Memorandum

To:	Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Northeast Vermont Development Association (NVDA), Towns of Greensboro, Wolcott, Walden, Woodbury, Elmore, Stannard, and Cabot
From:	Hardwick Planning Commission with Kristen Leahy, Zoning and Floodplain Administrator
Date:	November 10, 2025
Re:	Report on Proposed 2025 Amendments to the Town of Hardwick Unified Development Bylaws

Purpose

This report provides information related to proposed amendments to the Town of Hardwick Unified Development Bylaws as discussed by the Planning Commission at multiple public meetings. A formal public hearing is scheduled for the December 9, 2025 Planning Commission meeting; and will be discussed by the Hardwick Selectboard in early 2026 including formal public hearings.

The amendments specifically impact the following parts of these bylaws:

Article 1: Authority and Purpose;
Article 2: Zoning Districts
Article 3: General Regulations
Article 4: Specific Use Provision
Article 5: Development Review
Article 6: Subdivision Review
Article 7: Administration and Enforcement
Article 8: Definitions.
Town of Hardwick Zoning Map

Background

Since the completion of the 2024 Bylaw update that brought the Town of Hardwick's Unified Development Bylaws into compliance with the Vermont HOME Act and modernized local floodplain regulations, the Planning Commission has continued its phased review of the Bylaws to align with state requirements and local land-use priorities.

Over the course of 2024–2025, the Commission focused on advancing the next phase of bylaw modernization work. This stage includes the establishment of a Village Center Zoning District for East Hardwick, creation of a River Corridor Overlay District, and removal of references to local Act 250 review authority in accordance with Act 181. In addition, minor refinements are proposed to support incremental housing opportunities and further clarify administrative and development review language.

These amendments build directly on the 2024 work by continuing to improve regulatory clarity, support compact settlement patterns in areas served by municipal infrastructure, and strengthen long-term flood resilience and river corridor protection.

Purpose of Amendments

The proposed amendments are intended to:

1. Create and integrate a Village Center Zoning District for East Hardwick consistent with its state-designated Village Center status.
2. Establish a River Corridor Overlay District to reduce erosion risk, protect natural river functions, and enhance community flood resilience.
3. Remove references to local Act 250 review to comply with Act 181 and clarify permitting responsibilities.
4. Make targeted adjustments to dimensional and use standards to support additional incremental housing opportunities in serviced areas.
5. Improve clarity, consistency, and administrative usability across multiple sections of the Bylaws.

This phase represents the next step in Hardwick's ongoing bylaw improvement process, following the 2024 compliance updates.

Proposed Amendments

The proposed amendments:

1. Create the Village Center Zoning District (East Hardwick)
2. Establish the River Corridor Overlay District
3. Remove local Act 250 references and update related review language
4. Refine selected dimensional and residential standards to support incremental housing
5. Update definitions and cross-references
6. Improve clarity in administrative and procedural language
7. Strikeout text indicates deletions. Underlined text indicates additions.

A zoning map amendment is included to establish the new Village Center District boundary.

Consistency with the Hardwick Municipal Plan (2019; Update underway)

The following information is provided to address the requirements of 24 V.S.A. § 4441 regarding consistency of the proposed amendments to the Town of Hardwick Municipal Plan, adopted in November 2019.

Specifically, statute requires municipalities to consider three parts when reviewing proposals for new or amended bylaws. These considerations include:

1. Conforms with or furthers the goals and policies contained in the municipal plan, including the effect of the proposal on the availability of safe and affordable housing.

The Town updated the Municipal Plan in 2019. The Plan contains specific chapters addressing housing, land use, and flood resilience, and includes the goal "For Hardwick to have safe and affordable housing available in a variety of types for all incomes, ages, and for those with special needs."

The proposed amendments advance these goals by supporting compact settlement patterns and enabling housing opportunities within areas served by municipal water and wastewater. Establishing a Village Center Zoning District for East Hardwick promotes small-scale, walkable residential growth consistent with historic development patterns, and aligns with the Plan's policy that "multifamily housing is encouraged in our village centers." Targeted refinements to dimensional and use standards further reduce barriers to incremental housing development. The Municipal Plan also identifies a goal "to encourage a flood-resilient community."

The adoption of the River Corridor Overlay District and refinement of related review language directly support this objective by clarifying standards for development in fluvial erosion hazard areas, guiding development toward safer locations, and strengthening long-term resiliency. These updates build on the 2024 modernization of the Town's flood hazard regulations and further align local regulations with state river corridor policy.

These amendments improve clarity, promote safe and affordable housing options in appropriate areas, and advance Hardwick's long-term flood-resilience strategy in accordance with the Municipal Plan.

2. Is compatible with the proposed future land uses and densities of the municipal plan.

The proposed amendments are consistent with the future land uses and planned densities outlined in the Town's Municipal Plan. The Municipal Plan designates village areas served by municipal water and wastewater for higher-density residential development and compact, walkable land use patterns. The creation of a Village Center Zoning District for East Hardwick reinforces this land-use strategy by supporting modest residential growth, mixed village uses, and pedestrian-scaled development in an existing historic settlement area.

The amendments do not alter the overall density structure of the Town's zoning districts; rather, they refine standards and allowable uses to better align with the Plan's goals for targeted infill

and housing opportunities in serviced areas.

Consistent with the Municipal Plan's flood-resilience policies, the establishment of the River Corridor Overlay District helps direct new development away from erosion-prone areas and sensitive river corridors. This aligns with the Plan policy that "New development in identified flood hazard, fluvial erosion, and river corridor protection areas should be avoided" and strengthens the Town's long-term resilience strategy by guiding development to appropriate locations.

Together, these amendments support the land-use patterns envisioned in the Municipal Plan by reinforcing village-center growth, maintaining rural character outside serviced areas, and protecting river corridors and flood-prone lands from future development pressures.

3. Carries out, as applicable, any specific proposals for any planned community facilities.

The proposed amendments do not conflict with any planned community facilities identified in the Municipal Plan and do not change the location, capacity, or operation of municipal infrastructure or public services. Instead, the amendments reinforce efficient use of existing public water and wastewater systems by guiding development toward established village areas and areas already served by municipal utilities.

The creation of the Village Center Zoning District in East Hardwick is consistent with the Town's planning priorities to support village vitality and make effective use of existing infrastructure and services in designated centers. Similarly, the River Corridor Overlay District supports long-term municipal resilience by reducing future exposure of public infrastructure to flood and erosion hazards and by guiding development away from areas that could require costly public intervention or emergency response in the future.

No new community facilities are required to implement these amendments, and the changes are aligned with ongoing municipal capital investments, hazard mitigation planning efforts, and community resilience initiatives.