This plan combines the Regional Plan, the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), and the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) into one integrated plan.

For a healthy, inclusive, and prosperous community.

Adopted 6/19/2013

Chapter 1
1.0 Introduction


- **The ECOS Project is** both a process and a plan for managing sustainable growth in Chittenden County.
- **The ECOS Project is** a unique opportunity for municipalities, organizations, businesses and residents to work together to preserve and improve our quality of life.
- **The ECOS Project is** for anyone and everyone interested in how we live, work and play together in Chittenden County.

Three Plans Combined Into One

The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) is charged by the State of Vermont with preparing a regional plan at least every eight years to protect the County’s resources and to guide its development. The CCRPC is also charged with establishing a Metropolitan Transportation Plan every five years to address the long term transportation needs of Chittenden County. The Greater Burlington Industrial Corporation (GBIC) is charged with establishing a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) every five years to establish economic development priorities for Chittenden County. More detail on the purpose of these plans can be found in Chapter 4. An opportunity to update all three regional planning documents with one process became available when the region received a Partnership for Sustainable Communities grant (a partnership of Federal Housing and Urban Development, Environmental Protection Agency, and US Department of Transportation). The ECOS Plan is the combined Chittenden County Regional Plan, Metropolitan Transportation Plan and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

Community and regional planning enable people with different outlooks and awareness to learn about important and sometimes controversial matters, to agree on common objectives, and to collaborate on undertaking coordinated agendas of actions. Public planning should strive to engage people not only because our laws and democratic traditions require it, but also because public engagement makes planning better. Effective public planning promotes:

- Greater understanding of key facts;
- Deeper and more widespread appreciation of divergent views;
- Increased consensus on important goals and objectives; and
- Improved collaboration among stakeholders.

Planning for an entire region is especially challenging. While we all agree that Chittenden County should be a “great place to live, work and play,” there are myriad visions of exactly how such a place should look and which actions we should undertake to achieve this goal. The ECOS Plan is intended to articulate the current consensus for our County’s future.

Document Overview
This planning document roughly parallels the process of creating the plan, and is in 4 main sections:

1. **Overview and Vision**, including demographic information of the area
2. **Analysis and Current Conditions**, culminating in a list of 31 high-priority concerns
3. **Strategies and Actions**, integrated approaches addressing concerns
4. **Using the Plan**, as the Regional Plan, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), and Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

### 1.1 ECOS Process Summary

The ECOS grant allowed CCRPC and GBIC to significantly expand both the depth of analysis and public engagement in developing a unified Regional, Transportation, and Economic Plan for Chittenden County. Beginning in March 2011, 65 partner organizations and many others have gone through a five phase process to develop this Plan (see below). All participants signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to participate in the process, and to review the work with their individual organizations that they were representing. In addition, GBIC formed a CEDS committee composed of the GBIC board and Cynosure board members. The composition of this committee was intended to comply with EDA requirements for overseeing the preparation of a CEDS.

The ECOS Planning process started with the agreement of several key principles: transparency of process, setting priorities at each step, and accountability. Additionally, there has been a focus on building on previous planning work rather than starting from scratch, as much great work has already been done; and there has been a strong emphasis on community engagement.

The results of this collaborative process can be divided into two parts: analysis and actions. The first part (Chapter 2) looks at community goals, with an analysis of our existing situation, and establishes key indicators to measure our progress on an annual basis. Out of that process came a list of 33 concerns.

The second part (Chapter 3 and 4) looks at the choices we have to address these needs and recommends priority strategies and actions with a focus on implementation.

There is a commitment to annually measuring the community indicators to see if we are achieving our goals and also measuring our collective performance in implementing the actions. This is similar to the Results-based Accountability Model™ that is used by United Way and many other organizations.

The specific process the ECOS Steering Committee and partners went through to develop this plan is summarized below.

1. **Goals** (found in Chapter 2) – based on the 60 existing planning documents.
   a. **ECOS Steering Committee Retreat** – Held on May 25, 2011 to vet the Draft Goal Statements; there were 67 participants.
   b. **Public review** from July 14 to September 30, 2011 including sub-committee reviews resulting in 123 comments from 65 groups/individuals.
   c. **Vision, Principles, and Goals** were approved by the ECOS Steering Committee on October 26, 2011.
2. **Analysis** (referenced in Chapter 2, specific reports are here: www.ecosproject.com/analysis)
a. Technical experts were brought in to analyze topic areas including economy, housing, land use and transportation, energy, natural resources, public health, education, and climate change. It is important to note that the land use and transportation analysis report is based on a significant scenario planning exercise conducted by the CCRPC (CCMPO at that time) from 2008 to 2010. Over 900 people participated in the workshops and follow-up survey. More detail about the scenario planning exercise is provided in Chapter 3.

b. Public review from November 15 to December 31, 2011 resulting in 686 comments from 18 individuals/groups. At the same time the technical experts and sub-committees continued to review and improve the analysis reports.

c. Analysis Reports were accepted by the ECOS Steering Committee on January 25, 2012.

3. Indicators (found in Chapter 2)
   a. The University of Vermont Center for Rural Studies assisted with creating a possible list of indicators that will help monitor our progress toward goal attainment on an annual basis.
   b. The draft Indicators were released for public review from February 1 to March 16, 2012. Over 400 comments were received.
   c. The Interim Indicator Report was accepted by the ECOS Steering Committee on April 25, 2012.
   d. The ECOS Steering Committee, CEDS Committee, CCRPC’s Long Range Planning Committee and sub-committees (Natural Systems, Transportation, Social Community, Health, Education, Climate, Economic Development, Energy, and Housing) reviewed and recommended revised Indicators between July and September, 2012. These revisions are reflected in Chapter 2 of this ECOS Plan.

4. Plan Priorities (found in Chapter 3)
   a. Public engagement activities managed by Burlington City Arts were conducted from June through August to gather more community input on concerns and strategies for addressing those concerns. 130 hours of public engagement took place in these efforts with over 600 people participating. See more detail about these activities below.
   b. In order to connect with as many diverse constituents as possible, CCRPC’s Equity Coordinator, met with representatives from community and issue-oriented groups and organizations whose priorities are to serve marginalized communities. Input from over 600 people has been collected over the eighteen month process. See more detail about this public engagement below.
   c. The ECOS Steering Committee, CEDS Committee, CCRPC’s Long Range Planning Committee, sub-committees and partners developed concerns and recommended strategies and actions between July and October, 2012. The concerns are listed at the end of Chapter 2. Over-arching strategies and actions are in Chapter 3.
   d. These concerns, strategies and actions were incorporated into the Discussion Draft of the ECOS Plan, which was reviewed by the public between November 15 and December 31, 2012. A specific public engagement website tool was created to get direct feedback on the strategies and actions. Approximately 400 people participated - 130 comments were made, 2800 votes were cast. The most favorable responses were related to the
water quality, planned development, and economic development strategies. Direct discussions were also held with each municipality’s elected body from November, 2012 through January, 2013.

5. Plan Implementation
   a. The ECOS Steering Committee, CCRPC’s Long Range Planning Committee and sub-committees and partners developed draft ECOS Criteria for prioritizing ECOS Grant projects between April 25 and July 25, 2012.
   b. A request for proposed ECOS Grant projects was released on August 1, 2012 with proposals submitted by September 15, 2012. 55 grant applications were received for a total request of $2,205,537 and a total proposed investment of $4,274,715.
   c. The ECOS Steering Committee awarded grant funds to eight (8) projects, for a total of $280,000 on October 24, 2012. These can be found in the ECOS Project list located in Appendix A of this Plan.

6. ECOS Plan Adoption
   a. The revised Draft ECOS Plan was approved by the ECOS Steering Committee on January 30, 2013 and recommended to CCRPC and CEDS Committee for adoption.
   b. The CCRPC Executive Committee, on behalf of the full Board, approved the first Public Hearing Draft on February 6, 2013. The second Public Hearing Draft was approved by CCRPC and the CEDS Committee on April 17, 2013.
   c. Public hearings were held by CCRPC on March 20, 2013 and May 22, 2013. Both of these hearings were preceded by 30 day public comment periods.
   d. The Chittenden County ECOS Plan was adopted by CCRPC on June 19, 2013 and by GBIC/CEDS Committee on June 25, 2013.

Community Engagement Specifics

Community engagement is the foundation of the ECOS Plan. Meaningful community engagement breaks down silos and shrinks the distance between people from diverse and divergent perspectives, expertise, and experience. In order to build a vision and create a plan that leads to equitable access and opportunities for everyone, engagement must include people of all income, racial, and ethnic groups, with particular attention to groups that have been historically left out of the public policy decision-making processes. Intentional and innovative methods need to be developed that foster inclusion of and engagement by low-income communities and communities from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

Meaningful community engagement is not a one-time interview or survey; it is the development of an ongoing relationship with a continuous loop for input and feedback on decisions and outcomes. Successful community engagement leads to transformative engagement where democratic mechanisms are created to ensure that shared power and decision-making control are vested in marginalized communities.

As in the rest of the country, demographics in Chittenden County are dramatically changing. While the White, non-Hispanic population has slowly grown about four percent from 2000 to 2010, the population of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups has grown at a much more rapid pace, most over fifty
percent. (See Figure 11) Chittenden County also has a growing population of those who make under 200% of the federal poverty level. (See [http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.cfm](http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/index.cfm).) Due to these changing demographics, it is critical to establish inclusive methods for outreach and meaningful engagement so we may achieve greater equitable outcomes for our region. In order to connect with as many historically underrepresented constituents as possible, CCRPC’s Equity Coordinator met with individuals from community and issue-oriented groups and organizations whose priorities are to serve marginalized communities. The Equity Coordinator also met with key informants and informal leaders of various underrepresented ethnic and cultural groups. Input from over 600 people from marginalized communities has been collected over an eighteen month process. An initial large gathering of representatives from diverse cultural groups took place on September 24, 2011 to introduce the ECOS project and invite their input and participation. Follow up meetings for input and feedback have included individual meetings, personal interviews, focus groups, and various gatherings. Input has been collected from people in the following groups: persons of various socioeconomic statuses, diverse racial and ethnic communities, the aged and the young. New Americans that participated include immigrants from: Bosnia, Bhutan, Burundi, the Congo, Iraq, Kenya, Russia, Somali, including both Somali Bantu and ethnic, Sudan, Turkey, and Vietnam. The Equity Coordinator ensured that feedback was continuous through the development of this Plan.

In addition, the ECOS Project teamed-up with organizational partner Burlington City Arts to do outreach and community engagement. The goal was to learn about residents’ priorities for initiatives – “What should we do and who should do it? – by engaging community members in different creative endeavors as a means to reflect on what’s important to them: what they like about living here, and what they would like to see change. Rather than conducting a survey, this creative, qualitative approach was meant to explore peoples’ ideas and feelings about the institutions they interact with and their surroundings.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

It’s not surprising that most people who live here – whether young, old, new comer or 7th generation – all care about similar things: protecting the environment and our open lands; affordable housing; a variety of transportation concerns, including a desire for more buses and bike paths; access to health care, good schools and job training; and access to healthy foods. From the works on display, you’ll see these themes expressed in different ways. The ECOS Project will now take all this input, and integrate it into the project’s priorities moving forward.

The Burlington City Arts engagement activities included:

- **Community-created murals**
  - **WHAT:** We went to four different towns (we couldn’t go to all 19!) and conducted workshops with residents.
  - **PROCESS Part I:** We led them through a series of exercises and discussions, where their thoughts and ideas were visualized live by illustrator Matt Heywood. Then we asked
them to indicate their priorities by adding colored stickers to the mural indicating who (Individuals, Businesses or Government) they thought should do what.

- **PROCESS Part II:** Then we took those murals out into the public – to Church Street during the Discover Jazz Festival, and to the Champlain Valley Fair – and asked passers-by to draw on the murals, indicating what their priorities are for the County.

- **PROCESS Part III:** Illustrator Matt Heywood then took all of the original drawings and synthesized them into a single work, which further reflects the threads of the conversations and reinforces the themes discussed.

![Mural by Matt Heywood, The Image Farm](image.png)

- **Community Portraits**
  - **WHAT:** While Chittenden County’s growth includes many people from many places, a good number of them are “new Americans,” who have often come to this area because of difficult situations in their homelands. The immigrants have tended to concentrate in Burlington and Winooski, though previous influxes of new comers have also settled in Essex and South Burlington, among other towns.
  - **PROCESS:** We recruited photographer Dan Higgins to learn about the interests and concerns of different groups of New Americans, who are in different stages of assimilation into our communities. The series of portraits are the result of his sensitive and generous time with people, who invited him into their world to capture their current experience. The words that accompany the exhibit are their responses to the question of what works, what doesn’t work, and, from their perspectives, what could be improved in the Chittenden County of the future.

- **Youth Creative Writing**
WHAT: The decisions we make now are going to be inherited by our children, and so we wanted to find out what young people are thinking about the future, and what is important to them.

PROCESS: We partnered with the Young Writer’s Project to create a prompt for their engaged community of young writers, asking them “What does 2035 look like to you?” The three winning entries and two honorable mentions can be found on the ECOS website. The winning three pieces are also recorded by the authors.

1.2 Vision
Our vision is that Chittenden County be a healthy, inclusive and prosperous community.

1.3 Mission
We will have a collaborative planning process with citizens, public and private organizations to develop a consensus regarding priority actions to achieve the goals below. The intent of this effort is to strengthen and enhance coordination, accountability and implementation of the plans of participating organizations such as state and local governments, planning organizations and other partner organizations - including business, environmental, education, and human services.

1.4 Principles
Principles describe our underlying values and guide the selection of strategies and actions to achieve our goals. These 10 principles will guide the selection of strategies and actions to achieve our goals (adapted from Sustainability Goals & Guiding Principles, ICLEI, October 2010).

1. Think—and act—systemically. Sustainable communities take a systems perspective and recognize that people, nature and the economy are all affected by their actions. Local governments in these communities consider the broader implications before embarking on specific projects, and they look for ways to accomplish multiple goals rather than default to short-term, piecemeal efforts.

2. Instill resiliency. Sustainable communities possess a strong capacity to respond to and bounce back from adversity. Local governments in these communities prepare for and help residents and institutions prepare for disruptions and respond to them swiftly, creatively and effectively.

3. Foster innovation. Sustainable communities capture opportunities and respond to challenges. Local governments in these communities cultivate a spirit of proactive problem solving to provide access to futures otherwise unobtainable and to enable the risk-taking inherent in innovation.

4. Redefine progress. Sustainable communities measure progress by improvements in the health and wellbeing of their people, environment and economy. Instead of focusing on GDP (throughput of dollars), local governments in these communities use a broad set of indicators.

5. Live within means. Sustainable communities steward natural resources so that future generations have as many opportunities available to them as we do today. They also recognize
that resources exist for the benefit of life forms other than humans. Local governments in these communities assess resources, track impacts, and take corrective action when needed so that they meet the needs of today while maintaining and improving what they leave for future generations.

6. **Cultivate collaboration.** Sustainable communities engage all facets of society in working together for the benefit of the whole. Local governments in these communities bring government representatives, community members and organizations together and create a culture of collaboration that encourages innovation, sharing of resources, and jointly shared accountability for results.

7. **Ensure equity.** Sustainable communities allocate resources and opportunities fairly so that all people who do the full range of jobs that a community needs can thrive in it. Local governments in these communities actively eliminate barriers to full participation in community life and work to correct past injustices.

8. **Embrace diversity.** Sustainable communities feature a tapestry of peoples, cultures and economies underpinned by a richly functioning natural environment. Local governments in these communities celebrate and foster ethnic, cultural, economic and biological diversity and encourage multiple approaches to accomplish a goal.

9. **Inspire leadership.** Sustainable communities provide leadership through action and results. Local governments in these communities recognize their opportunity to effect change by backing visionary policies with practices that serve as an example for citizens and businesses to emulate.

10. **Continuously improve.** Sustainable communities engage in continuous discovery, rediscovery and invention as they learn more about the impacts of their actions. Local governments in these communities track both performance and outcomes, are alert for unintended consequences, and modify strategies based on observed results.

### 1.5 Broad Goals

1. **Natural Systems** – Design and maintain a strategically planned and managed green infrastructure network composed of natural lands, working landscapes, and open spaces that conserve ecosystem values and functions, and provide associated benefits to our community.

2. **Social Community** – Promote the skills, resources, and assurances needed for all community members to participate in the workforce and in their family, civic and cultural lives, within and among their neighborhoods, and in the larger community.

3. **Economic Infrastructure** – Build the region’s capacity for shared and sustainable improvements in the economic wellbeing of the community through support of both local and globally competitive initiatives.

4. **Built Environment** - Make public and private investments in the built environment to minimize environmental impact, maximize financial efficiency, optimize social equity and benefits, and improve public health.