



In April 2017, the Vermont Creative Network commissioned Claire Wheeler of Montpelier to survey Vermont's town plans. Claire looked for specific references to the arts, culture, creativity, and innovation (ACCI).

Background: The Role of Town Plans

Why do Vermont towns have plans? What purpose do town plans serve, and are there laws supporting their creation? We found a long answer to these questions in the Vermont Statutes: specifically in Title 24, Chapter 117, [Municipal and Regional Planning and Development](#), and a shorter answer on the [Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Planning Commission's \(TRORC\) website](#). The TRORC site says, "Town plans, also called comprehensive plans, lay out a vision for the town for next twenty years. What should the zoning do? Should we consolidate schools? What about a new fire truck? How will we conserve wildlife? All of these and more are questions that can be answered in the town plan can answer. The plans expire eight years after adoption so that they do not get stale. Towns are required to have a valid plan in place if they are going to adopt or amend any bylaws, but expiration of a plan will not affect bylaws in place."

This study helps us understand similarities, complexities, and omissions about the arts, culture, creativity, and innovation.

Study Findings

A few plans reference, as a framework/introduction to the plan, the Vermont Municipal and Regional Planning and Development Act referenced above. Occasionally, arts and culture were included within the vision statement and/or as part of the historical account of a town, even if arts then did not have a place at the table in the plan itself.

- A total of 104 town plans mention ACCI using either single words or words in conjunction with others (cultural industry, cultural environments, or — popularly — creative economy)
- Close to 10% of Vermont's town plans have a section or chapter in which some aspect of ACCI plays significantly
- A total of 93 goals, 82 policies, and 164 action steps related to ACCI were identified

The word "art" or "arts" was the best indicator that a town plan had integrated arts, culture, creativity, and innovation into its plan. Towns with larger populations and downtown centers tend to focus on arts and culture more so than less populated, more rural towns.

Integration of arts into town plans most typically fall into two sections:

- Natural/Historic/Cultural/Scenic/Recreational Resources – listing the institutions, programs, and organizations that host cultural events and arts programming; and
- Economic Development – listing the arts an industry that supports local employment, as a part of the local economy, and as a key strategy to increase tourism. Of the 195 plans with Economic Development sections, 74 (38%) included mention of ACCI

The creative economy -- which includes supporting home-based and retail businesses that include artists and artisans – trends as a topic in several town plans. Plans for developing high-speed and broadband internet to support growth in this sector. In a few plans were related to this subject. This is also referred to as the “informal economy.”

Art is often associated with a sense of place and quality of life.

Where the Words Are | ACCI

“Arts” were often mentioned within the education section, referring to arts programs or spaces in local schools. Because this was so common but did not speak to a particular focus on the arts, the consultant did not track these occurrences.

The words “culture” or “cultural” appear often but are red herrings. Town plans typically use this word in combination with “scenic,” “historic,” and “natural” to refer to the archeological, geographical, and agricultural assets of the town. The consultant included instances of this word in the survey only when it was clear that the intended use spanned beyond historical or natural features to include the arts and humanities.

Libraries are oft cited as the hub for cultural programs. References to libraries were omitted unless they were specific to the arts and humanities.

The word “creative” was found with some regularity, but was often used in the context of encouraging creative siting or creative housing solutions and therefore not material to this review. The exception to this rule was its use within the term “creative economy” and occasionally when it was used to describe the “creative arts.”

The word “innovative” was rarely used in the same context of the survey. It was often used to describe wastewater management or specific building and development requirements or goals.

Towns of Interest

- Brandon: examples of integrating arts explicitly into a “cultural resources” section for smaller towns. Includes a model one-page layout



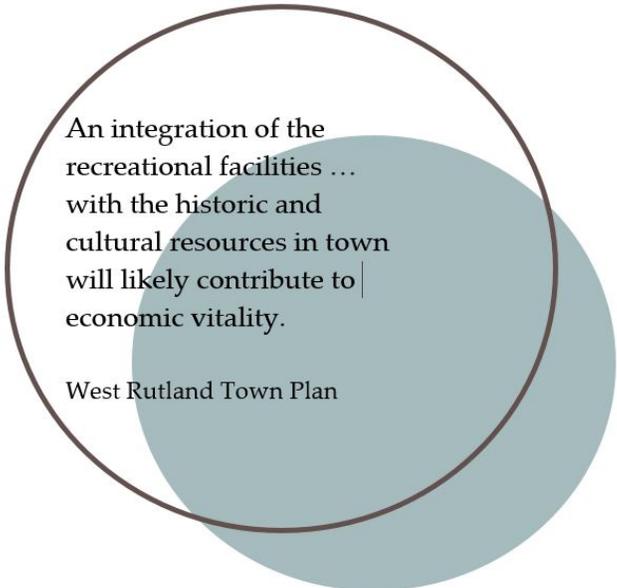
- Brattleboro: extensive integration of arts into economic development chapter and example of an arts and culture chapter with clear goals, policies, and actions
- Greensboro: policy to create a marketing cooperative for artists
- Hartford: economic development focus names artists as economic assets, linking them to the revitalization of White River Junction. Of particular interest is the statement that “Low rental real estate costs that help to incubate new businesses, attract firms seeking a lower cost location, and support users, such as artists and artisans, that need low-cost space to be viable.” Also of interest is the strategy to create arts organizations in order to strengthen recognition and support for the community’s arts and cultural assets
- Huntington: use of the word “innovation” and unique approach to economic development principles. “Create a culture of collaboration by government representatives, community members, and organizations that encourages innovation, sharing of resources, and jointly shared accountability.” And, “Foster innovation. Capture opportunities and respond to challenges by cultivating a spirit of problem solving and to enabling the risk-taking inherent in innovation.”
- Mendon: support for arts and informal economy as childcare strategy
- Middlebury: promotes the idea that strong culture equals strong economy
- Middletown Springs: use of the term “social capital” to speak to role of creative arts, productivity, and participation in community. Ideas on how the select board could support local artists
- Montgomery: sample town vision statement. “We value our connections with each other through the arts, local entertainment, and a willingness to support our neighbors and the community that binds us”
- Montpelier: extensive integration of arts throughout document, impressive strategies to support the arts and artists
- Pittsford: combines arts and education to achieve creative education
- Poultney – use of creative economy to support local arts
- Stowe: integration of arts as key economic and community driver
- Swanton: focus to create the Swanton Arts Council
- West Rutland: incorporation of arts into transportation policy

Favorite Quotes

"Social systems and human development is about education, recreation, health; it’s about the creativity we express in the world through the arts, music, and cultural pursuits, and the shared sense of community that is so important to our small town life." Montpelier Town Plan, page 15

“When viewed as a tourist amenity, the arts are clearly an economic driver." Waterbury Town Plan, page 26

“A sense of community shall be fortified by the expansion of arts and other cultural opportunities." Essex Town Plan, page 81



An integration of the recreational facilities ... with the historic and cultural resources in town will likely contribute to economic vitality.

West Rutland Town Plan

"Tinmouth residents have a tradition of working together to solve problems and assist others in their work or in their homes. It is important that all Tinmouth residents have access to ongoing education. It spurs creativity and ingenuity at home and at work, and helps to fulfill our lives." Tinmouth Town Plan, page 38

"The remains of the once booming quarries have fostered the growth of an arts community focused on marble carving and sculpture. An integration of the recreational facilities in West Rutland ... with the historic and cultural resources in town will likely contribute to economic vitality." West Rutland Town Plan, page 24

Methodology

The consultant sought to connect with digital plans or people in all 251 towns. Of those, about 15 remained elusive. In all surveyed communities, the consultant tracked the mention and integration of language regarding the arts, culture, creativity and innovation (ACCI). This process included a two-pronged approach: 1) a search for the words within the document, and 2) scans of tables of contents for specific indications. This process was aided by the discovery of the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, which hosts links to town information via regional planning commissions.