



# Growth Center Designation Program

## Application Guidelines



Department of Housing  
and Community Development  
Community Planning + Revitalization  
July 2017

 **VERMONT**  
AGENCY OF COMMERCE & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



## Overview

Growth Center designation recognizes municipalities that have or are planning for walkable, mixed-use development adjacent to a [designated downtown, village center or new town center](#). Designation aligns local planning initiatives with state policies and funding to implement Vermont's [smart growth principles](#).

Applications are made by a municipality and reviewed and considered by the [Vermont Downtown Board](#). Awarded designations remain in place for 20 years and are reviewed by the Board [every five years](#), when the municipality updates the Board on its progress and demonstrates that it continues to meet the program requirements.

## What is a Growth Center?

While local and regional plans may define areas for growth, a state designated growth center involves a rigorous process to ensure the designation meets state requirements.

Vermont law defines a state designated growth center as an area of land that:

- is within or adjoining a downtown, village center, or new town center designated [by the state]; and
- has clearly defined boundaries that can accommodate a majority of commercial, residential, and industrial growth anticipated by the municipality or municipalities over a 20-year period.

Development and redevelopment within any growth center shall support Vermont's traditional land use pattern of compact centers separated by rural lands and shall meet the [designation] requirements.

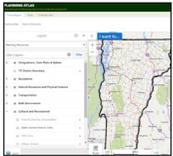
[24 V.S.A. § 2793c \(a\)\(1\)](#)

## Growth Center Designation Program Benefits

The Vermont growth center designation program supports local planning and economic development efforts across the state by providing technical assistance and state funding to help designated municipalities build strong communities. The following incentives are available for projects within a state designated growth center:

- Helps meet the location criteria for tax increment finance district.
- Qualified “mixed income” or “mixed use” projects are exempt from Act 250 regulations.
- Reduced Act 250 mitigation fees required for loss of primary agricultural soils.
- Eligible to seek preliminary findings for Act 250 review.
- Priority Consideration For State Grants, including:
  - ACCD’s Municipal Planning Grants, Vermont Agency of Transportation grants, Vermont Agency of Natural Resources grants and funding from Vermont’s Community Development Program (CDBG).

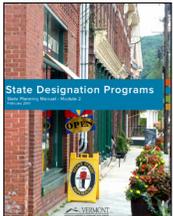
## Designation Information



### Maps and data on all existing state designated areas

Vermont Planning Atlas

<http://maps.vermont.gov/ACCD/PlanningAtlas/index.html?viewer=PlanningAtlas>



### Overview of state designation programs

Planning Manual Module 2

<http://accd.vermont.gov/sites/accdnew/files/documents/CD/CPR/DHCD-Planning-Manual-Module2.pdf>



## A municipality may apply for growth center designation if it has:

1. A state designated downtown, village center or new town center associated with the growth center.
2. A duly adopted and regionally approved municipal plan that describes the proposed growth center.
3. Regionally Confirmed Planning Process.  
Local planning process is “confirmed” under 24 V.S.A. §4350 by the regional commission. Confirmation means that the adopted municipal land use plan and planning process, have been reviewed and approved by the regional commission.
4. 20-year growth projections with targets to determine the land area needed to accommodate the anticipated housing and employment ([see Application Analysis 1 for instructions](#)).
5. Policies and regulations that ensure new development results in a walkable growth center ([see Application Analysis 4 for checklists](#)).
6. Policies and regulations that minimize impacts on important natural resources and cultural resources ([see Application Analysis 6 for details](#)).
7. Bylaws with permitted residential densities within the growth center that are at least four single-family detached dwelling units per acre, or if the existing density is higher, allowing new housing to be built at the existing or higher density.
8. A concept plan depicting proposed changes including the general location and character of any new or improved streets, buildings, and public spaces within the growth center.
9. A capital budget and program that addresses the infrastructure necessary to support growth center development.
10. Public facilities that are planned to accommodate the 20-year growth targets ([see Application Analysis 5 for details](#)).
11. Policies on the extension of water and wastewater lines that include a defined service area and allocation plan to support the growth center.
12. A public transit system serving the growth center.

**Municipalities should consider seeking designation once these items are in place or are in progress.**



1

Complete the eligibility checklist ([page 4](#)) to determine if the municipality is growth center ready.

2

Contact DHCD [staff](#) and set up a pre-application meeting to discuss the program and application process.

3

Submit a preliminary application for staff review of eligibility and interagency review of the proposed boundary. We strongly recommend you contact your RPC to assist you.

4

Schedule a local stakeholders meeting with DHCD in your town.

5

Review pre-application memo from DHCD, prepare the full application and submit a draft application for DHCD review.

6

Submit the application to the Vermont Downtown Board for consideration.

7

Attend the Vermont Downtown Board meeting and a designation decision will be issued.



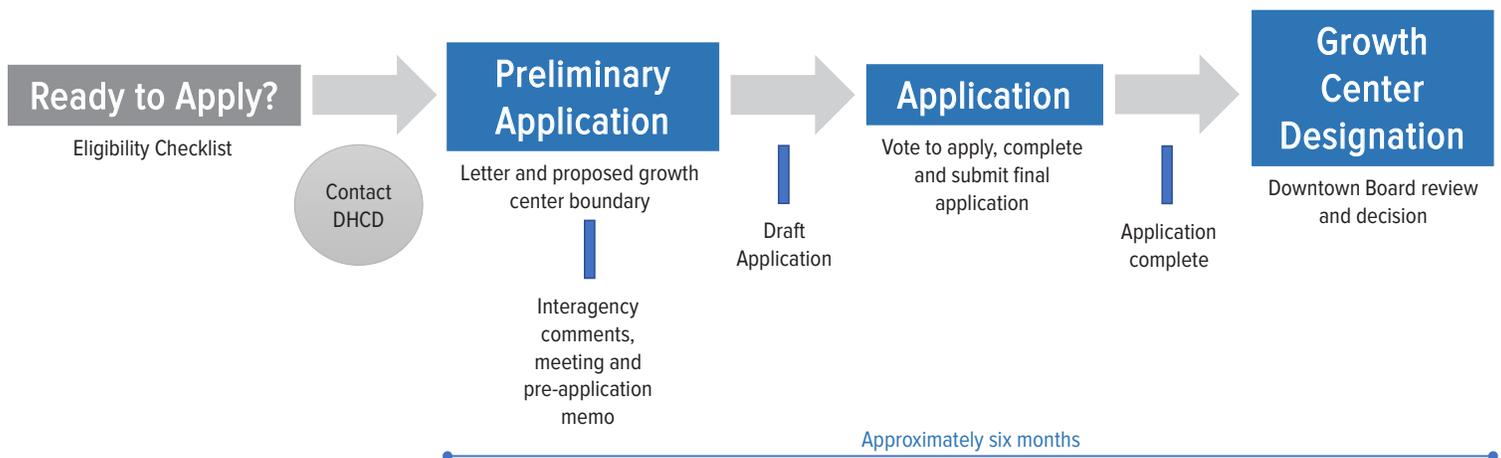
After determining readiness to apply by completing the Eligibility Checklist on [page 2](#) and contacting DHCD staff, the formal growth center application process begins with submission of a Preliminary Application to DHCD consisting of:

- A letter explaining the municipality’s interest in growth center designation, signed by the municipal executive officer (selectboard chair, town manager, etc.).
- A draft map showing the proposed growth center boundary.
- A list and links to the existing municipal planning and implementation policies (municipal plan, bylaws, etc.) that guide development within the proposed growth center study area and preserve the rural character of the surrounding area.
- A brief explanation of any planning and implementation policies the municipality plans to enact prior to submitting a full application for growth center designation.

Next, DHCD will solicit comments on the preliminary application from state agencies and regional planning commissions, evaluate the application for compliance with the growth center requirements and identify potential issues related to the application, the municipal plan and implementation tools. DHCD will summarize the interagency comments in a draft pre-application memo and if necessary, make recommendations to address any items that do not meet designation requirements, either through adjustment of the proposed growth center boundaries or revised municipal policies.

DHCD will then schedule an onsite meeting with the applicant and regional planning commission to learn more about the proposed growth center, share the results of the review and answer questions. Other stakeholders are welcome to participate if appropriate. After the meeting, DHCD will issue the finalized pre-application memo.

## Growth Center Application Process



Once the Preliminary Application process is completed and DHCD issues the pre-application memo, applicants may proceed with the full growth center application. Municipalities applying for designation must respond to all questions in the application and include all the items required on the [growth center application form](#). The municipality should seek assistance from its regional planning commission on the application including technical support for preparing 20-year growth projections, mapping and the required analyses to determine the growth center boundary. [Municipal Planning Grant](#) priority points are available for this work.

[Link to Growth Center Designation Application Form](#)

## Draft Application Review

To ensure all items are adequately addressed, submit a draft application three months before the date the municipality aims to bring the application before the Downtown Board. DHCD will issue written comments on the draft application within two weeks of receiving the draft.

Before submitting the final application to the Downtown Board, the municipal legislative body must vote to apply for growth center designation according to the procedure established under [24 V.S.A. §1972 and §1973](#) (procedures for adopting municipal ordinances and rules).

## Completeness Review

Once the final application is received, DHCD will review the application for technical and substantive completeness based on the application requirements and the municipality's responses to the items identified in the pre-application memo and the draft application review. If the application is incomplete, DHCD will list the missing items in a memo to the municipality within 30 days of receiving the final application.

Once complete, the application will be forwarded to the Downtown Board and posted online along with a staff report and a draft decision. The Board has 90 days to issue a decision after DHCD receives a complete application.

## Notice of Growth Center Application

DHCD will issue notice in the same manner required for a proposed municipal plan, emailing the adjoining municipalities and other parties listed under [24 V.S.A. 4384\(e\)](#) as well as each adjacent regional planning commission.

## Board Decision

After providing an opportunity for the public to comment, the Board will vote on whether to award growth center designation and will issue a written decision on whether the growth center application meets all the application requirements.

### Application materials must be submitted to:

Vermont Growth Center Designation Program  
Division for Community Planning and Revitalization  
Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD)  
One National Life Drive, 6th Floor  
Montpelier, VT 05620

Applications are due on the first Monday of the month by 4:30 p.m. in paper and electronic format.

### Vermont Growth Center Designation Program

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