



MAD RIVER VALLEY
PLANNING DISTRICT



2024 Year in Review

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A Word From Our Staff



As we begin 2025, the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD) would like to reflect on the past year's efforts.

In 2024, we made significant progress supporting the Mad River Valley community in several areas, including municipal planning efforts, infrastructure development, transportation planning, flood recovery, and data collection.

This report highlights our collective accomplishments and the impact of MRVPD's work while also demonstrating our commitment to fostering a sustainable future. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our staff, volunteers, partners, and community members who have been instrumental in driving our mission forward: *to be an innovative, vibrant, connected, and caring community honoring its past, celebrating its landscape, and actively pursuing its potential.*

JOSHUA SCHWARTZ,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SAM ROBINSON,
COMMUNITY PLANNER



The Mad River Valley Planning District was created in 1985 by the Towns of Fayston, Waitsfield, and Warren. The Purpose of the Planning District is to "carry out a program of planning for the future of the Mad River Valley. The planning program shall be directed toward the physical, social, economic, fiscal, environmental, cultural and aesthetic wellbeing of the member Towns and its inhabitants."

Our History

The history of the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVDP), and planning in the Mad River Valley (MRV), is the story of a community coming together to understand its identity amidst a changing landscape and economy.

The introduction of skiing (Mad River Glen in 1948 and Sugarbush Resort in 1958) brought rapid changes to land use and development patterns in the MRV. The Planning District was created during this rapid ski-associated development, which brought new life and economic activity to the Valley—and, along with it, intense growth pressure.

As a result, the towns of Fayston, Waitsfield, and Warren agreed to participate in an innovative multi-town planning program facilitated by the newly created Mad River Valley Planning District.

As noted in the Mad River Valley Planning District Articles of Agreement (March 1985), MRVDP's purpose is to:

"[. . .] carry out a program of planning for the future of the Mad River Valley. The planning program shall be directed toward the physical, social, economic, fiscal, environmental, cultural and aesthetic well-being of the Towns of Fayston, Waitsfield and Warren [. . .] and their inhabitants."

To this end, the MRVDP provides professional planning, leadership, coordination, and implementation support to its member towns.



A 7-member Steering Committee oversees MRVDP's activities, with voting representatives from each town's Selectboard and Planning Commission, plus the MRV Chamber of Commerce. Sugarbush Resort and the Central VT Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) serve as non-voting members. MRVDP is funded in equal portions by Fayston, Waitsfield, Warren, and Sugarbush Resort. Public meetings occur monthly on the third Thursday at 7 pm, with details at mrvpd.org. Joshua Schwartz serves as Executive Director alongside Community Planner, Sam Robinson.

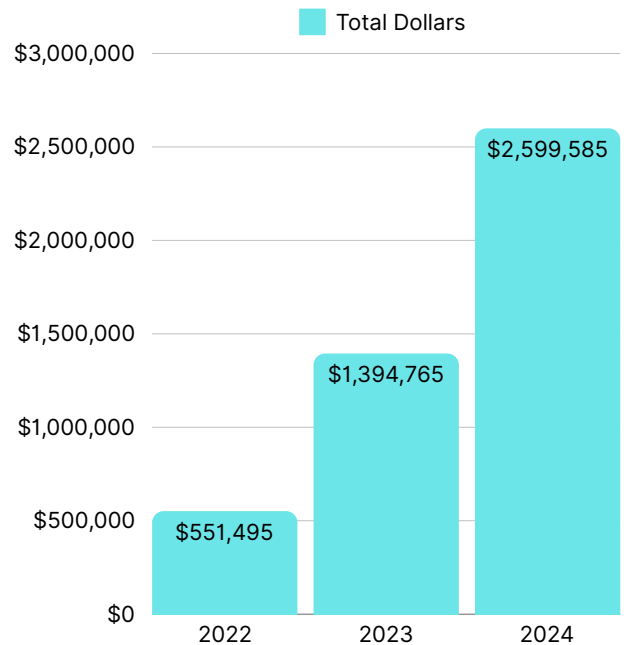
Grant History

One way MRVPD contributes to the MRV's vitality is by pursuing federal and local grant opportunities in support of locally driven initiatives. Our commitment to navigating and securing these funds is a testament to our dedication to the Mad River Valley, ensuring that the MRV towns and Sugarbush Resort's financial contributions to MRVPD are supplemented with additional resources. This approach leverages and amplifies the impact of every dollar spent by bringing in significant external funding, which has proven beneficial in implementing diverse and crucial projects across the MRV.

These grants have enabled the undertaking of initiatives that would have otherwise been beyond our reach, directly benefiting MRV residents and enhancing the quality of life in our community. We are proud of our role in these achievements, yet

remain humbly aware that our efforts are a small part of the larger collaborative spirit that defines the Mad River Valley.

Total Grant Dollars Awarded in 2024: **\$2,599,585**



MRVPD brought **\$2,599,585** in grants to the MRV in 2024, either through direct pursuit or guidance and support to town officials or local entities, totaling **\$8.2 million since 2009**.



Recent Projects





Waitsfield Community Wastewater Project



Since 2021, the Town of Waitsfield has been actively pursuing municipal wastewater infrastructure for Irasville and Waitsfield Village to address multiple community needs: to protect the Mad River water quality, safeguard public health, ease the economic burdens of septic replacements, expand housing options, and ultimately preserve the community's historic settlement patterns.

Following a 2022 Feasibility Study and a 2023 Preliminary Engineering Report (PER), the project identified a preferred alternative: a municipal wastewater system utilizing multi-stage treatment and in-ground disposal of 89,000 gallons per day at the town-owned Munn Site on Kingsbury Road.

Building on this foundation, 2024 marked a year of progress. In early 2024, the project's Funding Team presented a strategic funding approach to the Waitsfield Selectboard, outlining plans to attempt to secure \$12.6 million in federal and state grants toward the estimated \$15 million project cost, with the remainder to be financed through a USDA Rural Development low-interest loan. In order to facilitate this funding strategy, the town was required to have a successful bond vote for the full project cost, to demonstrate the community's commitment to the project.

Town of Waitsfield and MRVPD staff led a comprehensive community engagement campaign before the 6/11/24 bond vote. The team secured \$5,000 of grant funding to support the project's outreach efforts, coordinated the creation of an informational video regarding the project's significance, created promotional materials, and conducted direct community outreach at the Waitsfield Farmers Market and Mehuron's. Through weekly project team meetings and public information sessions, staff ensured consistent public communication about the project. These efforts resonated with the community, resulting in strong voter approval of the \$15 million bond by a margin of 415 to 140 (75%).

Following the bond vote, MRVPD staff continued to assist with project management through FY25. The project team completed crucial technical components, including topographic surveys, wetland assessments, rare plant studies, and cultural resource evaluations. From October to early December, a wastewater loading test at the Munn Site provided essential data for the wastewater treatment facility design.

Looking ahead to 2025, the project team aims to complete engineering design and draft bid documents by the summer while continuing to pursue additional funding opportunities through various federal and state programs. The project maintains its goal of ensuring affordable user rates without burdening taxpayers while delivering this essential infrastructure improvement for the community.



“ **The Mad River Valley Planning District is a cornerstone of our community's growth and well-being.** Mike Curtin, MRV Rotary ”

VT-100 Active Transportation Corridor Study

In December 2023, the Mad River Path, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC), and Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD) submitted a joint application for \$84,000 through the Vermont Department of Transportation's (VTTrans) Transportation Alternatives Grant Program. The funding would support a feasibility study for a 10-foot-wide, ADA-accessible shared-use path running parallel to, but separate from, VT-100 between Warren and Moretown. By March 2024, the project team was notified that their application had been fully funded.

Following this success, the project team hired Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., as the scoping study consultant and established a Scoping Study Team, which included members from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC), VTTrans, the Mad River Path, and the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD). A project Advisory Committee was formed to ensure community representation, comprising residents and municipal representatives, for each town within the Mad River Valley.

In November 2024, the project team hosted a successful Local Concerns Meeting at the Yestermorrow Design & Build School. The meeting gathered community input, interest, and concerns that will inform the future alignment of the proposed shared-use path connecting Warren and Moretown. Over 100 residents, business owners, and municipal officials attended,



“As a newly appointed Planning Commissioner for Fayston, one of the first places I turned to get up to speed on the issues we faced was the MRVPD. Josh and Sam continue to be an incredible resource, not just for me and other members of the Selectboard and Planning Commission, but for all the residents of the MRV.”

Paul Quinlan, Fayston PC



providing valuable feedback and expressing strong support for the initiative. Participants highlighted the importance of improving safety for pedestrians and cyclists, enhancing access to local businesses, and promoting active transportation within the Mad River Valley.

The meeting reinforced the community's enthusiasm for the project and highlighted the need to address concerns regarding environmental impacts, property access, and trail alignment. This input will guide the Scoping Study Team and Advisory Committee in

shaping a design that aligns with the Valley's values and priorities.

The 11/13/24 Local Concerns Meeting was the first of several opportunities for Mad River Valley residents to have their voices heard regarding this important community project. If you want to attend a future event, visit the Mad River Path's [website](#) to stay updated with project updates! Additionally, MRVPD staff created an [online summary](#) of November's event for those who were unable to attend the Local Concerns Meeting in person.

The MRVPD is excited to continue supporting this transformative project throughout the scoping study and beyond. As the initiative progresses into the design and construction phases, MRVPD will work closely with community members, municipal partners, and stakeholders to ensure the shared-use path aligns with the Valley's values and addresses community needs. This project represents a significant step toward improving active transportation options, enhancing safety, and fostering connectivity throughout the Mad River Valley.

“ The Warren Select Board appreciates what the team at MRVPD does not just for our town, but how it approaches the Valley as a whole entity. It manages to fill in the gaps that the Valley towns can't do individually with expertise that we do not have. An essential part of the puzzle for the MRV. ”

Warren Selectboard



Sugarbush Access Rd. Shared-Use Path



The Sugarbush Access Road Shared-Use Path, Segment I made notable progress in 2024, advancing plans for a 0.7-mile, ADA-accessible path in Warren, Vermont.

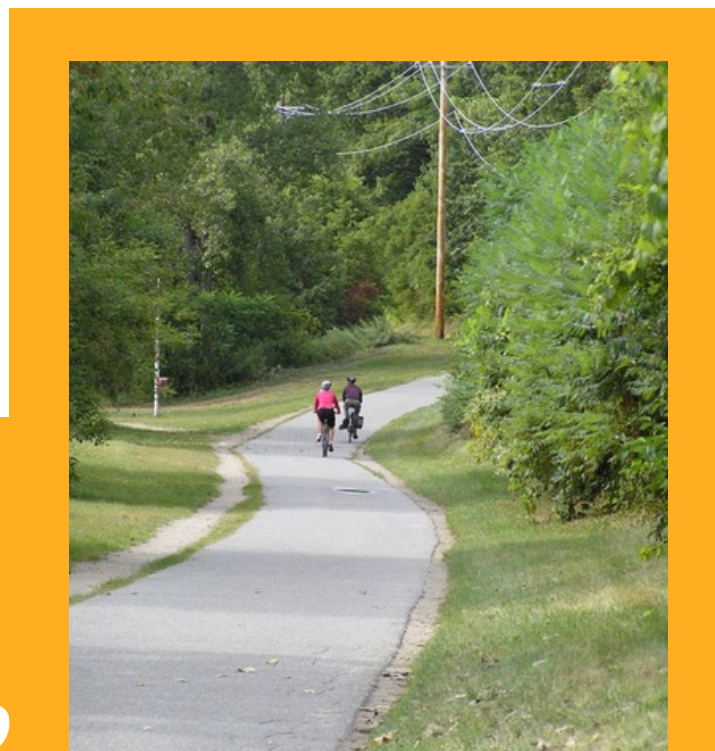
Following the successful August 2023 award of \$769,280 in federal funds through VTrans' Bicycle & Pedestrian Grant Program for final design and construction, Phase I of the Sugarbush Access Rd. Shared-Use Path is now in its design phase, with construction anticipated to begin in the summer of 2027.

The project team, including the Town of Warren, Sugarbush Resort, Mad River Path, CVRPC, and MRVPD, selected Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) as the design consultant in March 2024. Following a May project kickoff meeting and site walk, VHB began fieldwork and survey data collection in mid-summer to inform the path's alignment and design based on existing field conditions. In November, the Town of Warren and project partners hosted a public meeting at the Warren Town Hall to gather community input on the conceptual plans before their submission to VTrans for a preliminary review. The project continues progressing through the design phase, with ongoing collaboration among partners to prepare for future construction.

Building on this momentum, MRVPD and the Mad River Path recently applied for an additional \$600,000 through the VTrans Transportation Alternatives Program to support the design and construction of segment II. If funded, this segment would extend the path an additional 0.34 miles from Golf Course Road to German Flats Road.

While modest in length, this path represents a critical connection to the Valley's active transportation infrastructure. Upon completing both segments, the path will directly connect to over 41 miles of existing multi-use trails, providing access to Irasville and Waitsfield Village.

As part of a broader vision, it will integrate with the planned VT-100 Active Transportation Corridor, ultimately serving as a gateway to more than 100 miles of pathways throughout the Mad River Valley. This connectivity will enhance recreational opportunities and car-free transportation options for residents and visitors alike.



“*Reading your report gives me a perspective about our community members. Through our MRV Interfaith Council, we strive to help our neighbors deal with food insecurity, emergency needs and more. We provide Thanksgiving baskets for over 100 families in our area, vouchers to buy holiday gifts from local merchants, and assistance in the cost of summer camps. It helps us see where our work fits into the overall wellbeing of our community. Thank you for your good work.*”

Susan Bauchner, MRV Interfaith Council

Fayston Flood Recovery Efforts

On the morning of 7/11/24, MRVPD staff contacted the Town of Fayston to offer support following the July 10th rain event. Former Town Clerk Patti Lewis explained that while the town road crew had already begun to repair the damaged sections, she had recently been made aware of specific measurements and documentation that needed to be recorded to be eligible for FEMA reimbursement for the necessary repairs.

MRVPD staff jumped into action, inspecting 15 roads on July 11th and 12th at the town's request, measuring each section's damaged length, average width, and average depth. In addition to these measurements, MRVPD staff took photos and made sketches of the damage at each location. MRVPD staff used the information to create an interactive GIS map and attribute table in QGIS to better understand the extent of damage caused by the storm by calculating the total amount of displaced material and, consequently, the estimated cost to the town.

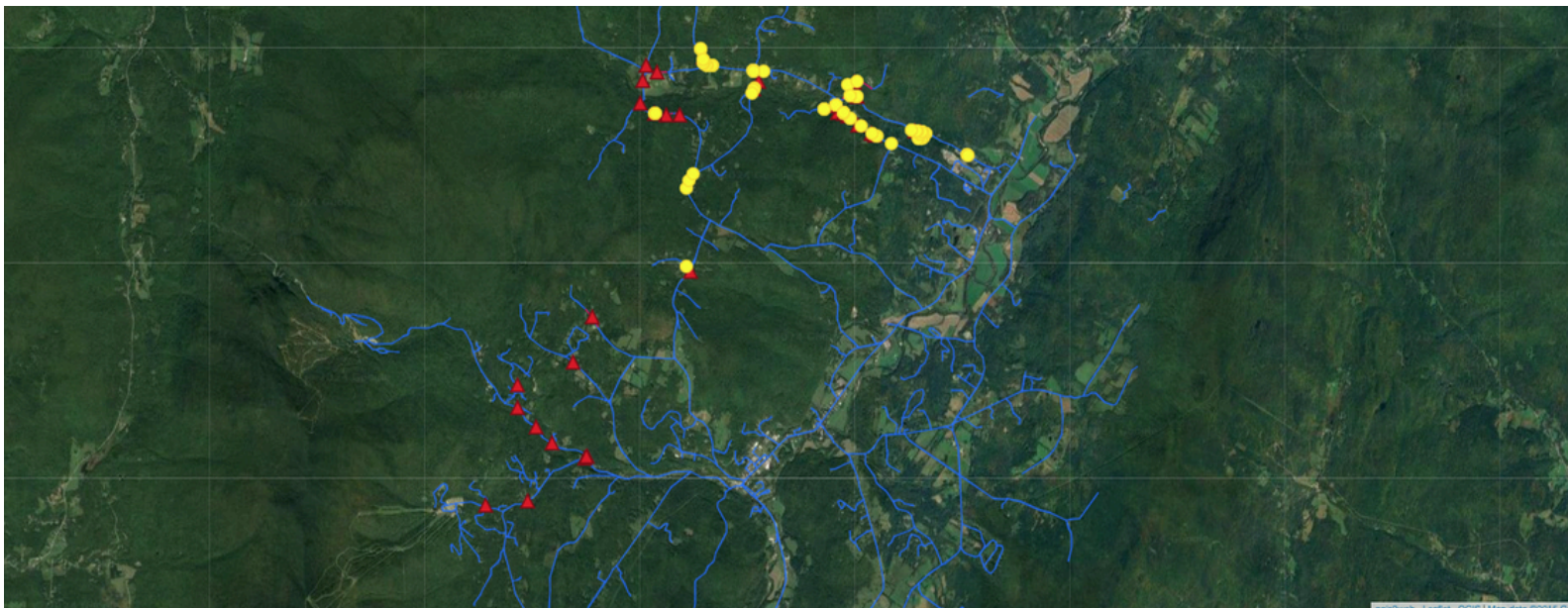
Based on MRVPD's analysis and the Vermont Department of Transportation's (VTrans) [5-Year Averaged Prices List](#) (last updated in June 2024), the estimated cost for materials alone could amount to roughly \$360,000. This estimate does not include the costs of replacing the two bridges lost during the flood, which require temporary and permanent solutions. Temporary repairs for each bridge could exceed \$150,000, while permanent replacements may cost as much as \$1 million per bridge, bringing the total municipal damage from the flood to approximately \$2.66 million.





Having detailed and accurate measurements of the aftermath of this storm will be crucial to recouping some of that cost moving forward as the town continues its rebuilding efforts. MRVPD and the Town of Fayston met with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) on 8/29 to begin strategizing a path to minimize the town's financial burden. CVRPC confirmed that the work the MRVPD did to catalog these damages would likely assist in the effort to receive federal reimbursement.

Through its experience supporting Fayston's flood recovery efforts in July 2024, MRVPD has developed valuable experience in FEMA documentation requirements and reimbursement procedures. This knowledge strengthens our capacity to assist all member towns in future disaster response and recovery efforts.



Screenshot of the flood damage map created by MRVPD

Irasville Village Master Planning

In late 2023, MRVPD staff supported the Waitsfield Planning Commission in developing a consortium Municipal Planning Grant (MPG) application with Fayston for the Irasville Master Planning initiative. The application leveraged the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) FY2024 Municipal Planning Grant program, which offered up to \$45,000 for consortium applications with a 10% local match requirement. On 12/19/23, Waitsfield and Fayston received notice that their consortium application was selected for full funding of \$45,000 with a \$4,990 local match. The grant supports the creation of a comprehensive Village Master Plan for Irasville that includes current conditions assessment, community input, wetland enhancement strategies, design scenarios, and a phased approach to revitalization and resilience.

In the spring of 2024, the Town of Waitsfield approached the MRVPD and requested its participation as a member of the Village Master Planning Steering Committee (VMPSC) to help contribute to this planning process. The project is guided by a nine-member VMPSC, representing diverse stakeholders including the Planning Commission, local residents, business representatives, Friends of the Mad River, and MRVPD.

By May of 2024, the VMPSC was fully formed, and the group began to meet to discuss goals & priorities for the master plan and start interviewing design consultants for the project. The VMPSC interviewed three firms - SE Group, Dubois & King, and ReGrowth Planning/TCE.

After careful consideration and an additional interview focusing specifically on wetlands expertise, SE Group was selected as the project consultant. The Waitsfield Planning Commission recommended a multi-phase approach for the project: first focusing on master planning in areas unaffected by wetlands for the current grant period, followed by wetlands enhancement and



flood mitigation planning, to be funded separately through a future grant cycle.

Based on this feedback, SE Group developed a tiered approach for the Master Plan that balances natural constraints with creative design opportunities. This approach categorizes areas based on their development potential, providing detailed recommendations for sites with fewer environmental limitations while offering broader conceptual visions for wetland-impacted zones. This structured framework ensures that the Master Plan remains both environmentally responsible and strategically flexible.



Community engagement has been central to this process. The first community open house was held on November 18, 2024, at the Village Meeting House and featured interactive stations for gathering community feedback. Following this, MRVPD offered to enhance project outreach by creating a dedicated [webpage](#) and leveraging its ArcGIS Online subscriptions for digital engagement tools. SE Group and MRVPD collaborated to create an [online survey](#) system for ongoing community input, with MRVPD managing data analysis to maximize the project's planning budget.

The initiative continues to advance through regular working sessions between the VMPSC and SE Group, focusing on several key components: assessing current infrastructure and environmental conditions, and developing phased design scenarios for village revitalization. The final master plan, which will help guide Irasville's future development, is expected to be completed by November 2025.



2024 MRV Wellbeing Survey



The Mad River Valley Community Wellbeing Survey, launched in 2021, serves as a vital tool for understanding how the Valley's people, environment, and local economy are doing.

Conceived as part of MRVPD's 2021 Community Indicators Project, the MRV Wellbeing Survey provides community members and local decision-makers with greater access to essential local data through the MRV Community Dashboard. It fills in the information gaps related to subjective measurements of wellbeing—such as community connections and social infrastructure—and significantly supports decision-making, empowering the community to make informed choices.

The 2024 survey, conducted from April 25 through June 6, marked the third iteration of this initiative, receiving responses from 573 participants—a 14% increase from 2022. The survey was designed for full-time residents of Fayston, Waitsfield, and Warren and measures eleven domains of wellbeing on a five-point scale. It was designed to draw heavily from the Vermont Happiness Study, enabling valuable comparisons with statewide data.

Overall, MRV wellbeing scored 3.79 (out of 5) in 2024, a slight decrease from 2022's score of 3.80. Physical Environment maintained the highest domain score at 4.29, with 87% of respondents rating the MRV's natural environment as "Very" or "Extremely" healthy. Education & Culture saw the most significant improvement (+4%) from 2022, while Governance experienced the most significant decline (-8%), primarily attributed to decreased confidence in State Government.

Notably, compared to the most recent Vermont Happiness Survey (2021), the MRV scored higher in every domain except Material Wellbeing, with particularly strong results in Social Connectedness and Community Vitality. This indicates that despite some decreases from 2021-2024, overall wellbeing in the MRV remains higher than the state average in most categories.

In open-ended responses, residents consistently identified community, natural environment, and beauty as the Valley's greatest strengths. Housing affordability emerged as a primary challenge, with 55% of respondents disagreeing that the MRV is an affordable place to live. Other significant concerns included the impacts of short-term rentals, high property taxes, and the need for a community center.

The 2024 survey results are a vital resource for our community planning efforts. The data informs MRVPD's FY26 Work Plan, enhances the MRV Community Dashboard, and helps us track changes in community wellbeing over time. Maintaining consistent longitudinal data allows a better understanding of how the MRV is evolving and identifies new opportunities to enhance residents' quality of life. The next survey, scheduled for 2026, will continue this important effort to support informed decision-making and community planning. Read the full report [here](#).

2024 MRV Annual Data Report

Each year, MRVPD, with the active involvement of our community, collects, analyzes, and shares data regarding various community indicators. This collaborative effort is crucial in supporting informed community planning and decision making. It helps our community understand its current state, identify areas for improvement, and make data-driven decisions about its future.

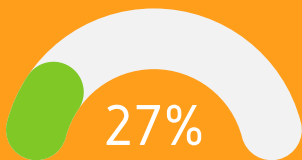
The [Mad River Valley Vision Statement](#) (Vision Statement), developed by the community in 2015, remains one of the MRVPD's guiding documents when considering its work and impact. This Vision Statement is a product of an inclusive process that drew inspiration from the three town plans (Warren, Waitsfield, and Fayston), historical visioning processes, comprehensive research, and direct resident input to ensure it reflects the MRV's core values and priorities. The [2024 MRV Annual Data Report](#) builds upon this Vision Statement by providing residents and local decision-makers with relevant, timely data to inform community planning and help guide us toward our collective vision.

In addition to supporting the Vision Statement, the MRV Data Report also fulfills requirements set forth in the MRVPD's [1998 Memorandum of Understanding](#).

Each year, the MRV Annual Data Report examines a variety of recurring trends & data points related to population, housing, economics, environmental factors, and town infrastructure while also seeking new opportunities to expand our data collection. In 2024, we enhanced our analysis by adding four new data points focused on natural resource constraints and parcelization trends, providing deeper insights into the MRV's changing landscape.

We encourage all MRV residents and visitors to explore both the [2024 MRV Annual Data Report](#) and its companion resource, the [MRV Community Dashboard](#).

DID YOU KNOW...



OF MAD RIVER VALLEY LAND WAS CLASSIFIED AS CONSERVED IN 2023?

THE MAD RIVER VALLEY HAS LOST

79

LONG-TERM HOUSING UNITS SINCE 2013

Closing Remarks



As we reflect on another year in the Mad River Valley, we are grateful for the collaborative spirit that drives our work forward. The Planning District's efforts would not be possible without the dedication of our community partners, staff, and volunteers contributing their time and expertise to bettering our community. Through thoughtful planning and engaged community involvement, we continue cultivating resilience and fostering sustainable growth in our valley. We want you to know that we are committed to serving the diverse needs of our community, and we enter the coming year energized by the opportunities ahead.

MRVPD Steering Committee:

Brian Shupe, Waitsfield Selectboard (Chair)
Daniel Raddock, Warren Planning Commission (Vice-Chair)
Chuck Martel, Fayston Selectboard (Secretary & Treasurer)
Andrew Cunningham, Warren Selectboard
Paul Quinlan, Fayston Planning Commission
Jonathan Ursprung, Waitsfield Planning Commission
Margo Wade, Sugarbush Resort
Eric Friedman, MRV Chamber of Commerce
Christian Meyer, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission



Mad River Valley Planning District Staff:

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