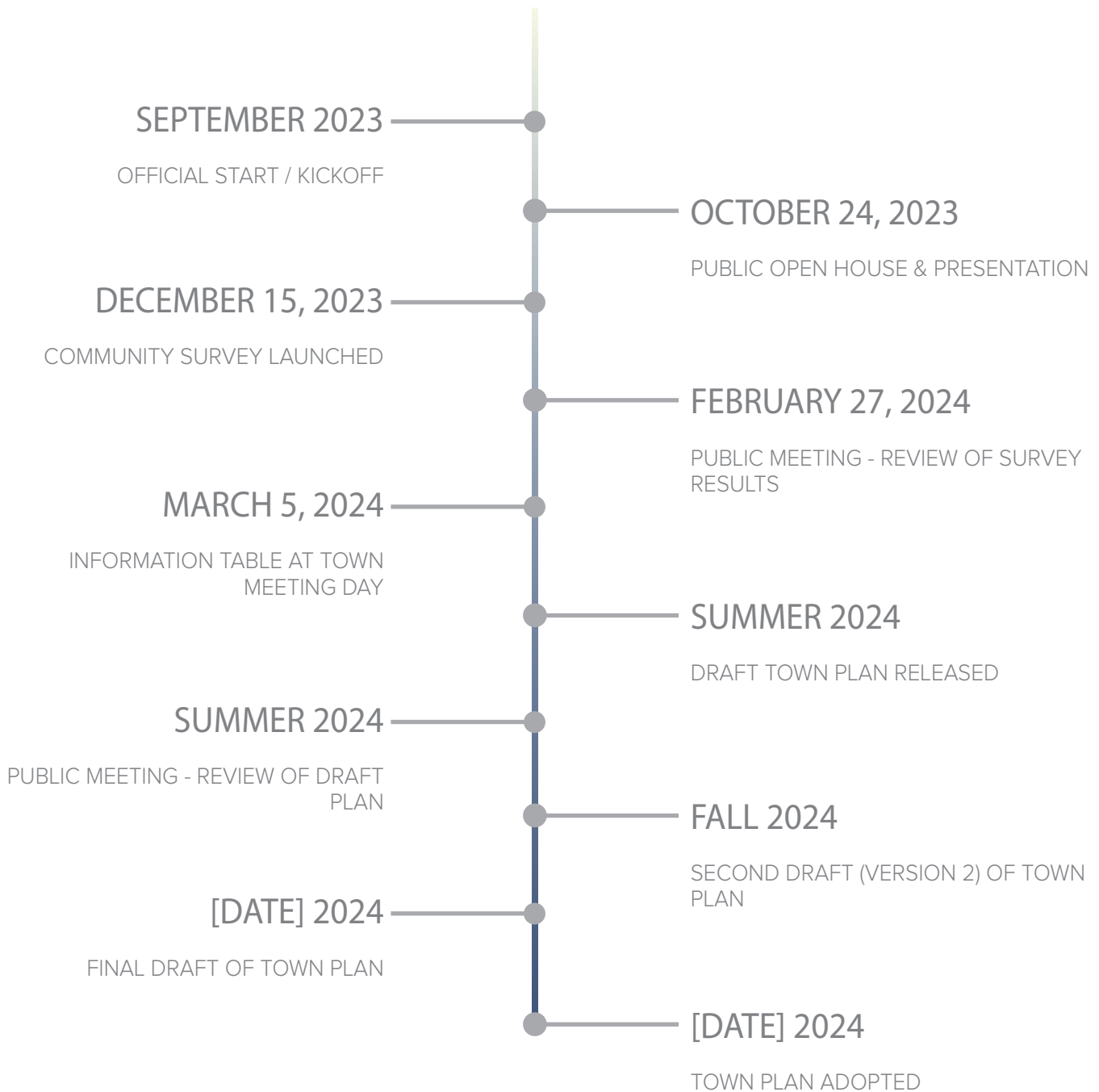
Based on this initial outreach, a draft Town Plan update was developed in the spring of 2024 and presented to the public for review and comment. Utilizing the input on the draft plan, a final Town Plan was then developed for review and consideration in the summer of 2024. The final Town Plan was then adopted in *[date]*. *[Note: confirm or add additional detail to this description as the process develops further.]*

Statement of Authorization

Text The Georgia Town Plan has been prepared in accordance with and under the authority of Title 24, Chapter II7 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, implementation strategies, 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. The Act provides the legal framework for municipal planning, capital budgeting, impact fee ordinances, transfer and purchase of development rights, and land use regulation.

TIMELINE OF TOWN PLAN UPDATE



PART II GEORGIA TODAY

The Community Setting

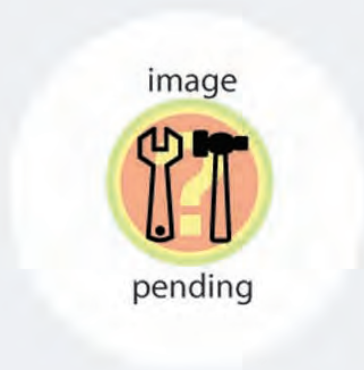
Location and Boundaries

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.



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, to a peak of 2686 residents by the year 1850, after which it steadily declined until the 1960's. *[See Figure x]* 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 Georgia 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

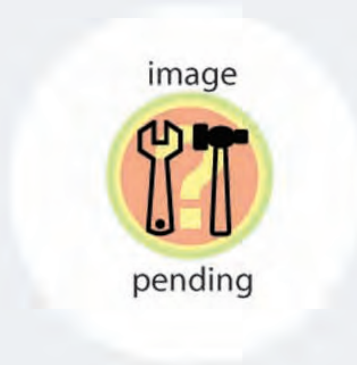


Photo Caption. Insert Historic Photo from Historic Society

“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, Vietnam and Gulf wars.

In 1896 Georgia established a public library.

[Note: Insert additional/updated history text from PC as may be provided here]

Existing Facilities & Services

Town Offices

All town administrative functions continue to be provided at the Town Offices in Georgia Center, which was remodeled in 2010. This facility includes the offices of the Clerk, Assistant Clerk, Treasurer, Administrator, Zoning Administrator, Lister *[Planning Coordinator]* and a meeting room used by the boards and commissions. The town has contracted services for *[the Assessor and Assistant Assessor positions.]*

The building is utilized by the Selectboard, Planning Commission, Design Review Board, Conservation Commission, Library Board, Historical Society, as well as the Boards of Civil Authority and Abatement. The facility is also utilized to support other important functions such as the First Constable, Delinquent Tax Collector, Auditors, Animal Control Officer, and Health Officer.

Highway Department

The Georgia Highway Department is responsible for maintaining all town roads, bridges, culverts and drainage systems. It currently operates out of a facility on Plains Road, which was previously shared with the Fire Department, and also includes a sand and salt shed across the street.

The department has 5 full-time employees and 1 seasonal employee, overseen by the Public Works Director. Currently one of those positions is filled by the Public Works Director, but as that job takes on more and more duties, there may be a need to hire another highway worker. The Highway Department not only maintains roads, culverts, bridges and ditches, but they mow all the town properties (municipal building, fire and rescue building, old and new town garages, Georgia beach area, used clothing shop), mow the cemeteries, service the town highway vehicles and fire department vehicles, and do general repairs to town structures. In addition, the Public Works Director duties include: to review and issue driveway permits, oversee project management of municipal projects, handle complaints from the public, write grants for town road and public works projects, make sure the department remains up to date on laws, regulations and training and more.

In 2021 the town of Georgia purchased adjoining property and built a new highway garage, behind the old garage on Plains Road. It contains 8 total bays, a maintenance bay, a wash bay, 2 offices, a breakroom with a kitchen, and 2 bathrooms. This is the only building in the Town of Georgia rated to withstand a category 4 storm.

In 2024 the highway department equipment inventory consisted of: 2020 6-wheeler truck, 2020 tandem truck, 2017 tandem truck, 2014 6-wheeler truck, 2013 6-wheeler truck, 2020 1-ton dump truck w/plow, 2022 ¾ ton w/ plow capabilities, 2001 grader, 2018 loader, 2012 backhoe, 2001 roadside mower, 2007 chipper, 2005 equipment trailer, 2018 landscape trailer, hydroseeder, 3 zero turn mowers,

4 chainsaws, 2 backpack blowers, hot water pressure washer, 3 generators and other small tools. Trucks are generally replaced on a ten-year cycle. In the next seven years the Highway Department is likely to require 3 plow trucks, a backhoe and a 1-ton truck to be replaced.

The former town highway garage is currently being used for cold storage of equipment. This stored equipment currently consist of: a loader, a backhoe, Zamboni, Night on the Green stage and supplies, fire department miscellaneous supplies, plow supplies, signs, mowers, chipper and trailers.

Transportation & Roads

Town roads are classified, according to a statutory scheme, into Class 1, Class 2, Class 3, Class 4 and Town legal trails. (*See Map 2.1 - Transportation*) These classifications are primarily for the purpose of distributing State Aid and often do not reflect the actual usage of the roads. Class 1 roads form extensions of State Highways, Class 2 roads form connections from town to town and carry more than normal traffic, Class 3 roads are all other traveled roads receiving State Aid. Class 4 roads and legal trails do not receive State Aid and do not have to be maintained by the town.

The roads in Georgia are comprised of 19.53 miles of Class 2 roads, 43.64 miles of Class 3 roads, 7.72 miles of Class 4 roads and 2.59 miles of legal trails, for a total of 73.48 miles. There are 11.09 miles of State Highways and 6.53 miles of Interstate Highway running through Georgia that are maintained by the state of Vermont. In 2022 there were 2.5 miles of roads repaved. In 2023 there were 2.3 miles of roads repaved. The number of roads in need of repaving is increasing. The rate of repaving will need to be increased in order to maintain good quality travel lanes on our paved roads. As of 2024 there were 16 miles of roads in need of repaving and the 2024 budget allowed for about 3 miles to be done.

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MAP 2.1. Transportation

In addition to roads, the town maintains bridges, culverts, and drainage systems along these roads. This can be enormously expensive. The state of Vermont provides grant funding to help with some of these projects. Since 2017 the town has received the following grants: Structures Grants, paving grants, clearwater grants, and FEMA grants. These funds help offset the total costs of repairs and maintenance, but overall contribute only a small portion of the funding needed.

In 2023 the town of Georgia spent \$111,989 on sand and \$52,135 on gravel to maintain the town roads. The town purchases this sand from out of town, since the town owned sand pit ran out. They can purchase gravel from local sources in town, but not all gravel is the same. Some packs better, and some types cause washboarding, so a sieve analysis is done before purchasing gravel from a new source. The Public Works Director is always looking for local sources of sand and gravel.

Public Safety

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. As of [2015], there is a [16]-hour-per-week contract with the Sheriff's Department and a [four] hour per week contract with the State Police.

Several arrangements for increased police services have been previously considered by the Selectboard, including a contract with the Vermont State Police, a contract with the Franklin County Sheriff's Department, and the creation of a local police department. The cost and liability exposure to the Town from having its own Police Department has been deemed as cost-prohibitive in previous analysis, while existing contract services have been deemed most cost-effective. Recent negotiations to increase the existing contract hours have been unsuccessful due to a lack of available law enforcement manpower

to cover the additional hours.

Fire & Emergency

The Georgia Fire and Rescue Department is a paid on-call Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) force and is a member of the Franklin County Mutual Aid Agreement. The Department's primary coverage area is the entire Town of Georgia (47.8 square miles) and mutual aid to neighboring communities from one station at 4134 Ethan Allen Highway in Georgia Center.

The department's financial needs are supported by the Town budget, Impact Fees, and some grant funding. This Department also has an Association that does fundraisers in support of the Department and its members. "911" emergency dialing is available throughout all of Georgia, and dispatch services are provided by Central Dispatch of the St. Albans Police Department.

The Department responded to 439 emergencies in 2023 and 472 in 2022. Georgia's Ambulance transport services are contracted by Amcare Ambulance in St. Albans until June 30, 2024. Then our transport services on July 1, 2024, will then be contracted by Fairfax Rescue. Emergency response is a significant issue in Georgia as the Fire and Rescue Department must be prepared for numerous types of emergencies. The Department covers homes, farms, industrial parks, other businesses, waterways, Interstate 89 and other roads and dwellings.

The Fire and Rescue Department is comprised of 24 members. The membership consists of 15 Firefighters, 3 EMTs and 6 Firefighter/EMTs ranging from months of service to over 50 years of service to the Town of Georgia. In August of 2023 the Fire and Rescue Department hired the first Full-Time Firefighter/EMT in Department history. The new position allows the Department to have a person at the fire station Monday through Friday during the day to cover emergencies, doing administrative work,

and maintaining the equipment and the station.

A new fire station was constructed in 2011 [*in Georgia Center?*]. The new station is 8,996 square feet and has four apparatus bays, with 3 of them having front and rear access to the building. The station meeting/training room provides a safe and convenient location for Department training as well as use by other Town entities and community members.

The Fire and Rescue Department has 5 fire trucks. They are as follows:

- » 2005 E-One 75' Ladder Truck with a 1500 GPM pump/500 gallon tank.
- » 2019 E-One Engine with a 1500 GPM pump/780 gallon tank.
- » 2014 E-One Tanker with a 2000 gallon tank/500 GPM pump.
- » 2023 E-One Tanker with a 2000 gallon tank/1250 GPM pump.

- » 2020 Ford F550 Crew-Cab Rescue/Utility truck.

Solid Waste

Georgia is a member of the Northwest Vermont Solid Waste Management District (NWSWD), which offers disposal options for several types of solid waste such as Household Hazardous Waste and Special Trash 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. NWSWD posts a complete list of fees and accepted materials on their website, nswsd.org. Georgia's Conservation Commission sponsors Green Up Day activities.

Water & Sewer

The Town does not own or operate its own municipal water or sewage treatment facilities. The vast majority of all water systems and sewage disposal systems

Photo Caption. Georgia Fire & Rescue



within the town are provided by private on-site wells and septic systems on individual properties.

The South Georgia Fire District owns and operates a water system which currently serves approximately 175 users, and there are also several small *[public? should this read private?]* water systems in housing developments. There is a large private wastewater system that serves the Georgia Industrial Park.

With a majority of townspeople getting their drinking water from groundwater sources, it is extremely important that local septic systems be properly designed, constructed and distanced to eliminate contamination of local groundwater resources. The lakeshore also presents unique concerns for sewage treatment and potable water supplies due to its potential impact on water quality. Various areas of the town have been studied to determine the feasibility of wastewater disposal and community water systems to help address these concerns and/or support additional growth and density in specific areas. (See Appendix 'X' for a listing of town reports and studies) These areas include the Town Center/South Village area, Georgia Center, and the Georgia Shore.

Recreation

The Town of Georgia currently owns and maintains three major recreational facilities covering 89 acres, as follows (*See Map 2.2 Town Facilities & Services*):

- » The Town Beach (10 acres). Facilities include the beach, fishing access, multi-purpose athletic field, tennis, volleyball and basketball courts, pavilion with public facilities and a playground. The Town Beach facility is maintained and operated by the Georgia Recreation Committee. During normal operations, the Town Beach is used for summer outings, Little League, picnics, swimming, fishing and boating access. Annually, the beach is also used for Fall Fest. While there are limitations, options for expansion and/or improvement of the Town Beach facility should be investigated.
- » Georgia Elementary and Middle School (GEMS) - (36 acres). Recreational facilities on this site include a gymnasium; a soccer, softball and Babe Ruth field; a walking path inside and outside of the school, as well as playground equipment.
- » Russel Greene Natural Area (43 acres). Recreational facilities here include a 0.8 mile walking trail.

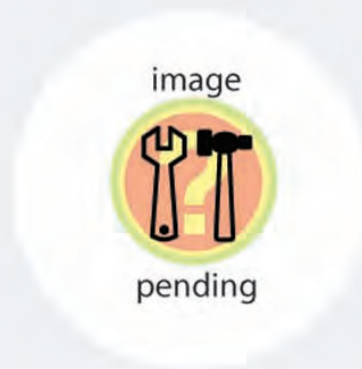


Photo Caption. Insert photo of town beach



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MAP 2.2. *Town Facilities and Services*

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MAP 2.3. *Electric Utility Areas*

- » Webster Town Forest [?]
- » *Loomis Town Forest*

Private Utilities Electric & Gas Service

Georgia is served by several utilities which provide needed electricity, gas and communication services. As shown on [Map 2.3](#), Electric Utility Areas, Green Mountain Power (GMP) serves a majority of the residential, commercial and industrial electrical needs of the town (xxxx customers), with Vermont Electric CO-OP (VEC) serving the remainder (xxxx customers). *GMP estimates they will have ample supplies of electrical energy in the near term for both residential and commercial/industrial usage.*

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. Three phase power, which can deliver twice the amount of electricity and is important for supporting the growth potential of commercial and industrial land, is available along several corridors within the town.

Wind Turbines. *[add info pg 101]*

Vermont Gas Systems has a major north south transmission line and provides gas service to approximately 440 residential, business and industrial customers in town. The presence of this energy source near the B-1, I-1 and I-2 zoning districts also enhances commercial and industrial development potential in those areas.

Telecommunications/Cellular Service

The coverage of local wireless cellular phone service has grown, however the relatively sparse population density, hilly terrain, and concerns about tower

locations are often an impediment to expansion. Unlike other utilities, maps of service areas often depend wildly on the different carriers. Today, the Town of Georgia continues to have inconsistent and spotty cellular coverage. While many residents would like improved coverage, this must be balanced with how additional towers may impact the scenic landscape. 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 help protect the town's rural nature, historic character, and scenic beauty.

High Speed / Broadband Internet Service

The increasing importance and influence of the Internet on our daily lives is hard to ignore, and has many implications for the Town of Georgia. High-Speed Internet in particular provides many advantages including the ability for people to work from home, or start a small at-home business, and the data speeds and coverage of these networks continue to grow.

Up until recently, the minimum speed to qualify as "high-speed" Internet was 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload, which appears to be available along most roads in Georgia¹. This year, the FCC raised the minimum standard speed benchmark to 100 Mbps/25 Mbps. This higher level of service appears to be available in most areas of the town as well. (*See Figure 2.x - Broadband Availability*²) Interestingly, much of the adjacent Town of Fairfax appears to already be served by 100 Mbps/100 Mbps service, which is relatively rare in the northern part of the state, so it may be possible to expand that service west.

¹—High speed Internet coverage based on 2021 maps prepared by the Vermont Department of Public Service;

²—Broadband Availability Map <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/62c5b602401d48d7aee08249ffd92d76/>

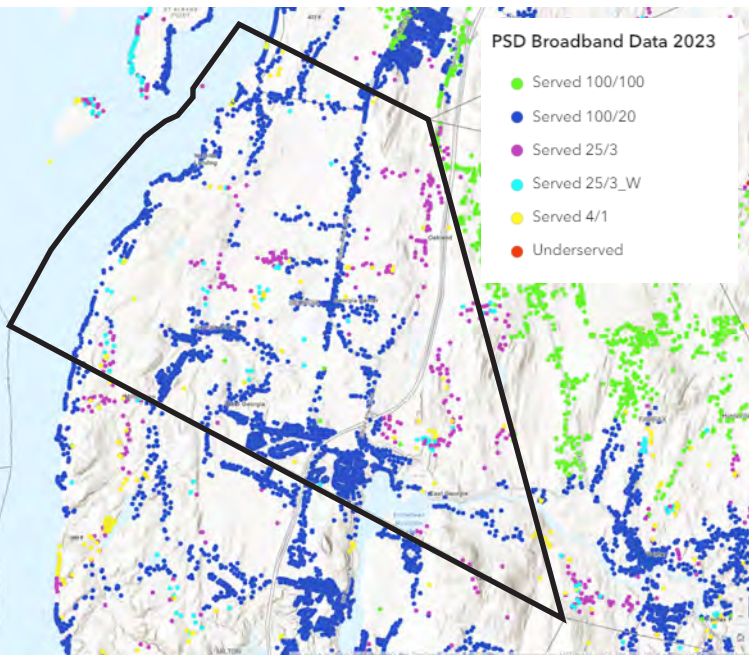


Figure 2.x - High-Speed Broadband Internet Availability. Source: Vermont Dept. of Public Service - <https://experience.arcgis.com/>

Health Services

The closest hospital to Georgia is the Northwestern Medical Center (NMC) in St. Albans. NMC is a 70-bed community hospital with an active medical staff of more than *75 physicians spanning 22 medical specialties*. NMC's service area covers the greater Franklin and Grand Isle County region, which includes the Town of Georgia. NMC cares for approximately *2,000 inpatients each year, performs over 3,000 surgeries, delivers over 450 babies, and treats over 27,000 patients* in the Emergency Department. NMC offers a comprehensive array of diagnostic and rehabilitative services as well as Chronic Disease Management and Health Promotion initiatives.

The Northwestern Georgia Health Center, located on Highbridge Road in Georgia, is an NMC-employed practice providing primary care for adults and children. Through a wholly-owned subsidiary, NMC also operates the Northwestern Walk-In Clinic on Ethan Allen Highway in Georgia, with extended hours during the week as well as Saturday hours.

This facility offers non-emergent care for minor medical conditions with no appointment necessary, occupational health services, x-ray imaging, mammography, and physical therapy.

The nearest trauma center is at Fletcher Allen Health Care in Burlington. Georgia residents also are served by providers in St. Albans and Milton.

Historic & Cultural Resources

Georgia is rich in cultural and historical resources. According to the State Division for Historic Preservation, the Town of Georgia includes 74 structures listed on the State Register of Historic Places, and 8 structures on the National Register. The town also includes two historic districts, located in Georgia Center and Georgia Plains, as well as at least 14 cemeteries. These assets are important in defining the historic rural character of our town and represent a significant cultural resource, a visual reminder of our history.

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.

These historic and prehistoric sites are an essential link to our past and represent significant social and cultural investment deserving consideration in the planning process. Efforts should be made to reduce or mitigate negative impacts on these valuable resources. *[Note: the 2017 plan indicates a total of 92 structures on the state register, and the state document I found with 74 structures is dated 1993. It is unclear where the 18 missing structures are? Also may need to confirm if the 74 listed in 1993 are still surviving.]*

<https://accdservices.vermont.gov/ORC/Home.aspx>

Library

The Town of Georgia includes one library, located on Route 7 in the building which formerly housed the Northwest Regional Library. The library is available to town residents, and is primarily supported by the town budget. *[additional info we may want to add?]*

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 was spent to house about 700 students with a new building and considerable renovations to the two older ones. The student population is currently 896 according to Franklin Southwest School District, with 620 children attending Georgia Elementary School.

Post Office

The Georgia Station Post Office opened in 1993 at Bob's Hardware, and was formerly located at the Georgia Market on Route 7. *Today however, the Town of Georgia no longer has its own U.S. Post Office.* The town shares three separate zip codes with adjacent communities: 05454 with Fairfax, 05468 with Milton, and 05478 with Saint Albans which covers a majority of the town. The lack of a local post office continues to be an inconvenience which bothers many people, and undermines the sense of identity of our town.

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. The Georgia Plain Baptist Church is a historic church in our town. Built in 1877 for a congregation established in 1793, it is a well-preserved example of High Gothic Victorian architecture. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. The congregation is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches of Vermont and New Hampshire. Though the United Methodist Church was officially created in 1968, its history dates back to 1730 when John and Charles Wesley, two students at Oxford University in England, gathered a small group of students who sought to spread the Methodist movement.

There are currently five active churches in Georgia, [up from four since the previous plan:](#)

- » The Methodist Church in Georgia Center, organized about 1830 (Located in former Historic Village in Georgia Center)
- » The Georgia Plain Baptist Church, organized about 1793, (Located in former Historic Village in Georgia Plains)
- » 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
- » The Redeeming Grace Church, located in Georgia South Village, organized in 2010
- » City of Light Worship Center, organized 2005 (North end of town on RT7)

Childcare

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

According to state data, the Town of Georgia has 5 registered childcare homes, 3 childcare centers and 1 after school childcare program, with a total capacity of 150 children. The 2022 U.S. Census indicates that there are 747 children from birth to age 12 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.

The Town of Georgia, along with surrounding towns in Franklin County, do not have enough sufficient childcare options for our families.

Elderly Daycare

Taking care of our seniors is very important. There are currently no daycares for our elderly within the Town of Georgia. However, if our elder generation needs some daily TLC there are a few options available found in nearby towns, as follows:

- » Home Care Assistance of Greater Burlington located in Essex Jct.
- » Carepartners Adult Day Center Located in St

Albans (Green Mountain Transit is available)

- » Third Age Adult Day Center located in Plattsburgh NY
- » Adult Day and Memory Care Program Essex and Colchester Locations

Doggie Daycare

Taking care of our furry family members is important to many Georgia residents. As of right now, the Town of Georgia does not have any doggie daycare services. There are however about ten services found in the surrounding area. ~~many options in adjacent towns.~~ ~~The names and locations of these daycares are:~~

Other Community Groups

Georgia has several other community-based groups, including: Friends of the Arts, Lions Club, active Boy, Cub, and Girl Scout troops, a Georgia Historical Society, a Riding Club, a Snowmobile Club, and 4-H.

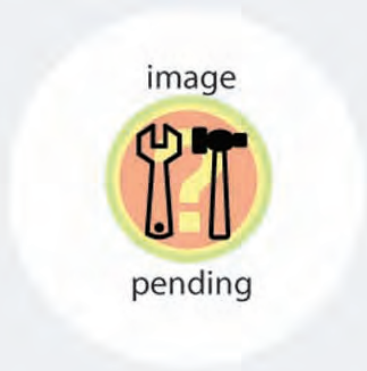


Photo Caption. Insert photo

Existing Demographics

In order to plan successfully, a community must understand its demographic composition. This section of the town plan includes a community profile of Georgia, which provides a solid baseline for town planning activities. An understanding of recent growth trends, current community make up, and future growth projections, planners 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.

Much of the information in the demographic overview, and throughout the entire plan, comes from the American Community Survey (abbreviated as ACS in this plan). This is because the US Census no longer collects a considerable amount of data that was previously collected. When information previously

obtained via the US Census was no longer available, data from the most recent American Community Survey was used.

The main difference between the American Community Survey and the US Census is that the American Community Survey contains statistical estimates based on surveys of random households within a community during a five year period (ex. 2009-2013). It is not a “count” like the census. The ACS is collected via mail, with follow up phone calls or personal visits by U.S. Census workers to households that do not respond to the mailed survey.

Since Georgia is a small community, and the ACS is a survey and not a census, data from the American Community Survey for Georgia typically has a considerable large margin of error. This should be kept in mind while reading this data. Despite issues with the American Community Survey, it is the best available data for a variety of data points used in this plan.

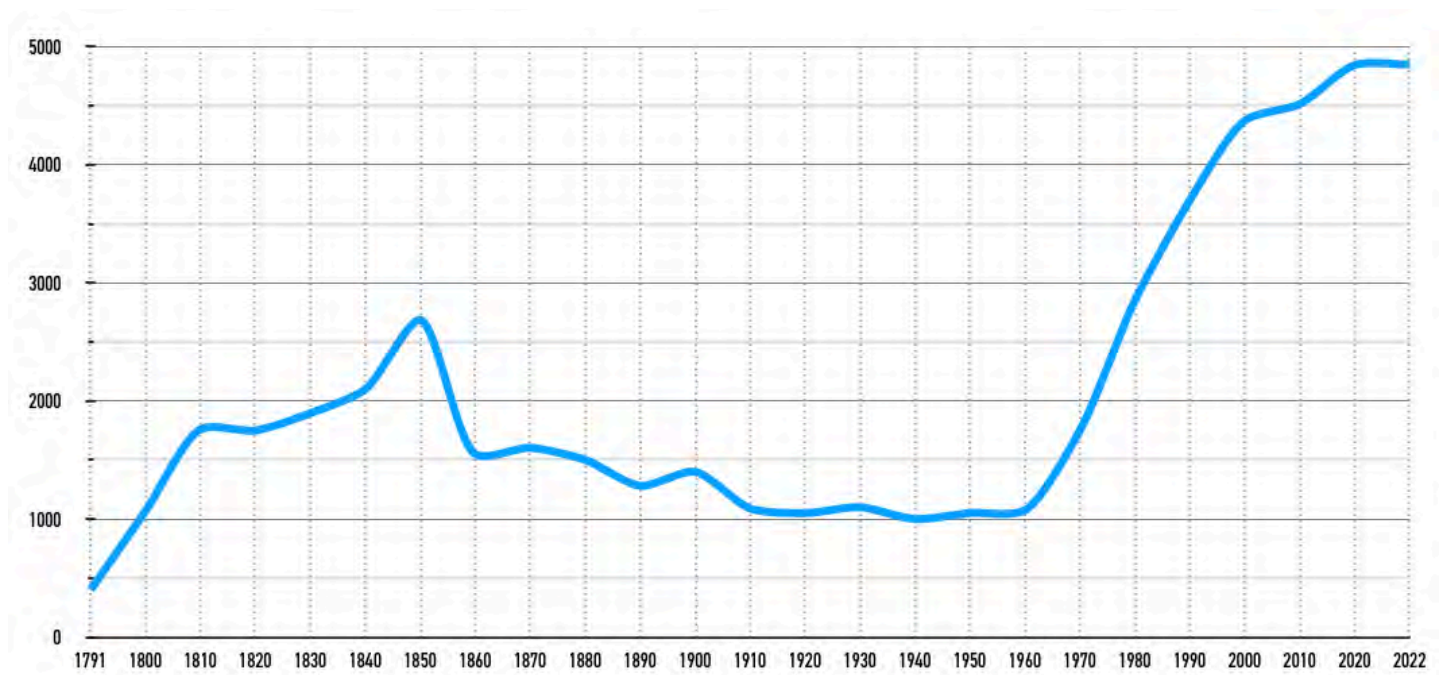


Figure 2.x. Population of the Town of Georgia, 1791 - 2022. (Source: Town of Georgia; U.S. Census ACS Data. 2022 data estimated by American Community Survey)

Population Growth

Georgia now ranks as the 31st largest town in the State of Vermont, up from 33rd in the previous Town Plan.

A review of historic population data for Georgia, *Figure 2.x*, indicates early rapid growth, reaching a population of almost 2,700 persons in 1850. The growth which characterized the town’s early years was followed by almost 100 years of population decline reaching a low population point of just over 1,000 persons in 1940. Population levels began to increase again at a relatively slow rate in the 1940s and 1950s, picking up speed between 1960 and 2000, increasing by almost 3,300 persons. Clearly, those 40 years have been a time of tremendous change in the town.

Since the last plan was adopted, the population of Georgia has increased from 4,515 (2010 decennial) to 4,845 (2020 decennial) and was estimated to be at 4,850³ in 2022.

3- 2022: ACS 5-Year Estimate data profile.

Population Growth - Comparison

[NOTE FROM THIS POINT FORWARD ALL TEXT IS ESSENTIALLY NEW - I am not redline/greenlining since most of the existing text will be discarded.] A comparison of the relative population growth in Georgia compared to Chittenden County, Franklin County, and the State of Vermont overall is shown in *Figure 2.x*. In the period from 2000 - 2010, the Town of Georgia grew slightly faster (3.2%) than the overall state population (2.78%), however was noticeably lower than Franklin County overall (5.13%) and significantly lower than Chittenden County overall (6.8%)⁴.

In the next decade of 2010 - 2020, this changed dramatically, with the population growth in Georgia jumping to 7.31%, just behind Chittenden County (7.52%) and well above Franklin County (4.61%). In that same period, the population growth in the

4 - U.S. Census ACS Data, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2022

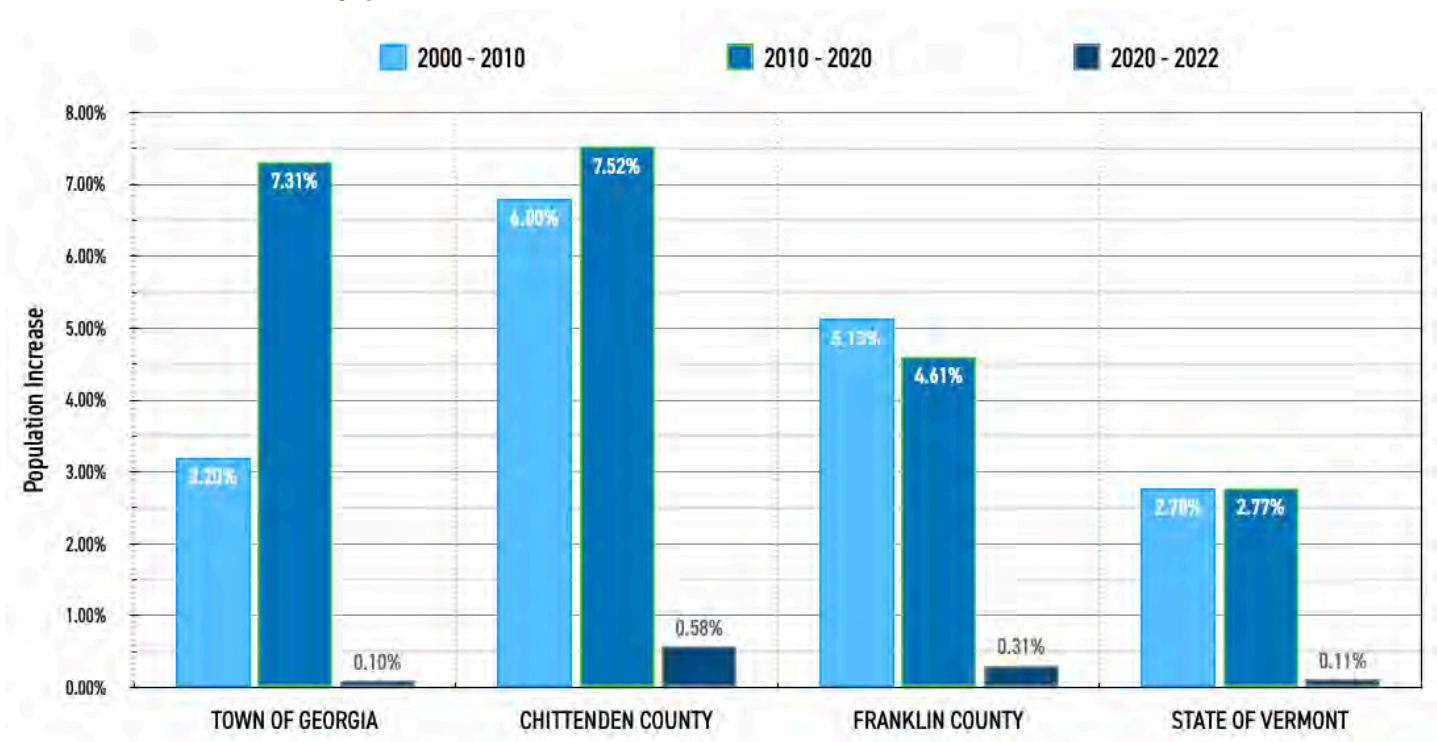


Figure 2.x. Population growth comparison, 2000-2022 of the Town of Georgia compared to Chittenden County, Franklin County, and the State of Vermont. (Source: U.S. Census ACS Data)

overall State of Vermont remained relatively steady at 2.77%. This period represented a new growth spurt for the town after the relatively calm period of the previous decade.

In the two years since the 2020 census, this growth spurt appears to have softened, with growth within the town (0.10%) closely mirroring the state (0.11%), while Franklin County (0.31%) and Chittenden County (0.58%) appear to be growing faster.

Population Projections

[Note - Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development population projections do not appear to have been updated since the 2013 report, which was already included in the current plan - do we want to still include it in this plan?]

The prior Town Plan included population projections under both “moderate” and “small” growth scenarios⁵. Interestingly, the moderate growth projection for the Town of Georgia for the year 2020 came to within 23 people of the estimated population at that time

⁵- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Development, Vermont Population Projections 2010-2030, 2013.

(4,822). Projections for the same moderate growth scenario for the year 2030 would put the population of town at 5,055.

Age Distribution

The 2017 Town Plan noted the continued trend of our aging population, experienced both nationally and locally, as part of the “baby boom” generation. The plan noted that in 2000, the percentage of the population which was above age 35 had grown to reach an equilibrium with the number of people below age 35 - with younger/older both split at roughly 50%–50%. Since that time, the percentage of people above the age of 35 had continued to grow, and was estimated to have reached 56% of the local population by 2013. As we look at this same data today, it is remarkable to note that the number of people age 35 and over has now grown to over 62% of the population.

This aging bubble can also be illustrated by looking at the growing percentage of people above the age 65 over the last few decades, as shown in *Figure 2.x*, which has been growing at a rate of about 5% every 10 years.

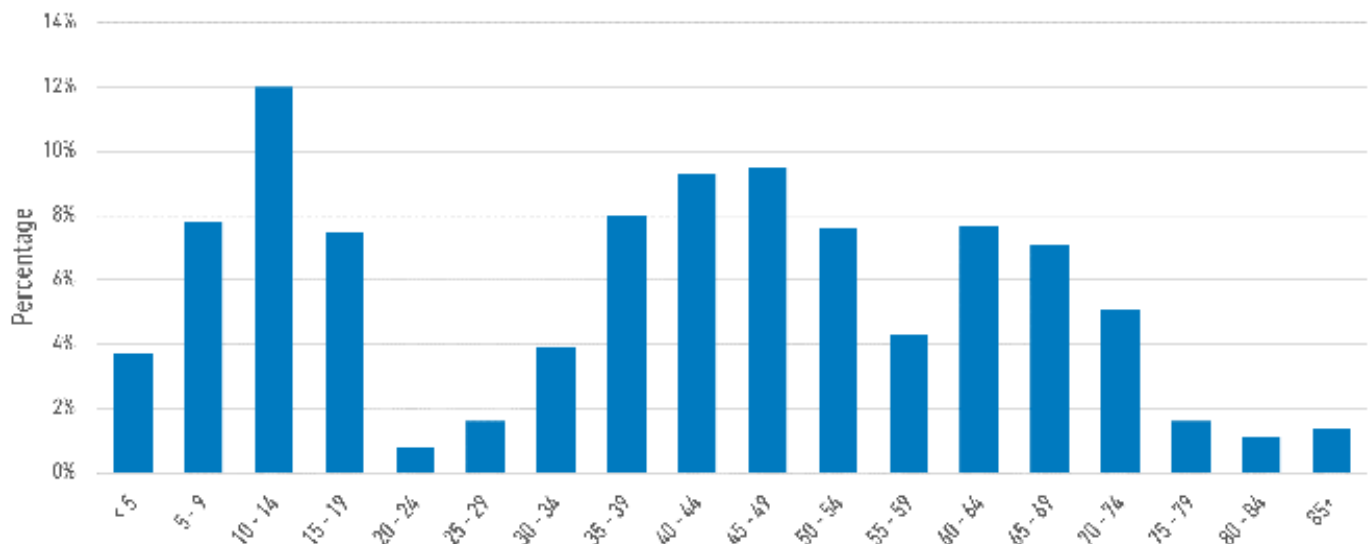


Figure x.x. Age distribution in Georgia, 2022. (Source: U.S. Census ACS Data, 2022)

Georgia - Percentage of Population Age 65+

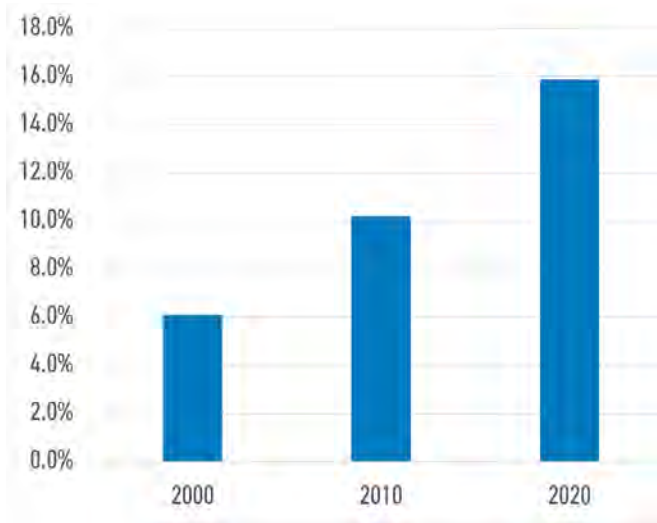


Figure 2.x. Percentage of population above the age 65 has been steadily growing. (Source: U.S. Census ACS Data, 2000, 2010, 2022)

The Town of Georgia is going to continue to experience this aging trend as a natural course of mathematics, however it could be amplified by other factors, such as a failure to attract and retain younger people in the Georgia area, as well as an overall decline in families having children. Georgia, like many other communities, will need to anticipate this aging population, and also take steps to help attract and retain younger families if it wishes to have a balanced and age-diverse community.

Median Household Income 2022

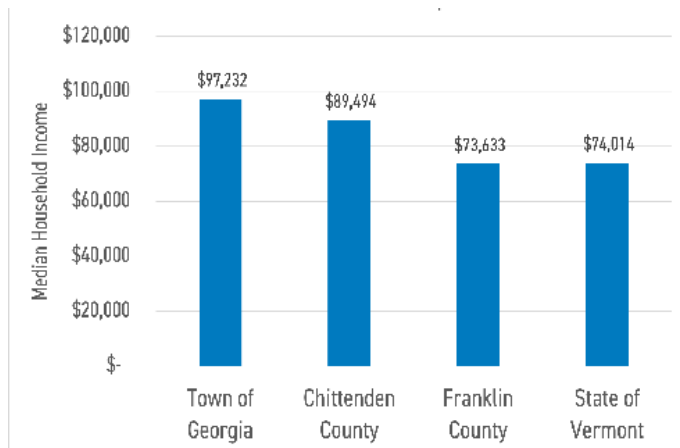


Figure 2.x. Median household income, Georgia and surrounding areas, 2022. (Source: U.S. Census ACS Data, 2022)

Household Income

Median household income in Georgia is estimated to be \$97,232 in 2022, an increase of over 19% since 2013, and continues to be higher than the surrounding areas of Chittenden County, Franklin County and the State of Vermont overall. (Figure [2.x]).

While the local household income still remains higher, it should be noted that these surrounding areas have been experiencing a noticeably larger percentage increase in income over the same 9-year period. Since 2013, the median family income has increased over 30% in Franklin County, over 36% in the State of Vermont, and over 39% in Chittenden County.

Property Values

The median home value in the Town of Georgia drastically increased by 105% in the ten year period between 2000 and 2010, and then increased by 7.6% in the following ten years. It is believed that the dramatic increase in values between 2000-2010 was due in part to a town-wide reappraisal in 2006.

In 2020, the median value is estimated at \$262,000. *See Table 2.x - Median Home Value Trends.* This is significantly above the median home value in Franklin County (\$219,200), above the median value in the State of Vermont (\$230,900), however remains far below the value in Chittenden County (\$314,200).⁶

⁶ - U.S. Census ACS Data, 2020

Table 2.x - Median Home Value Trends

	2000	2010	2020
Median Home Value	\$119,000	\$243,500	\$262,000
Population	4,375	4,515	4,845
Value Per Capita	\$27.20	\$53.93	\$54.08

Housing Supply

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 that are used year-round. The town also has a notable second home component, although it is consistent with the state average.

Over the past two decades, the relative percentage of single-family homes has been on the rise, while two-family and multi-family housing options have been fluctuating or declining. (See *Table 2.x - Housing Units by Type*) This trend is also reflected in the number of owner occupied vs. renter occupied units over the years. The number of renter occupied units has been in steady decline, estimated at just 3.4% of inventory in 2022. (See *Table 2.x - Housing Units by Occupancy*) This is far below Franklin County as a whole, which is around 23%. The popularity of short-term rentals have also contributed to the shifts in the market, something which was not foreseeable when the previous town plan was written. The result of these trends is that the availability of housing options which were once considered more affordable for younger adults and families are becoming harder to find, particularly in Georgia.

Table 2.x - Housing Units by Occupancy

	2010	2020	2022
Owner Occupied	1,495 (89.8%)	1,620 (95.2%)	1,687 (96.6%)
Renter Occupied	170 (10.2%)	81 (4.8%)	60 (3.4%)

Source: U.S. Census ACS Data

Housing Demand

Statewide, the rate of new homebuilding has been on the decline for some time, and current projections indicate that Vermont will need to increase total housing stock by 5,800 units by 2025 to meet demand, with roughly half of those as rentals⁷. Chittenden County alone is anticipated to see 89% of all of the additional household growth in the State of Vermont between 2020 and 2025. This demand on Chittenden County is likely to have a spillover effect on adjacent areas, such as Franklin County.

⁷ - 2020 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment, Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

Table 2.x - Housing Units by Type

UNIT TYPE	2000 ^A		2010 ^A		2020 ^B		2022 ^B	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Single Family	1,458	88.1%	1,801	93.7%	1,770	91.9%	1,824	93.6%
Two Family	73	4.4%	22	1.1%	64	3.3%	38	2.0%
3-4 Family	26	1.6%	50	2.6%	25	1.3%	10	0.5%
5-9 Family	6	0.4%	10	0.5%	0	0.0%	15	0.8%
Mobile Home	91	5.5%	104	5.4%	66	3.4%	60	3.1%
TOTAL	1,654		1,922		1,925		1,947	

^ASource: 2017 Town Plan; ^BSource: U.S. Census ACS Data

Housing Affordability (p 33)

According to Vermont Statute, housing is considered affordable when a household earning not more than 80 percent of the county median income or the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) median income (if a municipality is within a MSA), pays no more than thirty percent of their income on housing. A household consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit.

The median rent in the Town of Georgia has climbed 220% from \$713 in 2000 to \$1570 in 2020. It is interesting to note that this rent is higher than the median rents for both Franklin and even Chittenden Counties, and the rate of increase appears to be outpacing them in terms of growth. (See [Figure 2.x - Median Gross Rent Comparison.](#))

Comparing the median home values in town to both Chittenden and Franklin Counties paints a different picture. The median values in Georgia have been largely consistent with the values in Franklin County, while the values in Chittenden County have been increasing more rapidly.

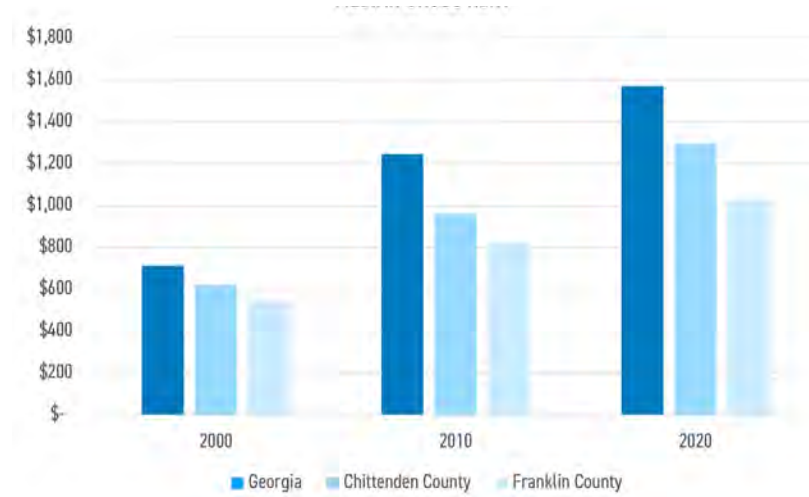


Figure 2.x. Median Gross Rent Trends, Georgia and surrounding areas.
(Source: U.S. Census ACS Data)

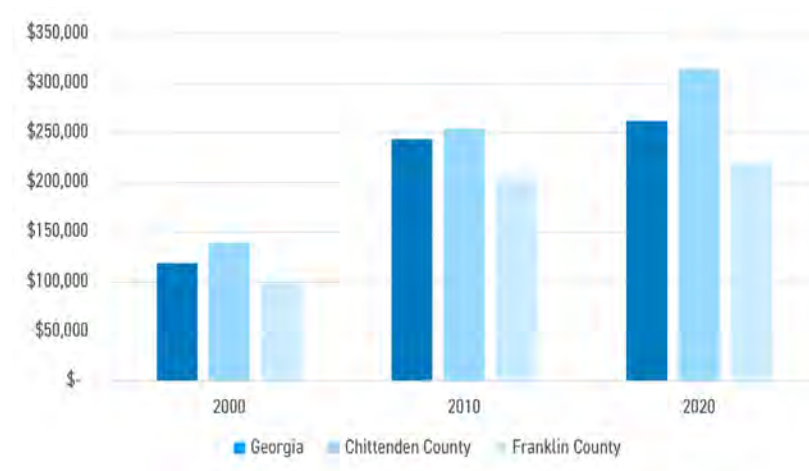


Figure 2.x. Median Home Value Trends. Georgia and surrounding areas.
(Source: U.S. Census ACS Data)

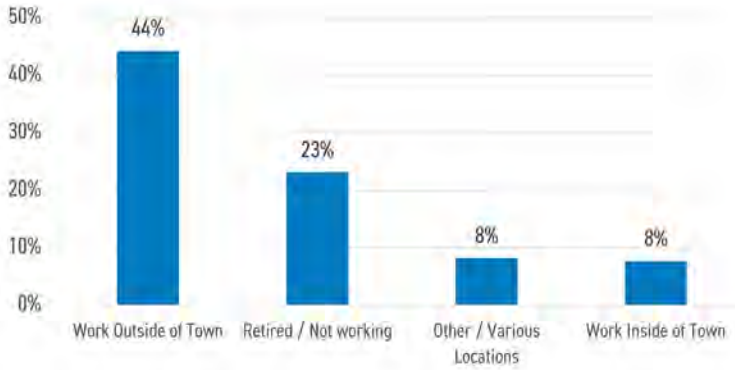


Figure 2.x - Work Location. Anecdotal data from the 2024 Community Survey suggests that roughly 44% of Georgia employees work commute to areas outside of town, while only 8% work inside of town. (Source: Town of Georgia Community Survey 2024)

Local Economy (p 37)

Georgia is largely a bedroom community to the greater Burlington metropolitan area, however it does have some substantial local business and industrial presence. Anecdotal data from the Community Survey completed earlier this year showed that 44% of Georgia employees responding to the survey commute to locations outside of the town, compared to 8% who work in town. (Out of a total of 355 responses). The inflow and outflow of employees in Georgia based on the U.S. Census “On The Map” tool estimate that 2,405 of Georgia employees commute to work outside of the town, while 1,059 commute into town from other areas, and 192 both live and work within the town.

Approximately 82% of Georgia’s workers commute or carpool to work via a private automobile, which is on par with the state, slightly higher than Chittenden County while below the average in Franklin County. (See Figure 2.x - Commuting) Only about 1% of Georgia workers take public transport or walk, which is well below the Vermont average.

However, it is estimated that 16.5% of Georgia’s workforce work from home, which is higher than these other geographic areas. The number of people who work from home in Georgia has grown

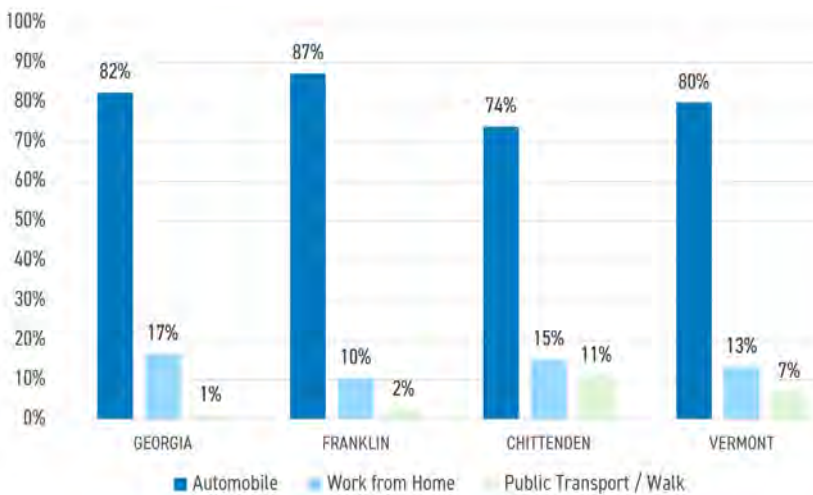


Figure 2.x. Commuting Comparison. Percentage of workers who commute to work in a private vehicle, those who work from home, and those who take public transport or walk. (Source: U.S. Census 2022 ACS 5-Year Data)

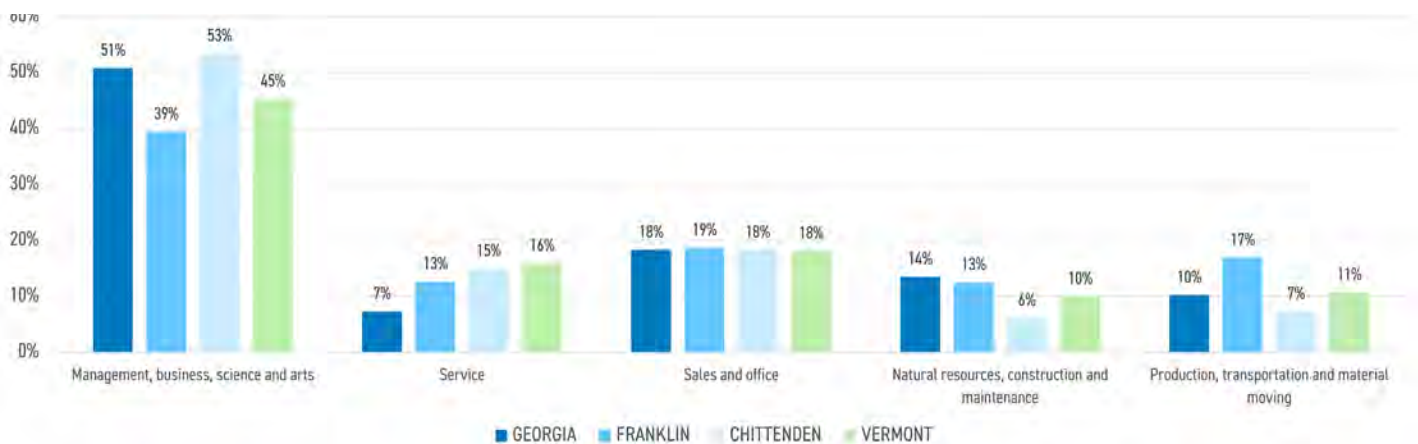


Figure 2.x. Employment by Occupation Comparison. Percentage of workers who are employed in various sectors of the local economy. (Source: U.S. Census 2022 ACS 5-year data)

substantially, up from only 4% in 2015.

Looking at employment by types of occupations, Georgia continues to largely mirror other regional and statewide trends, with some exceptions. Overall, most employees are found in the management, business, science and arts sectors, comparable to Chittenden County where many residents presumably work. A relatively small percentage (7%) work in the service industry however.

Energy (p 92)

Taxes, Growth & Fiscal Conditions (p 41)

[Note: need data from town on the town and school budgets for the past several years to update Figure 3.11 and 3.12 from the current plan (page 42)]

Existing Land Use

The use of land, both historically and currently, defines the physical make-up of Georgia, providing not only a sense of place, but an insight to how the town functions economically, physically and socially. The changing distribution of land use types affects the town’s ability to provide services and has implications for taxes. *Figure 2.x* shows the distribution of different land use types by parcel over the years, showing residential uses comprise over **80%** of the parcels, while commercial/industrial uses represent only about **4%**.

The number of seasonal vacation homes has been decreasing since the 1980’s, often converted into year-round residences, *[add new data]* The number of agricultural/open space properties has also been slowly declining, while the number of commercial/industrial parcels has been slowly increasing. It is important to note however that growth in the number of parcels does not necessarily indicate growth, since if a single property is subdivided into two that creates an additional parcel. The growth in commercial/industrial parcels likely has had the effect of reducing the overall tax burden on private residences. *(Note: this sentiment is from 2017 plan, do not know if it is valid or necessary)*

As a rural and agricultural community, much of the existing development concentration has taken place in one of three village centers: Georgia Center, Georgia Plains, and more recently South Village near the highway interchange. *See Map 2.x - Existing Land Use.* The highway in particular has been very influential in attracting new residential, commercial and industrial growth at the southern end of town. Concentrating growth in limited, selected areas of town has been a valid strategy for helping to reduce sprawl and undermine the rural character of the area. These focal points of growth, along with other notable character areas of the town, are briefly described below.

Georgia South Village. The Georgia South Village is an area of approximately 120 acres located south of the Exit 18 interchange of Interstate 89. This area consists of commercial and residential development along routes 7 and 104a, surrounded by high-density residential neighborhoods to the south and southwest. Because of its proximity to major transportation corridors, this area has been envisioned for many years to become a walkable mixed-use neighborhood similar to a traditional Vermont downtown village, where the core commercial activity would take place. Several studies have been conducted toward

Figure 2.x - Land Use Types by Parcel

PARCELS	2005 ¹		2010 ¹		2015 ¹		2024 ²	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Residential	1,419	77%	1,504	76%	1,582	77%	pending	
Residential Vacation	184	10%	160	8%	141	7%		
Commercial / Industrial	57	3%	66	3%	76	4%		
Agricultural/Open(?)	39	2%	37	2%	36	2%		
Other	149	8%	218	11%	214	10%		
TOTAL	1,848		1,985		2,049			

1 - Source: 2017 Town Plan

2 - Source: 2024 Vermont State GIS data

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FOR MAP

MAP 2.x. *Existing Land Use*

this goal, including the Georgia Village Plan (2003); Georgia Sewer Feasibility Assessments (2005); South Village Bicycle and Pedestrian Feasibility Study (2012); US Route 7/104A Intersection Scoping Study (2013); the South Village Transportation Master Plan (2019); and was the focus of a new rezoning to enable the desired vision. Despite these efforts, the South Village area has not yet realized the desired growth or form envisioned. The obstacles which have been preventing this are discussed further in Part III of this plan.

Georgia Center. Georgia Center has served as the municipal center for our community, reinforced by the presence of the Town Offices and the Georgia Fire and Rescue facility. This historic hamlet was the subject of the 2003 Georgia Village Plan (along with the South Village), which outlined a vision for the expansion of municipal and educational facilities, multi-family and senior housing, and modest commercial together with ample greenspace and parks. Today, it continues to be a focus of potential new growth.

Georgia Plains. The third focal point for village type growth has been the area 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. While this area remains primarily residential, there is potential for some very limited small-scale non-residential uses which would serve the immediate area and provide a place for people to interact and congregate.

Georgia Shoreline. Although not a focal point of potential growth like the areas described above, the Lake Champlain shoreline is a unique and important feature in the town. The area along the lake has traditionally developed over time as a mix of residential and agricultural uses, including many seasonal/vacation homes. This area comprises most of the seasonal residences within the town. The views of this lake and the sensitive natural environment here are important considerations in future planning.

Agricultural/Open Space. Much of Georgia outside of the traditional village centers has historically been agricultural lands and open space which contribute greatly to the rural character of the town. Agriculture and forestry continue to be important components of the local culture and economy. It is important to remember that owners of farms and forests provide a public benefit by not developing their property, and cost the town little in terms of municipal services. These lands provide agricultural industry, popular scenic vistas, and important wildlife habitat which must be balanced against the desire for future development.

Industrial Lands. Industrial Development is generally concentrated in the two industrial parks located to the east of Exit 18, which measure approximately 600 acres. These industrial activities contribute greatly to the local tax base, and are designed to have minimal impact on adjacent residential areas due to their location and buffers.

Existing Zoning

The Town of Georgia is currently divided up into 11 different zoning districts (and 1 overlay?) as follows: (*See Map 2.x - Existing Zoning*)

Agricultural/Rural Residential (AR-1). The primary purpose of this district is to provide a place in Georgia for agriculture and silviculture uses, and encourage development in other areas of town. Residential and other uses permitted in the district are intended to be very low density and should not interfere with the agricultural and rural nature of the district, and should not place an unreasonable burden on the town's ability to provide and maintain services to all residents. Land here should be developed so that large contiguous (non-fragmented) expanses of agricultural, forestry, significant geological areas, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and other important open space land will be protected. Development may be phased in order to meet the purposes of this district.

RESERVED
FOR MAP

MAP 2.x. Existing Zoning

Medium Residential (AR-2). The purpose of the AR-2 District is to enable, in areas where historic centers of the Town are located, residential development at a higher density than surrounding rural districts. In addition, small scale commercial uses will be allowed. Development in the district should reflect historic village patterns, protect important resources, enable the economic provision of services, plan for pedestrian and vehicular access, avoid strip development, and be planned so as not to burden the ability of the Town to provide adequate facilities and services.

High Density Residential (AR-3). The purpose of the AR-3 District is to enable higher density residential development where existing development at a higher density has already occurred. Development in the district should enable the economic provision of services, reasonable pedestrian and vehicular access within the district and to nearby business and recreation districts, protect important resources, avoid strip development, and be planned so as not to burden the ability of the Town to provide adequate facilities and services.

South Village Core (SV). The intent of the South Village Core District is to promote development of a compact settlement with a mix of small-scale business, civic, and residential uses and to foster a built environment patterned on a traditional Vermont village center with streetscapes and public spaces where people can walk, gather, and meet comfortably. Design of development in this area is 2009 South Village Core Strategic Plan.

Business (B). The Business District is a moderate traffic area with good access to major highways. The purpose of the Business District is to enable mixed commercial and residential uses in an interconnected, unified pattern that does not result in strip development. Development in the district will have controlled access on highways, screening and landscaping, creative design and layout, some pedestrian circulation, and connections to adjoining residential and commercial districts. This district is not intended to serve as a regional growth

center. Commercial uses shall be of a scale and size appropriate only for a local growth center.

Industrial (I-1). The I-1 District enables industrial development in an area with good highway and rail access and is set apart from agricultural and residential districts. The I-1 District enables heavy and light industrial development in an efficient pattern.

Commercial-Light Industrial (I-2). The purpose of the I-2 District is to enable commercial and light industrial development in an area with good highway access and set apart from agricultural and residential districts. The I-2 District enables light industrial development to develop in an efficient and integrated pattern. This district is not intended to serve as a regional growth center. Commercial uses shall be of a scale and size appropriate only for a local growth center.

Recreation (R-1). The Recreation District has severe limitations for development, including steep slopes, poor soil suitability, and high elevations. Therefore, much of the district is best suited to remain in a natural state or to be used for outdoor recreation purposes. Residential uses are limited to large lots to limit fragmentation and minimize the impact on the land and prevent substantial alteration to the landscape. Land should be developed so that large contiguous expanses of agricultural, forestry, significant geological areas, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and other important open space land will be protected.

Natural Areas (N-1). The N-1 District has significant natural features or areas which are unique or irreplaceable. The purpose of this district is to protect these features and areas in their natural state to the extent possible for present and future generations and to protect significant geological areas, wildlife habitat, scenic areas and other open space land. Structures are limited to large lots to limit fragmentation and minimize the impact on the land and prevent substantial alteration to the landscape.

Lakeshore (L-1). The L-1 District contains a 500-foot strip of land measured from the mean water mark of Lake Champlain inland 500 feet bordering Lake Champlain - one of the most significant natural features of the Town of Georgia. The purpose of the district is to protect the water quality of the lake and the recreational potential and natural beauty of the shoreline, significant geological areas, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and other important open space land. The building height dimensional standards established for this district are intended to preserve visual access to Lake Champlain. This district includes all islands.

Lakeshore Residential-Recreation (L-2). The L-2 District which contains land close to Lake Champlain beginning at the easterly border of the L-1 District continuing inland 1,500 feet. The purpose of the district is to protect the water quality of the lake and the natural beauty of the shoreland area. Development within the district should preserve contiguous open lands, significant geological areas, and wildlife habitat and protect the view looking eastward from Lake Champlain. There are some severe limitations on development in this district due to soil conditions and slopes and thus densities in the district should be low.

Flood Hazard Area Overlay. The Flood Hazard Area is an overlay which spans other mapped zoning districts. The purpose of this district is to minimize threats and damage caused by flooding in areas where it is most common.

Existing Physical Setting

Introduction

The Town of Georgia is rich with natural resources. The diverse landscape 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. These resources enrich the lives of all those who live, work and play in our community. Our natural resources provide recreational opportunities, a scenic landscape, and support the local economy. Through good planning and sustainable management of these resources, we seek to enhance the quality of life for current and future Georgia residents.

The Georgia Conservation Commission was formed in 1992 by the voters of the town in accordance with state statute. The commission has seven members who are appointed by the select board for a term of four years. The members work to preserve,

protect, and enhance the native plants, animals, and their habitats in the town for current and future residents. Topics studied have included stream bank buffers, and invasive plants and insects in Vermont. Conservation Commission members also work on controlling invasive plants, increasing wildlife habitat, controlling erosion, building trails, improving water quality along Georgia's extensive Lake Champlain shoreline, tree plantings, and Green Up Day held in May. Other duties currently include town maintained properties including Russell Greene Natural Area at Deer Brook, the Henley Webster Town Forest and the Mill River Falls natural area.

On the recommendation of the Commission, the Town purchased a 70 acre parcel in 2004 at the North end of Lost Pond; this area has a management plan which is overseen by commission members. The Town also established a Conservation Reserve Fund, to help preserve property deemed valuable to the Town of Georgia.



Water Resources

Georgia's hydrology is largely a function of Lake Champlain and its tributaries which pass through Georgia. As shown on [Map 2.x - Watersheds](#), the Town of Georgia is divided into three subwatersheds.

The northwestern portion of Georgia drains into the Mill River, which is joined by Rugg Brook and ultimately drains to St. Albans Bay. The southwestern portions of Georgia, which includes the Stone Bridge Brook watershed, drains directly into Lake Champlain. Eastern portions of Georgia are part of the Lamoille River Watershed, including Arrowhead Mountain Lake.

Rivers and Floodplains. The Town of Georgia includes portions of the Lamoille River, Rugg Brook, Mill River and all of Stone Bridge Brook, in addition to many smaller streams and brooks. Erosion is a major issue in Georgia's rivers, due in large part to unstable soil types and significant conflicts between rivers and road infrastructure. The Town of Georgia has been successful in obtaining grants from the Agency of Natural Resources and the Better Backroads Program to address some of the most pressing erosion issues that threaten public road and bridges. The Georgia Zoning Regulations also require a fifty (50) foot buffer from the edge of the waterways and a "no development" buffer of two hundred (200) feet along Deer Brook and Arrowhead Mountain Lake in the I-1, I-2 SV, and B-1 zoning districts. [Map 2.x - River Corridors](#).

Stormwater runoff has also been identified as a threat to our local waterways as it carries sediment and pollutants, increases the volume of water in our rivers, accelerates flows, and exacerbates erosion in the stream channel. Ensuring stormwater from roads, parking lots, roofs and other impervious surfaces is adequately captured and treated is an important step to protecting our water quality and improving the stability of our streams and shorelines.

Arrowhead Mountain Lake. Arrowhead Mountain

Lake was formed by the impoundment of water by the Green Mountain 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 Industrial Park. Water is drawn from the Lake, treated at the Park, used for industrial processing, re-treated and discharged back into the lake.

Lake Champlain. The Town of Georgia has approximately 7 miles of lakeshore frontage on Lake Champlain. The lake, which is more than 400 sq. miles in size is the largest freshwater body in the United States besides the Great Lakes. 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 peninsula which separates the northerly half of Georgia's waters from the broad lake.

The water quality of St. Albans Bay is impaired primarily by excessive levels of phosphorus which lead to algal blooms and growth of aquatic weeds. This problem impacts recreation in the lake, making boating, swimming and fishing less enjoyable for residents and visitors of our community. The State of Vermont's recently adopted a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Lake Champlain. The TMDL aims to reduce phosphorus pollution in Lake Champlain. The State also recently adopted Act 64, which aims to address increased phosphorus loads in Lake Champlain through increased regulation of agriculture and stormwater discharge.

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.

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MAP 2.x. Watershed Map

Sewage disposal along the lakeshore also has the potential to degrade water quality. Regional solutions are currently 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.

Lake Champlain continues to be a valuable asset to our community for community recreation and enjoyment, but access to the lake 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 will continue to investigate ways to increase public access to the lake.

Shoreline. The Lake Champlain shoreline is a unique ecosystem that provides an important habitat for both aquatic and terrestrial animals. The shoreline 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 Delta.

Much of the Georgia shoreline is characterized by high-density, seasonal camps. 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.

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.

Wetlands. Wetlands are abundant throughout Georgia and play an important role in maintaining water quality. The location of known wetlands are shown on *Map 2.x - Water Supply*

The extensive biological activity of a wetland area enables the absorption and assimilation of nutrients and thus purifies to some extent the water that is discharged. These areas store large quantities of water during periods of high runoff and gradually release water during low flow periods. Therefore, the wetland regulates stream discharge both during low flow and peak flow. Loss of this storage capacity not only adversely affects stream behavior but also increases floods and reduces stream flow during crucial low flow periods. Wetlands also provide habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals, including a disproportionately high number of threatened or endangered species, compared to other ecosystem types. Many wetlands receive some protection through State and Federal regulations.

Drinking Water Supply. There are three Wellhead Protection Areas that have been delineated to protect public drinking water sources: one which serves Rhodeside Acres, one which serve Sherwood Forest, and one which serves the South Georgia Fire District (*See Map 2.x, Utilities, Facilities and Town Services*).

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.

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.

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MAP 2.x. Water Supply Source Protection Areas, Wetlands and Flood Zones

Scenic Resources

The views and scenic beauty of the Georgia landscape are greatly valued and appreciated by residents and visitors alike. Georgia's gradual transition from the foothills to the lake provides beautiful scenery: The juxtaposition of rolling farmland, historic settlements, and forest within the Champlain lowlands creates a landscape that enhances our community and our quality of life. Scenic resources must be a consideration in planning and development, including ridgelines, foregrounds of distant views, open lands, vistas, and historic village settlements.

Lake Champlain is particularly important as visual and aesthetic resource for the Town of Georgia. To the west, we enjoy beautiful views of the Adirondacks and to the east we see the Green Mountains. The shoreline itself is a scenic resource and is particularly sensitive to human and natural change.

Changes in our working landscape will also affect the aesthetics of our community. Just as Vermont's forest cover has risen from 20-30% in 1850 to over 75% today, we can expect to see our landscape change as the economics of forestry and agriculture change. We can also expect that demand for new renewable energy sources will create interest in wind power development in our town and towns within our viewshed. Balancing economic, environmental and aesthetic interests will require careful review of projects and consideration of all potential costs and benefits.

Poorly planned development can threaten the scenic beauty of our community. These scenic resources contribute to the local quality of life and sense of place, help to preserve and enhance property values, and are instrumental in defining the character of the Town. Future development must be sensitive to these areas of the landscape. Development should be properly sited to protect scenic vistas, and to avoid steep slopes and hilltops. Through the use of flexible zoning tools, such as PUDs, the town can allow creative site design that accommodates and respects

scenic and natural resources.

Fragile, Unique and Sensitive Ecology

All three physiographic regions contain sites for natural, unique, and fragile areas/species. *Map 2.x - Wildlife Areas & Critical Habitats* indicates the location of critical habitat areas including deer yards and habitats used by threatened and endangered species.

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 not mapped - perhaps replace with discussion of more recent state conservation priorities and possibly include separate map?]*

2018 - Vermont Conservation Design, Summary Report for Landscapes, Natural Communities, Habitats and Species.

Habitat loss and fragmentation, non-native species, and a rapidly changing climate all pose grave threats to species and ecosystems. plan to address that uncertainty and sustain the state's valued natural areas, forests, waters, wildlife, and plants for future generations.

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MAP 2.x. Wildlife and Critical Habitats

Geology

Perhaps the most notable geologic feature in Georgia is 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 Town of Georgia spans across two Physiograph Regions: The Champlain Lowlands and the Foothills of the Green Mountains (*See Map 2.x - Physiograph Regions*). [*physiographic map*]

The Champlain lowlands extend 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 eastern part of Georgia is considered to be the foothills of the Green Mountains. Many of the 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.

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

Topography

The topography of Georgia ranges from an elevation of 95.5 feet above sea level along the shores of Lake Champlain, to 1,400 feet at the peak of Georgia Mountain in the southeast corner of town. Much of our everyday human activity however remains confined within the 103 feet to 500 feet elevation range.

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. 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. The Georgia lakeshore is perhaps less dramatic than further south in Milton, where the Thrust Fault emerges in the bedrock hills of Milton creating a more elevated and cliff-like environment, such as Eagle Mountain.

Topography is one of the major factors that determine suitability of specific land uses. Traditionally, major settlements have been located near water courses,

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MAP 2.x. Physiograph Regions

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MAP 2.x. Steep Slopes

for power and transportation, and roads have followed the course of valleys and streams for ease of construction.

Georgia's drainage pattern is a result of its geology and topography. Our drainage network includes meandering streams, lakes and ponds, and significant wetland areas. Poorly draining soils and high ground water tables in many parts of town present a challenge to development.

Map 2.x - Steep Slopes gives a good indication for the limits for development, based on slope factors. 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 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. *[steep slopes map]*

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.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service maintains soil survey maps for approximately 95% of the United States. This information has recently been made available online through the Web Soil Survey (<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>)

As far 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. Maps 4.3 and 4.4 show the locations of prime agricultural and prime forestry soils in Georgia. Others are well suited to development presenting few constraints from a physical perspective. In general, development constraints are based on many factors including soils (Maps 4.3 and 4.4), topography (Map 4.2) and the presence of sensitive natural features such as wetlands and floodplain (Map 4.6).

These maps show a broad picture of the town and do not indicate that specific sites might or might not be suited for development.

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

The presence of appropriate soils is also critical to

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MAP 2.x. Primary Agricultural Soils

supporting the working landscape in Georgia. *Map 2.x - Primary Agricultural Soils* and *Map 2.x - Primary Forestry Soils* indicate the locations of soils that can support agricultural and forestry operations. Vermont's agricultural soils have been classified by USDA/NRCS in the publication, "Farmland Classification Systems for Vermont Soils" (June 2006).

The two categories of agricultural soils are Prime Soils (Classes 1-3) and Statewide Soils (Classes 4-7). 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. Preserving large, contiguous blocks of agricultural soils is necessary to continue to have viable agricultural operations in Georgia.

The NRCS has also identified "primary forestry soils," important to sustain commercial forestry operations in the region, according to their relative productivity.

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. *[soils map(s)]*

Earth Resources

Earth resources, including sand, gravel and stone, are important resources particularly for use in construction and road maintenance. 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.

In 2014, the Town of Georgia spent \$31,307.21 on processed 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.

Climate & 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

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MAP 2.x. Primary Forestry Soils

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.

Flood Resiliency

Flooding is the most common and impactful natural hazard that affects Georgia. The Town of Georgia lies within the Champlain Islands sub-basin of the Northern Lake Champlain watershed and the Lamoille River watershed. Several small streams and wetland complexes drain into Lake Champlain. Lake Champlain rises above flood levels in the spring of each year when snow melts and also rises during major summer rain events. Flooding along the shores of Lake Champlain affected a considerable amount of the community in the spring of 2011. This flooding resulted in thousands of dollars in property damage. Flooding can also occur on Georgia's rivers and streams.

Flooding is a natural occurrence and can occur in two ways: inundation and fluvial erosion. Inundation flooding is when water rises and covers the adjacent low-lying land. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) defines a floodplain as an area of land adjacent to lakes and streams that is subject to recurring inundation or high water (Map 4.6). There are several areas of floodplain in Georgia. This includes areas along the banks of the Lamoille River, the Mill River, Deer Brook, and the shoreline of Lake Champlain. The base flood elevation for Lake Champlain is 102 feet above sea level.

Development within floodplains can have damaging consequences. Development may obstruct the natural flow of water or displace soil and raise base flood elevations. One strategy to mitigate potential encroachment and flood loss is to prohibit

development below the base flood elevation or set an elevation from which development is prohibited. The State of Vermont has recently implemented a statewide buffer regulation on all lakes and ponds greater than 10 acres (including Lake Champlain). The Shoreland Protection Act essentially prohibits new clearing and development within 100 feet of the mean water level of Lake Champlain (95.5 feet above sea level) and places limits on clearing and development from 100 to 250 feet from the mean water level. The intent of the regulation is to limit bank erosion, to protect shoreland habitat, and to improve water quality.

The Town of Georgia has adopted land use regulations for special flood hazard areas, as defined by FEMA on Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs), in order to protect the health, safety, and welfare of its residents and to allow the community to participate in the National Flood Hazard Insurance Program (NFIP). It is important to note that the existing FIRMs are dated September 16, 1981 and the Flood Insurance Study was published in August 1980. While this information is the best available, the hydrology that these maps are based on has not been updated since the study in 1980 and therefore does not account for shifts in shoreline or effects of development. The FIRMs were digitized by the Northwest Regional Planning Commission in 1999 to assist in planning efforts and are used to determine approximate locations. The digital version is not used for regulatory rulings.

Flooding can also occur through fluvial erosion, a condition that occurs when fast moving flood waters, typically in steep areas, cause erosion of areas surrounding streams and rivers. To identify areas prone to fluvial erosion hazards, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resource has identified River Corridors in all Vermont municipalities. River Corridors are based on the individual conditions of streams and rivers including topography and the existence of public infrastructure. River Corridors are not mapped for streams that have a watershed of less than 2 square miles. Instead, the Agency advises using a 50 foot buffer on each side of a stream with the intention of



MAP 2.x. River Corridors

protecting stream stability and natural flow. *Map 2.x - River Corridors* shows all mapped River Corridors in Georgia.

River Corridors regulations currently apply only to Act 250-related land development and land development not regulated by municipalities (like agriculture). Municipalities may adopt River Corridor maps and regulation as a part of their development regulations. Adoption may provide financial benefits to the Town in the event of federally declared natural disaster due to changes in how the Emergency Relief and Assistance Fund (ERAF) is administered.

Georgia has adopted zoning regulations to address fluvial erosion hazards on named rivers and streams in the community. Specifically, Georgia has adopted a riparian buffer zone regulations. These regulations include a 200 foot setback from Deer Brook and a 50 foot setback from all other named rivers and streams. Setbacks are measured from the top of bank or top of slope depending on topographic conditions. Within these setback areas development is highly restricted. These setbacks are based on the work that was done with Northwest Regional Planning Commission and the Agency of Natural Resources in the early 2000s that identified areas susceptible to fluvial erosion. These regulations are comparable to River Corridor regulations and therefore may make a possible transition to River Corridor regulations relatively simple and straightforward.

Planning for future flooding events is important to ensure that a community is flood resilient. Development and adoption of a local hazard mitigation plan can help a community identify potential hazard risks to the community. Local hazard mitigation plans can also identify projects in the community that can decrease the effects of potential hazards, such as the replacement of culverts or buyouts of properties with repetitive flood risk. Approval of local hazard mitigation plans by FEMA may also lead to increased grant opportunities for communities to implement identified projects. Georgia should ensure that it continues to have a local hazard mitigation plan to

plan for future hazards, including flooding to ensure continued access to this funding.

Changing Times

Since the last Town Plan was adopted, there have been several notable changes locally and globally which have an impact on our area. The continued growth of the Internet is one such phenomena, expanding its presence and influence into our everyday lives more than ever before. This growth has had many implications. Working from home (“remote work”) has become increasingly popular, enabling many people to start up small at-home businesses which have increased demand for allowable home occupations. This shift was largely influenced by the global COVID pandemic, which also saw an increase in people leaving urban areas in search for more rural, country living. The Internet has also fueled an increase in online shopping, putting strain on more traditional brick-and-mortar retail businesses, and given rise to the exploding popularity of short-term rentals. [Continue to elaborate on these changes, including loss of agricultural land, popularity of solar power, decline in community volunteerism, climate change, etc.]

Can PC identify other, more local changes we might want to include in the last plan?

Summary

Georgia will continue to grow. With close access to I-89, Lake Champlain on its western shore, Mt. Mansfield not far away, and Burlington within a half-hour, the town has strong appeal. It is a nice place to live and it will continue to attract people.

PART III

ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

This planning process began with an effort to reach out to the community and learn what issues and topics were important to local residents, business and property owners so that they would have a say in the formation of their updated Town Plan.

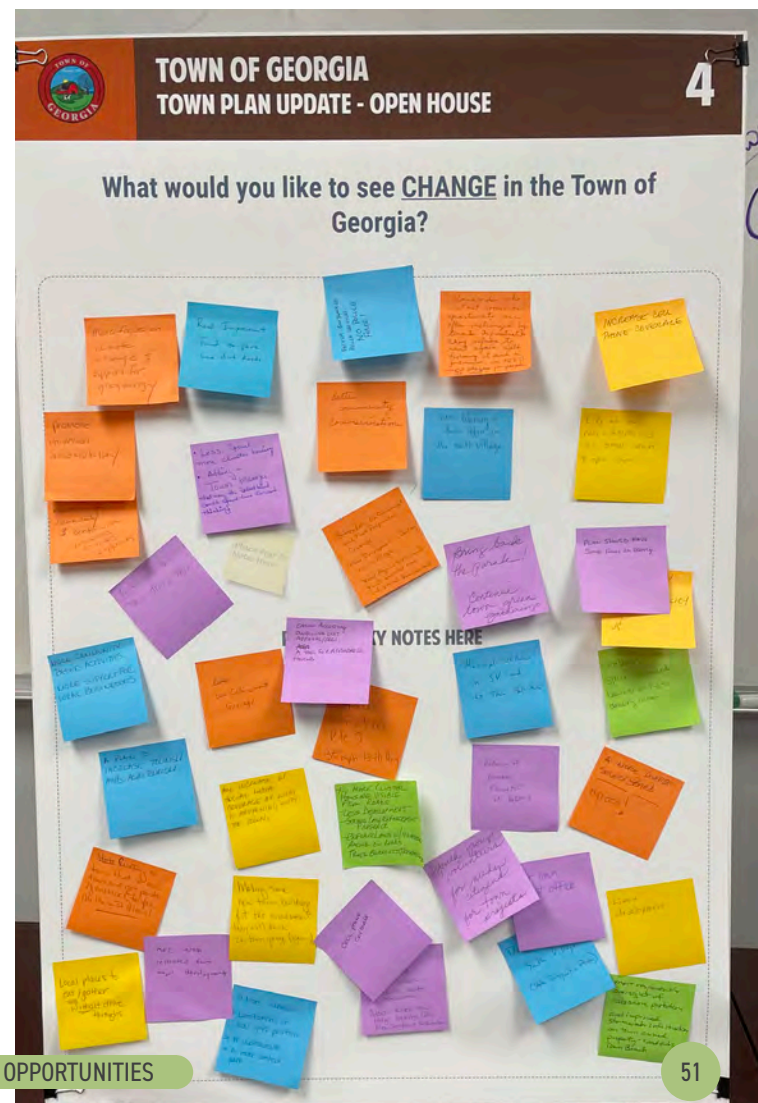
On October 24th, 2024, an Open House and Presentation event was held at the Georgia Fire & Rescue Building in Georgia Center. The purpose of this event was to make the public aware of the Town Plan update effort, and begin to solicit input on various planning issues through a series of display boards where visitors could write ideas and suggestions. The questions provided were designed to help identify issues of importance, as well as help develop questions for a community survey which would be targeted toward a much wider audience in town. The Open House was followed by a presentation outlining the expected schedule and steps of the Town Plan update process and an open discussion of issues with the public. Notes from this event have been provided in the Appendix for reference.

A dedicated webpage was also set up as a central repository of information about the Town Plan, so that people would be able to find information and announcements quickly, including notes and videos of meetings, as well as draft review materials.

The Open House was followed by the development of a Community Survey which was provided to the public both online and in paper format for more accessibility. This survey was designed to solicit input on a variety of topics, many of which were identified as areas of importance from the initial open house public discussions to help inform some of the community vision and goals for this plan, and identify potential priorities. The results of this survey were presented at a public meeting on February

27th, 2024 for additional discussion and feedback, and have been incorporated here as part of a larger discussion on issues and opportunities. (A copy of the full Survey Results Report has been provided in the Appendix for reference.)

This section of the Town Plan outlines the different issues, opportunities and considerations discussed, many of which originated from the public outreach process. What follows in this section is a summary of these and other findings which together help to formulate the goals of this community.



Protection of Local Character & Natural Resources

An overarching theme emerging from the public input was a strong desire by many residents to protect the Town of Georgia from changes which would erode its historic rural setting and natural resources. This position was supported in several survey questions and public comments. When asked in the survey to identify which factors were most important for managing future growth and development in the town, the top three responses were: protection of water quality and natural resources, protection of local working farms and agricultural lands, and protection of small-town rural character and scenic views. A combined 76% of survey respondents also felt it was either important (22%) or very important (55%) to protect the view of the lake along Georgia Shore Road. When asked to rank overall priorities for the town to address, “preserving town character and natural resources” ranked as the highest overall priority, noticeably higher than all other topics provided.

Specific natural resources suggested for protection included Lake Champlain, Arrowhead Lake, Silver Lake, as well as local wetlands and streams. The view of Lake Champlain along Georgia Shore Road was often suggested as an area for viewshed protection.

These natural resources are important not just for maintaining the scenic beauty and charm of our town however. As our climate changes, having contiguous areas of the natural landscape which maintain ecological function helps plants and animals to survive, reproduce, migrate, adapt and be more resilient to change, in turn helping us and our localized environment. The preservation of these resources, in short, helps make us more resilient for future generations. It is clear from the public input that this issue is of high importance to the community, and should be a focal point of this plan.

CRBPA

The “Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act” (CRBPA) was enacted by the State of Vermont in 2022. This Act seeks to address the loss of critical biodiversity from human development, climate change, pollution, habitat fragmentation, and invasive species. The Act seeks to protect the priority ecological areas of the state identified in the Vermont Conservation Design, with the goal of conserving 30% of Vermont’s land area by 2030, and 50% by 2050. This plan seeks to support and coordinate with those goals.

GOAL A1	To maintain, improve, and p Protect the quality of Georgia’s water resources, including groundwater and surface water.
GOAL A0	Protect fragile, unique, and sensitive areas <u>natural resources, including those which contribute to Vermont’s high priority inventory for ecological integrity.</u>
GOAL A0	<u>Protect the existing open spaces and scenic views which define Georgia’s rural character</u>
GOAL A0	To m Maintain and improve the quality of important soils, such as agriculture and forestry soils, when considering the future development of the town.

GOAL A0	To e ncourage that Georgia’s noteworthy historic and scenic resources remain intact.
GOAL A0	To p rotect private and public investment and maintain the natural environment by considering topography and geology when determining land use.
GOAL A0	To p rotect local earth resources until needed for future use for the benefit of the community; and to minimize the impacts of extraction on the environment.
GOAL A0	To c onsider climatic factors and to protect the quality of the air when planning for future development.

Roadway Maintenance and Safety

Improving roadway maintenance and safety is a common desire of local residents today. This topic was ranked in the survey among the highest priorities for the Town of Georgia to work on in the coming years. The winter maintenance and plowing of both state and town roads ranked reasonably well in the survey, with a majority of respondents having a favorable opinion on the level of service which is provided. This was followed by the clearing of right-of-ways, mowing and ditching along both state and town roads, which received more mixed reviews. However, the level of service paving and repairing roads ranked the lowest among the topic of roadway maintenance overall, and appears to be an area for improvement. In general, residents had a slightly more favorable view of the state roadway upkeep compared to the town, which would seem to support the notion that more could be done to keep the local roads in shape. In particular, residents noted that there were some unpaved roads which should be considered for paving, potholes which were in need of repair, and that it sometimes takes too long for mowed roadside materials to be cleaned up. Bicycling or walking along the roadways is sometimes a cause for concern, with narrow shoulders and potholes creating obstacles. The town should look for ways where this service could be improved in order to provide for a safe, efficient and cost-effective transportation network.

GOAL B1	<u>Work to improve roadway maintenance.</u>
GOAL B0	Provide a safe, efficient, cost effective transportation network to meet the varied needs of the residents of the Town.

Police and Law Enforcement

The need to increase overall police presence and law enforcement was a popular topic for people during the public outreach process. In a ranking of various municipal services, this topic was rated as the most unfavorable overall among respondents, and was identified as the third highest priority for the town to address. Several people noted that the speed limits on local roads are not being enforced adequately, and that additional police coverage in general should be provided before the town expands with additional commercial or residential development. Unfortunately, this service is outside the direct control of the town, which must rely on outside support from the County Sheriff and State Police through contract agreements. Attempts to negotiate additional service in the past have been stymied due to a current lack of available manpower to cover all of the service areas needed in the region, but it is clear that a resolution to this issue must be found. The town should work to identify ways in which it may be able to secure better support from the County Sheriff and State Police.

GOAL C1

[Seek ways to increase local police and law enforcement coverage within the town.](#)

Cellular and Internet Coverage

The availability of local cellular and internet coverage continues to improve technologies and expand throughout the region, however it remains lacking in some areas and can be spotty or inconsistent. In the community survey, a majority of people felt that current high-speed internet service was adequate for their daily needs, while most felt that current cellular service was inadequate. Overall, the improvement of these combined services ranked 4th in terms of town priorities in the community survey. The private service providers who supply this technology naturally prioritize population centers which more efficiently provide coverage to many people, and as a result more rural areas such as Georgia receive less attention. However, these technologies remain increasingly important for the growth of local businesses, home occupations as well as safety and convenience. The expansion of cellular service coverage in particular needs to be balanced with the desire to maintain our natural rural and scenic countryside. Similar to police presence, this service is outside the direct control of the municipality, however the town should continue to work to influence and lobby for improved and more consistent communications services while mitigating the potential negative impacts it may have on the Vermont landscape.

GOAL D1

Continue to expand local availability of cellular and high-speed Internet communications services.

GOAL D0

Seek ways to mitigate potential negative visual impacts of cellular towers on the scenic landscape.

Municipal Government & Communication

Throughout the public outreach process, there were comments received about the need for improved communication between the municipality and local residents. People noted that they weren't often aware of what was happening in town, had missed announcements, or felt that better transparency was needed. Town Office communication and information generally received an unfavorable rating in the community survey, and addressing this issue was ranked as the 5th most important priority for the town. Public comments on this topic ranged from a need for more mailed notices/newsletters, use of local newspapers, more reliance on online/electronic notices, and a general distrust of local government and decision making. Some people were not aware that the town has an official Facebook page, others felt that the Facebook page was not utilized well enough, and others felt there was a need for mailed/paper announcements since they do not use social media. A newly redesigned and updated town website was launched shortly before the community survey was conducted, and this update addressed several of the commonly requested improvements—such as the ability to sign up for email announcements—however many were not aware of this. A portion of the communications issue is apparently a lack of awareness of the media sources available, however there is still room for improved communication methods. While it is true that some residents would prefer mailed notices or newsletters, printing and mailing incurs additional expense on the town. There is no denying the cost-savings, reach and convenience which online-digital media can provide. Therefore, the town should develop a strategy to improve both digital and paper communication methods, and launch an educational campaign to make the public aware of how it will be used and the different media sources available. This should be done to both improve municipal communication and begin to address concerns regarding transparency.

GOAL E1

Improve municipal communication methods with the public, including notices, announcements and transparency policies.

Healthy Tax Base

Each town must find a balance between the tax revenue it collects from commercial, industrial, agricultural and residential land uses, and the cost of providing municipal services to those uses. As new development and growth occurs in town, it generates additional revenue, however it also requires more servicing and cost to the town. Generally speaking, commercial, industrial and agricultural operations tend to be more profitable to municipalities because they require relatively little work to service. Residential uses, on the other hand, have traditionally been less profitable for a variety of reasons. Much of this was due to their impact on local schools and school taxes, however this impact is much more complicated to quantify locally since Act 60 was enacted and schools began to get funded through a statewide pool. Maintaining the right balance of growth and land uses to keep taxes low is a moving target, however the right amount of commercial/industrial development can potentially provide the town with sufficient tax revenue that they can keep residential taxes relatively low. This is the goal of increasing revenues to support a healthy tax base. In the community survey, respondents indicated that increasing tax revenue to maintain a healthy tax base was among the top four most important considerations in managing future growth and development, after protecting local character and natural resources. It was also identified as the 6th-ranked priority in overall town goals. Respondents also indicated a preference in attracting more industrial and commercial growth over residential.

[Note: Need to complete update on tax burden and land use data for more insight to complete this section]

The 2017 Town Plan noted that until the longer-term effects of Act 60 on land use profitability are better understood, big picture land-use decisions should be postponed. Another consideration is that since the adoption of Act 60, municipalities have seen more muted financial benefits to local economic development. *[Two potential avenues for discussion here: 1) Accept that some additional commercial/industrial growth will generate additional tax revenue, and move forward with that; or 2) Continue to pause any major zoning recommendations until a fiscal benefit analysis can be completed, and recommend that be done, or 3) or both]* Going forward, the town needs to find the appropriate mix of land uses and development to support a balanced tax base.

GOAL F1

To mMaintain 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.

GOAL F0

To eEncourage the development and expansion of appropriate and compatible industry and business in the town.

Housing

Nationwide, our country is experiencing a significant issue where housing has been in short supply, and is becoming increasingly unaffordable. This problem is particularly acute with the lack of available “long-term” rentals for people who aren’t yet ready or able to buy. The Town of Georgia is not immune to this phenomena. Data in Part II of this plan illustrates a continued decline in the number of rental properties, a growing lack of diversity on housing types, and home prices which are rising faster than the surrounding region. This is reflected in the community survey where a majority of respondents felt that the types of housing needed in Georgia were not available for people, and a larger majority felt they were not affordable. The current lack of diversity in the local housing stock is creating a landscape where younger people and families cannot afford to live here, including local workers and seniors looking to age-in-place.

HOME Act

The “Housing Opportunities Made for Everyone” (HOME) Act was enacted by the State of Vermont in 2023. This Act amends state law regarding planning and development, Act 250 and other laws to help enable new housing opportunities to address the housing crisis. This Act calls on local municipalities to address housing affordability through a variety of mechanisms, including allowing 2-family duplexes in any district where single-family homes are permitted, allowing Accessory Dwelling Units in all districts where single-family homes are permitted, and allowing small multi-family apartments (3-4 units) in any area served by municipal water and sewer.

The town has an obligation and self-interest to address this issue, however public support for new housing in Georgia is extremely low. Attracting additional residential growth or affordable rental properties scored at the bottom of importance for managing future growth in the community survey, and ranked last in terms of overall town priorities.

Some of the housing goals of this plan are already addressed by the Vermont State “HOME” Act of 2023, which requires additional housing diversity.

GOAL G1	To e Ensure that safe, sanitary and adequate housing is available and affordable for Georgia residents.
GOAL G0	To a Achieve a <u>more balanced and diverse diversified</u> mix of housing types that meet the needs of Georgia’s population at every stage of life.
GOAL G0	<u>Utilize the development potential of the South Village area to accommodate new housing options where infrastructure is able to support it while protecting the rural areas of the town.</u>