

April 27, 2025

Richmond Selectboard and Community,

On Monday, May 5 at 7:00 PM, the Selectboard will review proposed zoning amendments to the Jolina Court (JC) district as submitted by the Planning Commission after 20 months of discussion. JC district is almost entirely composed of the Creamery development, which we have owned since undertaking the expensive, complicated brownfield clean-up in 2015.

The proposed JC zoning amendments, as currently written, will restrict housing and economic opportunity in Richmond. They are not aligned with the Town Plan or the findings of the 2022 Housing Study and will limit Richmond's ability to achieve the state housing targets to address the current housing crisis.

Key considerations:

- **Vermont is in a housing crisis.** Progress to mitigate the housing crisis has been slow. Anti-housing town regulations & NIMBYism is one barrier. Act 47 required the establishment of municipal housing targets to address the statewide housing shortage. Richmond's target ranges from 202 to 606 new residential units (see appendix).
- **The Creamery is identified as a primary site for infill housing.** Richmond's 2022 Housing Study lists the Creamery as the #1 priority location for increasing residential density in Richmond.
- **Site readiness.** The Creamery is a shovel-ready site with over 75,000 square feet of developable downtown space with town water, sewer, and pedestrian access. The permitted site has met all applicable environmental, stormwater, parking, and traffic standards, and the current net zero building received recognition for environmental performance.
- **Density limitations:** The proposed zoning amendments maintain a cap of 45 total residential units (set in 2015), allowing for 31 *new* units across the 5 acres. This is a gross underutilization of developable space and would offer only 5–15% of Richmond's housing target through 2050.
- **Comparative zoning inequity.** The proposed JC density is 46% lower than the as-built density and regulations of the neighboring district - Village Downtown (VD) district. VD district has the highest allowable density in Richmond but, due to space limitations, the VD district is unlikely to accommodate significant new housing units. Whereas, JC has ample developable, centrally located space. An increase in JC baseline density is logical, necessary and recommended.
- **Density bonus provisions:** The proposed optional incentive structure will not be effective under current market conditions. The bonuses do not outweigh the costs. In low-growth, rural areas like Richmond, best practices suggest that increasing base density is more effective than relying on incentive-based systems. As proposed, the bonus program is unlikely to increase the total number of units developed in Jolina Court.
- **Conversion limitations:** Current JC zoning prohibits residential use on ground floor of existing structures even when a significant amount of the building is located on private roads and is not visible from a main street (e.g. Bridge Street). There is an opportunity to maintain ground level main street commercial and allowing for redevelopment of vacant commercial space into housing at lower cost and faster timelines than new construction. Plus, with anticipated long-term vacancy of the commercial property (currently 10 months with 0 tenants), conversion of non-Bridge Street space would add vibrancy to Richmond downtown.
- **Market conditions are the worst on record.** Construction costs far exceed returns. Financing any projects is challenging due to imbalance of costs to income. In response, the State and

many towns are reducing fees, offering tax credits, and actively supporting developers with permitting and financial support. Whilst, Richmond's Planning Commission has done the opposite - adding costs, limiting density, and creating barriers.

- **Regulatory history:** Previous amendments to JC zoning in 2019–2020 required a high commercial requirement that stalled all development for the past six years. Those requirements are now being removed, suggesting a need to evaluate proposed zoning changes more carefully to avoid repeating delays.

If Richmond is serious about helping address the housing crisis and provide meaningful housing solutions, the following strategies – recommended in your own 2022 [Housing Study](#) – must be pursued.

1. Increase baseline residential density in Jolina Court to be at least equal to neighboring district, Village Downtown.
2. Remove unnecessary barriers and cost increases to housing production (e.g., commercial mandates, excessive unit size and storage requirements, fees and more).
3. Advocate for housing projects including creating financial and permitting support, including tax abatements, fee reductions, in-kind contributions, housing trust etc. And, importantly, support a Tier 1B designation to unlock state/federal support and reduce costs.
4. Streamline the permitting process and reduce regulatory burdens.
5. Cultivate positive relationships with developers and landlords.

We hope that you agree that Richmond can and should play an active role in Vermont's housing crisis and this proposal falls short of that goal. Whatever your decision, we remain committed—as fellow Vermonters—to championing thoughtful, inclusive, and forward-looking solutions for housing and economic development across our state.

Regards,

Josi & Brendan

Owners of the Creamery

<https://www.richmondcreamery.com/>

Winners of the Vermont's Greenest Building Awards for Commercial + Multi-Family

Vermont's Municipality Housing Targets

Based on Richmond's housing targets and with the purposed maximum new units in Jolina Court, other districts would have to provide 171 to 575 units in the next 25 years.

	2050 Housing Target Ranges	New Allowable Units in JC	GAP: Other Units Required
Low Level Needs Assessment	202	31	171
Med Level Needs Assessment	404	31	373
High Level Needs Assessment	606	31	575

The Housing Study recommended density in specific locations to best utilize infrastructure, improve local economy and reduce environmental impact. The Creamery at Jolina Court was the #1 Priority Area. However, the current proposal will constrain density in that location and either require other areas to increase supply OR the town will fail to achieve the targets.



CHITTENDEN COUNTY HOUSING TARGETS

Draft
Review and comment by May 18! Visit ccrpcvt.org/housing for more details.

Vermont's HOME Act (Act 47 of 2023) introduced new requirements for regional and municipal plans. One is that plans must now include housing targets for 2030 and 2050 to ensure an adequate supply of safe, affordable housing in locations that keep transportation costs low.

Below are the draft housing targets for 2050. CCRPC has divided its regional target range (15,783 - 47,407) into LOW, MID, and HIGH targets for each city and town.

	EXISTING HOUSING UNITS (2023)	2050 HOUSING TARGET RANGES						ANNUAL HISTORIC GROWTH (2000-23)	2050 ANNUAL #S*		
		LOW # and %	MID # and %	HIGH # and %	LOW	MID	HIGH				
BOLTON	550	59 11%	118 21%	177 32%	6	2	5	7			
BUEL'S GORE	12	1 11%	3 21%	4 32%	0	0	0	0			
BURLINGTON	18,245	3,557 19%	7,120 39%	10,683 59%	77	142	285	427			
CHARLOTTE	1,643	178 11%	353 21%	530 32%	6	7	14	21			
COLCHESTER	7,673	848 11%	1,697 22%	2,546 33%	39	34	68	102			
ESSEX	4,889	1,233 25%	2,467 50%	3,702 76%	51	49	99	148			
ESSEX JUNCTION	4,955	1,462 30%	2,927 59%	4,392 89%	52	58	117	176			
HINESBURG	2,071	375 18%	752 36%	1,128 54%	16	15	30	45			
HUNTINGTON	876	94 11%	188 21%	282 32%	6	4	8	11			
JERICHO	2,014	210 10%	419 21%	629 31%	10	8	17	25			
MILTON	4,515	840 14%	1,282 28%	1,923 43%	42	26	51	77			
RICHMOND	1,729	202 12%	404 23%	606 35%	8	8	16	24			
SHELburne	3,529	802 23%	1,605 45%	2,409 68%	33	32	64	96			
SOUTH BURLINGTON	9,921	3,788 38%	7,583 76%	11,378 115%	142	152	303	455			
ST. GEORGE	314	34 11%	67 21%	101 32%	2	1	3	4			
UNDERHILL	1,313	141 11%	282 21%	423 32%	9	6	11	17			
WESTFORD	899	96 11%	193 21%	290 32%	6	4	8	12			
WILLISTON	4,725	1,402 30%	2,807 59%	4,212 89%	70	56	112	168			
WINOOSKI	3,685	663 18%	1,327 36%	1,991 54%	27	27	53	80			
COUNTY TOTAL	73,538	15,783 21%	31,595 43%	47,407 64%	602	637	1,264	1,896			

*Annual new units needed to reach 2050 targets.

HOW WERE THE NUMBERS ASSIGNED TO EACH CITY AND TOWN?
CCRPC worked with its Planning Advisory Committee, made up of city / town planning directors and commissioners, for over a year to develop a method to assign housing targets to each city and town in Chittenden County. Housing targets consider factors like **infrastructure, historic growth rates, and land available for development.**

CITIES

Burlington, Essex Junction, South Burlington, Winooski

Receive **60%** of the regional housing target.

RURAL TOWNS

Bolton, Buel's Gore, Charlotte, Huntington, St. George, Underhill, Westford

Receive **3.8%** of the regional housing target and are encouraged to promote village development and protect working lands.

SUBURBAN TOWNS

Colchester, Essex Town, Hinesburg, Jericho, Milton, Richmond, Shelburne, Williston

Receive **36.2%** of the regional housing target, and weighting is applied based on accessibility of water and wastewater infrastructure.

This approach allows Chittenden County to meet its goals for livable downtowns and villages, intact farm and forest land, and healthy natural resources - while still accommodating development in all cities and towns.