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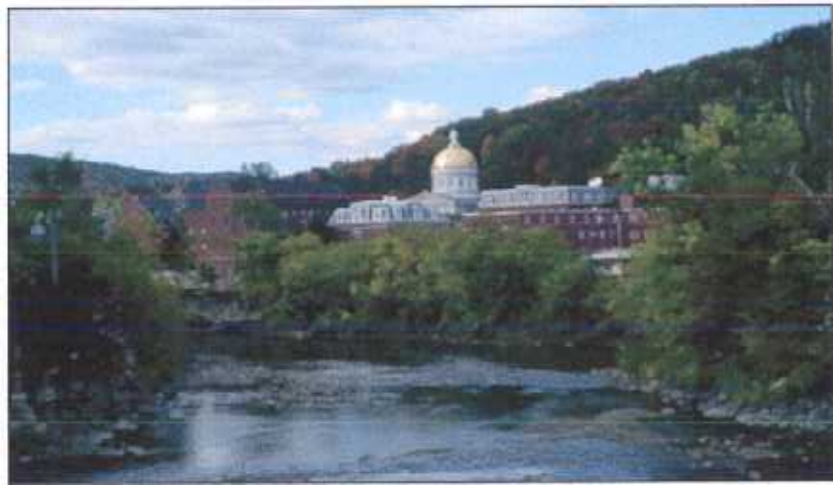
MONTPELIER OPEN SPACE PLAN

VIEWS AND VISTAS



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MONTPELIER OPEN SPACE PLAN
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I. Introduction

Montpelier is likely to be a focus of much of the region's future growth. Accommodating this growth in ways that retain the important scenic elements of the City requires a systematic approach to identifying the landscape elements that are most valuable. This document will examine both the elements in the Montpelier landscape that contribute to its beauty, as well as the points from which especially dramatic views occur. Existing open spaces rather than the built environment are the focus of the study, though in many ways each contributes to the other in well planned cityscapes.

The first part of the report provides an inventory of these scenically important elements and places. The inventory is followed by recommended actions and protection strategies. The last section describes techniques for accommodating development while protecting scenic resources.

A. Understanding Scenic Resources: Basic Principles and Terms

The visual concepts described below are not new, but a large body of research has demonstrated their relevance in assessing the scenic quality of various landscapes. Despite individual preferences, the research has shown remarkable agreement over the kinds of landscapes we find especially beautiful. The results help to explain why so many people find places like Yosemite and Vermont so beautiful, even though they are extremely different landscapes. They also help us to accommodate new development that retains important scenic values. One of the first systematic methods for evaluating scenic quality was developed by the United States Forest Service and later adapted by the US Department of Transportation, and by many states and local communities. These and other references can be found at the end of the report.

- Visual Diversity
  Natural landscapes with variations in topography and vegetation tend to be more scenic than those that are flat, or of uniform vegetation. When additional elements such as water or rock ledges are added, the diversity and the scenic values usually increase. In built landscapes, architectural detailing and a variety of styles can add to the visual appeal of a cityscape. Spires, domes, and turrets tend to add to the visual appeal of cityscapes, for example. In built landscapes as in natural landscapes, however, there must also be a sense of order and harmony.

- Order and harmony
  Natural landscapes are subject to laws that give them a natural order. Spruce and fir grow on particular soils, other trees grow where aspect, elevation, and other factors are favorable. Built environments also are most beautiful when threads of logic or meaning hold them together. These threads often have to do with pattern and scale. In downtown Montpelier, for example, we see patterns that are repeated throughout Vermont and New England, of buildings which are closely linked to the street and oriented at right angles to it. There is a similarity in scale of buildings so that they relate comfortably to each other and to the pedestrian.

Public buildings dominate in some way so that we "read" their importance. While each building is unique, they are often connected visually in some way such as through material, window patterns (fenestration), or roof overhang. If there is too much order, a built landscape becomes boring, if too much diversity it becomes chaotic.

- Scale

  Scale has to do with the size of objects and their relationship to other nearby objects, and to people. Natural landforms can affect the feeling of spaciousness, or containment, and therefore, scale of a locale. For cities to attain a human scale, they must feel comfortable to move around in on foot. Research has shown that people prefer environments which are visually rich and interesting. Architectural details at street level, or vegetative diversity and views along a path can add to this richness. Research has also shown that a four-story limit retains human scale because at this height the details of a face can be perceived when looking from top to bottom. Landscapes scaled to the automobile tend to be uncomfortable on foot due to the distances, and the lack of interesting visual detail or provisions for walking comfortably.

- Focal Point

  Focal points are created when a particular element in the landscape contrasts dramatically with its surroundings. Landscapes that contain meaningful focal points are often especially scenic. Camel's Hump and the Statehouse are both good examples. The County Courthouse clock tower forms a pleasing focal point in the photograph above. These features contrast with their surroundings in scale and form. In the case of the Statehouse, the gold dome adds additional contrast in form and color. In order for focal points to retain their drama, this contrast must be maintained. If other buildings of similar or greater height and scale surround the Statehouse, its drama will diminish. One problem with strip development is that every business tries to become the focal point, so that the whole becomes chaotic and confusing.

- Views

  Being able to see far into the landscape adds to the diversity of a scene. Contrasts, like a combination of fields and forest, enhance the scene. Seeing layers of mountains also enhances a scene. Distant views usually require high elevation or an open foreground (see footnote defining foreground, middleground and background, p. 6). Meadows or parkland are often valuable not only because of their inherent visual appeal, but also because they allow us to see into the distance. Not all important views are distant views. Views at close range of steeples and spires, or of a waterfall are also valued. Characteristics of a

view include its distance, diversity, focal points, and intactness (the degree to which it is free of eyesores or incongruous development).

- Eyesores

  Eyesores may be more in the eye of the beholder than beauty. One person's eyesore can be another's nostalgia or historic structure. Nevertheless, research shows certain landscape characteristics and elements are commonly perceived as detracting from, rather than contributing to a landscape. There is a growing consensus that strip development is unattractive. The reasons relate to the concepts described above. These developments lack human scale. They are characterized by one-story, single-use structures separated by vast parking areas, unlike traditional patterns that use space very efficiently. Neighboring uses in a strip often have no visual or functional connection to each other. The spaces in between are "leftover" and serve no useful public or private purpose. Structures lack interesting architectural detail. Often, they are "boxes" with few windows, no roof overhang, no large trees, and few pedestrian accommodations. There is no clear focus along the strip with every business vying for attention. People also tend to dislike large parking areas. Many eyesores are necessary evils but they can also be accommodated in most cases without dominating the view. Parking areas can be screened or hidden, electric lines can be visually diminished by planting large trees, and cell towers can be located where they do not dominate important scenic views.

- Viewsheds

  A viewshed is the area one can see or potentially see from a particular viewpoint. Computer viewshed analysis can be very useful for determining the areas from which a proposed object might be seen (e.g. a cell tower).

- Open Space

  In this report open space is defined as undeveloped land. It may be meadow, scrub, or forest. The particular balance of open space vs. developed land affects the overall character of a city. For example, many areas outside Montpelier's downtown still retain a rural character. But some open spaces are more scenically significant than others. Factors that may enhance the value of open space include its visibility from major streets, its vegetative diversity, its elevation, or its proximity to a valuable scenic resource such as a river. Also certain characteristics make open spaces more sensitive to visual impacts from development. Steep slopes and ridgelines for example are visually sensitive areas.

B. Methods for Evaluating Scenic Quality

In order to develop meaningful results, scenic evaluations generally use two approaches. The first is often referred to as a professional approach. It is based upon research of visual landscape preferences, and requires the analysis of a professional in the field of visual assessment. It uses established scenic quality determinants to evaluate a scene, sequence of views, or a particular geographic area. This approach was originally developed by the US Forest Service, and has been modified for scenic resource planning at the federal, state, regional, and local levels for both built and natural landscapes (see appendix for examples). A second approach to scenic evaluation is to solicit public opinion. While a professional methodology helps to systematically identify the particular elements that are important in a view or landscape, public opinion elicits a clear sense of what areas are most valued by citizens. For this report, citizens were asked to respond through a public meeting, and through a survey. The specific methods for identifying and evaluating Montpelier's scenic resources and are described in more detail below, and in the appendices.

a. Identifying and Ranking Viewpoints and Vistas

Important viewpoints were identified in the public survey, and through a walking and driving tour of city streets and pathways. Volunteers mapped views along all major city streets and pathways noting the elements that contributed or detracted from the views. They also evaluated particular scenic viewpoints according to the following criteria. The criteria are adapted from similar methodologies used in other New England States (see references in the appendix). Foreground, middleground and background* were each ranked on a scale of 1-3, for a total possible score of 9 points.

SCENIC QUALITY CRITERIA

Scenic (3)

Characterized by at least 3 of the following:

- **Intact and healthy natural landscape**
- **Historic settlement patterns predominate visually**
  Includes distinct cultural or natural focal points
- **Overall diversity or dramatic contrasts in the landscape**
  Any eyesores are minor part of overall scene

Common (2)

Characterized by at least 2 of the following:

- **Natural Landscape predominantly healthy and intact**
- **More recent development patterns such as strip development, recent subdivisions, or industrial development are noticeable in the scene**
- **Topographic and vegetative diversity are moderate to minimal**

Degraded (1)

Characterized by at least 2 of the following:

- **Built Landscape predominantly strip development patterns**
- **Automobile oriented elements dominate scene (e.g. parking, roadway)**
- **Natural Landscape eroded or degraded**
- **Visual clutter dominates scene**

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*Distance Zones: Foreground: Approximately ¼ to ½ mile; details can be seen such as leaves or building details; Middleground: approximately ½ mile up to 3-5 miles; individual trees and buildings can be seen; Background: beyond 3-5 miles; hills and mountains appear bluish, only landform is distinguishable.

b. Identifying and Ranking Scenically Important Open Space
Certain categories of open space were critical components of Montpelier's views and vistas. These included 1) river corridors, 2) ridgelines and certain hillsides, 3) open meadows, and 4) existing parkland, and formal green and plaza spaces. Within each of these open space categories particular properties, or parts of properties, are identified as containing elements of scenic significance. The specific evaluative criteria are described in each section. No scenic rankings are provided for river corridors since the entire corridor is considered to be highly valuable. However certain sections of the river corridors are given priority for protection using the criteria described below.

c. Ranking Scenic Resources As Priorities For Protection
In this section the various types of open space are examined collectively, and sorted into high and moderate priorities for protection. Recommendations are made for enhancing scenic views that are currently degraded. Keep in mind that protection does not necessarily mean that the property should not be developed. Development techniques that can protect scenic resources are described in Section IV, Integrating Development and Scenic Resource Protection. In general, properties given a high priority for protection are characterized by at least three the following four attributes:

- Property's scenic values are immediately threatened by development, or have received development proposals in the past.
- Property is visually prominent in the cityscape (is seen from many vantage points)
- Property received high scenic value ranking in applied methodology
- Property received high scenic value ranking in public survey

II. Scenic Resources Inventory

A. General overview

Montpelier has a vibrant urban community interwoven with a diverse natural landscape. Retaining this dynamic balance while accommodating future urban growth will be an important challenge. To do this, it will be important to understand which resources are vital to the scenic identity of the city, and by contrast, where development can occur without compromising critical scenic resources.

Several visual characteristics are critical to Montpelier's sense of place. Perhaps most important is the sense that the city is nestled in the valley surrounded by wooded hillsides. This image is important for several reasons. It provides a clear sense of order and contrast when we see developed and natural landscapes as clearly distinguishable from one another. There is also a connection with the past when newer development patterns carry on historic patterns in which development was organized compactly and efficiently at a human scale.

Smaller green spaces which are woven into the urban fabric are also very important. Often they are formal spaces such as the Statehouse lawn, Vermont College green, or the small neighborhood park on Summer Street. City Hall and Christ Church Plazas are urban spaces that provide a setting for important buildings as well as places to sit and gather. Less formal small green spaces include Peace and Gateway Parks. Cemeteries provide another kind of open space that many enjoy for their attractive and peaceful settings, and in some cases the distant views they provide.

Also contributing to Montpelier's sense of place are a few key visual focal points. These include the Winooski River and North Branch, the clearly defined downtown, and the Statehouse. The rivers have defined the shape of the city and its major roadways. The intensity of downtown Montpelier and its spires, turrets, and domes expresses clarity of purpose. But one dome in particular stands out and contributes to Montpelier's unique identity. The Statehouse with its gold dome and crowning Goddess, seen against a backdrop of green hillsides is one of the most unique and dramatic settings for any public building. The turreted College Hall at the top of State Street is a visual counterpoint to the Statehouse dome in many Montpelier scenes. Some views

of these important focal points are marred by eyesores, and would benefit from enhancement.

While settlement patterns, integration of built and natural elements, and distinctive natural and cultural focal points may be critical visual features, the manner in which they are seen moving through the city is equally important. While not specifically addressed in this report, Montpelier's architecture is highly valued by residents. Montpelier's buildings are wonderfully diverse, retain human scale, and in most cases continuity between old and new.

B. Important Views

Five Montpelier views ranked highest in the Views and Vistas survey. They are noted below along with a description of important elements in the view.

- **River Views**
  River views ranked very high among those surveyed. At present bridges offer the best opportunities for viewing the Winooski River and North Branch. In some cases such as the Granite Street Bridge and Main Street Bridge, the statehouse becomes a focal point in the scene. The bridges offer a diverse range of views from the lovely waterfall from the pedestrian bridge by the Lane Shops, to highly urban views from the Langdon Street Bridge, to more open rural views along bridges off Elm Street. The views from State Street's Rialto bridge looking toward Langdon Street, and from Main Street bridge both east and west were two of the favorites expressed in the survey.

  Many sections of the river are difficult to see or get to; others are accessible but marred by visual clutter or eroding shorelines. The Taylor Street bridge, an important downtown gateway, views of backs of buildings, utilities, parking, and the backs of buildings mar the views of the river.

- **Hubbard Park Tower**
  The tower offers a nearly 360° view that includes Camel's Hump and the Worcester Range in the distance, portions of the downtown and much of its surroundings. There are wonderful views to the north of the North Branch valley, which from this vantage point appears nearly undeveloped. A wooded hillside immediately to the south with a distinct high meadow adds visual diversity to the scene.

- **Sabin's Pasture**
  Informal footpaths over Sabin's pasture behind Vermont College lead to a high meadow with dramatic views of College Hall and the Statehouse dome with a backdrop of distant mountains. The view extends about 180°, with the view to the west being the most dramatic portion. To the south and west are several high open meadows that also contribute to the scene. The foreground meadow is important to the overall view.

- **North Street**
  Just below the City line, a high meadow permits views toward downtown Montpelier. The old Breezy Acres farm (now the Hooper/Slinkman homestead) is in the foreground. It is a classic view showing the city with numerous spires nestled in the valleys of the Winooski and North Branch valleys. The surrounding hills are predominantly forested with the exception of a distinct open meadow on a high hillside to the south.

- **Berlin Street heading West**
  A sequence of views includes Sabin's pasture and Vermont College to the north, and the Worcester Range and Bolton Mountain (*check)* in the distance, the Winooski River and the Statehouse with its golden dome, and green backdrop. In places the Statehouse is reflected in the river.

Other views noted as important include:

- Cliff Street overlooking the city,
- Town Hill Road toward Vermont College,
- Northfield Street overlooking the downtown,
- Spires and domes from Hubbard Street,
- Worcester Range view (VINS North Branch Nature Center).
- Green Mount Cemetery to mountains and river,
- St. Augustine's Cemetery over city
- National Life over city and to mountains.
- Views from Elk's Club Golf Course especially northeast end to Camel's Hump

View from St. Augustine's Cemetery

Table 1. Scenic Quality Criteria

Scenic	Common	Degraded
Characterized by at least 3 of the following:	**Characterized by at least 2 of the following:**	**Characterized by at least 2 of the following:**
• Intact and healthy natural landscape • Historic settlement patterns predominate visually • Includes distinct cultural or natural focal points • Overall diversity or dramatic contrasts in the landscape • Any eyesores are minor part of overall scene	• Natural Landscape predominantly healthy and intact • More recent development patterns such as strip development, recent subdivisions, or industrial development are noticeable in the scene • Topographic and vegetative diversity are moderate to minimal	• Built Landscape predominantly strip development patterns • Automobile oriented elements dominate scene (e.g. parking, roadway) • Natural Landscape eroded or degraded • Visual clutter dominates scene

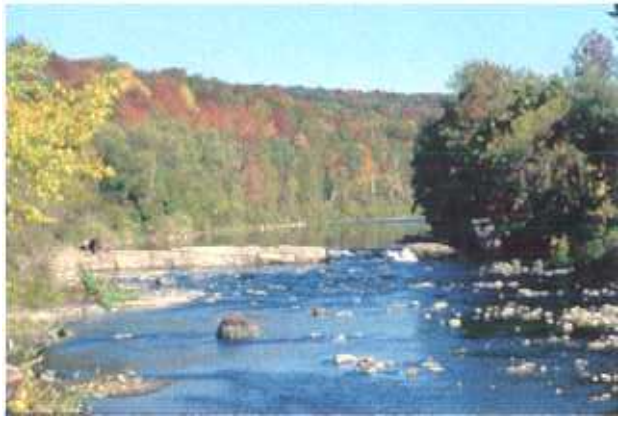
C. View Sequences from Roads and Pathways

The viewpoints described above are often a specific destination for Montpelier residents on a walk. They are places people often stop to linger. But other views are appreciated while moving around the city by car, on foot, or by bicycle. These view sequences are identified on accompanying maps. Some are urban views like the cityscape along Main and State Streets. Memorial Drive, Berlin Street, and River Street offer a sequence of views of downtown Montpelier seen across the Winooski River. These roads are the gateways by which many visitors are introduced to Montpelier. Views from the bike path offer a sequence from urban to industrial to rural. Not all of these views are positive. In the survey, residents expressed concern about numerous eyesores, particularly along the Memorial Drive, River Street, Berlin Street sequence. Industrial buildings, parking areas, the back facades of some buildings on State Street, eroding riverbanks, and general visual clutter were noted as significant eyesores. Strip development along Berlin Street (east of Main Street to the hill) was also noted as detracting from the otherwise dramatic views looking north to the downtown across the river.

D. Scenically Valuable Open Space

Four types of open space were identified as important to the city's character. All are important components of the views described above. They provide a variety of aesthetic functions from natural focal points to important backdrops to the city's built environment. These scenically important open spaces are identified on accompanying maps. A discussion of how development might be integrated with these open spaces occurs in the next section of this report.

1. River Corridors



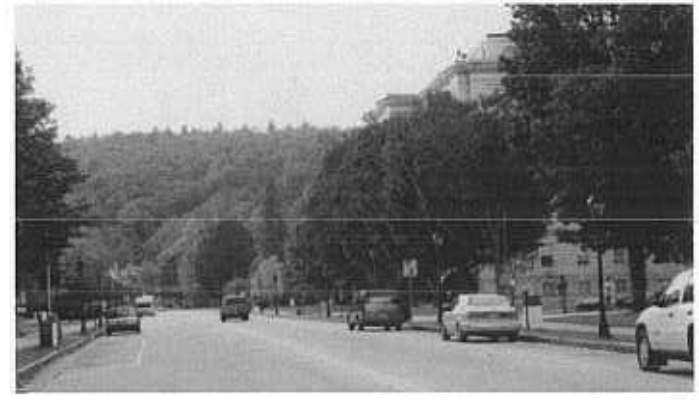
Water nearly always creates a compelling scenic focal point in any form. The Winooski River and North Branch extremely important aesthetic elements for Montpelier, but they are too often ignored as a resource. Physical and visual access to the rivers was frequently mentioned as an area for improvement in the survey. Concern over the degradation of many portions of the river edge and surroundings was also expressed.

Montpelier is beginning a process of strengthening its relationship with its rivers through projects like the development of the bike path, Gateway Park, and land acquisition for the North Branch Park. Extensions of the bike path east of Granite Street are in the planning stages. Overall, little protection of the river corridor exists, and physical access to the river is generally poor.

Visual access to the rivers is good in many parts of the city. East State Street, River Street, Berlin Street, and Elm Street offer excellent views of the river. But these views are often marred by eroding riverbanks, or by unsightly development along the riverbanks. Views of the Winooski are largely inaccessible along Routes 2 and 302 east of Berlin Street. Good pedestrian access along the rivers is limited.

The downtown area presents the greatest opportunities for visual access to and enhancement of the river corridors. Significant improvements have been made along Stone Cutters Way, but west of this, from Main Street to Bailey Avenue, views of the river tend to be marred by parking areas, the unsightly backs of buildings, utilities, and the degraded quality of the riverbanks and, in some cases, the water itself.

2. Upland Corridors



Ridgelines and high hillsides tend to be visually sensitive areas. They can provide dramatic views, but they are also highly visible from many locations. They often form the horizon line, the place where earth meets sky. Development appears incongruous in these areas because traditional settlement patterns tended to focus development in the valleys. Often these hillsides form important green backdrops for the cityscape. While all of Montpelier's forested hilltops and ridgelines are visually important, certain hillsides are particularly important because of their prominence in important urban views. Examples include:

- Backdrop to the Statehouse: most of this is part of Hubbard Park but it includes unprotected properties (Gilbertson, Heney);
- Hillside at the west end of State Street (Goldman), a focal point along State Street
- Hillsides south of River Street and Memorial Drive, a backdrop to the south seen from the Statehouse, downtown, and entering the city (National Life, 112 Northfield Street);
- Hillsides along I-89 in Montpelier (National Life, Goldman), these hillsides are part of the entry experience into the city, and help to visually contain the urban growth.

These highly sensitive hillsides are identified on Map X, along with other high elevation ridgelines. With the exception of Hubbard Park, and the Connor property, few upland areas are formally protected. Hubbard Park's trails provide access to a variety of woodland habitats and connect with trails at the Recreation Field, North Branch Park, and VINS. Linking these with other upland areas and ridges such as the high meadows and woodlands of Sabin's pasture could provide an upland corridor network around the City.

Development already occurs on some of Montpelier's high elevation lands (*see elevation map).* In some cases the development is associated with a well-established road system such as Town Hill Road. Cliff Street is also a relatively long established road serving residences as well as providing access to Hubbard Park. Vermont College is situated on a hilltop, and the surrounding residential neighborhoods have evolved over more than a century. In most cases these residential neighborhoods are relatively unobtrusive due to the abundance of remaining trees and the retention of steeper slopes as woodlands. Larger scale development such as National Life and Murray Hill, however, are far more visually prominent due to their scale, lack of immediate surrounding vegetation, and location near the ridgeline.

3. Open Meadows

Open meadows have great visual appeal. They allow us to see into the distance, as well as providing pleasing foreground views. The visual simplicity of a meadow is restful to the eye in contrast with more visually complex scenes. Patterns of field and forest add diversity to the natural landscape. Only a few meadows now exist in Montpelier so their relative rarity increases their value. The table below identifies nine significant meadows in Montpelier and ranks their relative importance according to four variables: 1) foreground to distant views, 2) visual prominence, 3) contribution to visual diversity, and 4) protection status.

Since meadowland is often relatively flat it may also be very valuable for development. Careful planning of proposed development can protect the open space values of meadows, and enhance the value of surrounding development. In order to protect meadows, a visually meaningful size and shape needs to remain. If they are too small, or broken into small units, the visual resource is lost and they appear to be back yards or leftover space, rather than a distinct meadow.

There are also a few important pieces of open land at the entryways to the City that are not within the City of Montpelier, but nevertheless serve as important visual gateways to the city. Coordinating with neighboring towns on these properties is recommended. These include:

- Meadows on Terrace Street with views northeast toward North Street
- Meadows just north of the City line on County Road in East Montpelier
- Farm south of City boundary on Hill Street
- Farmland south of city boundary on Northfield Street
- Farmland west of City boundary on Three Mile Bridge Road

Table 2. Relative Scenic Values of Montpelier's Open Meadows*

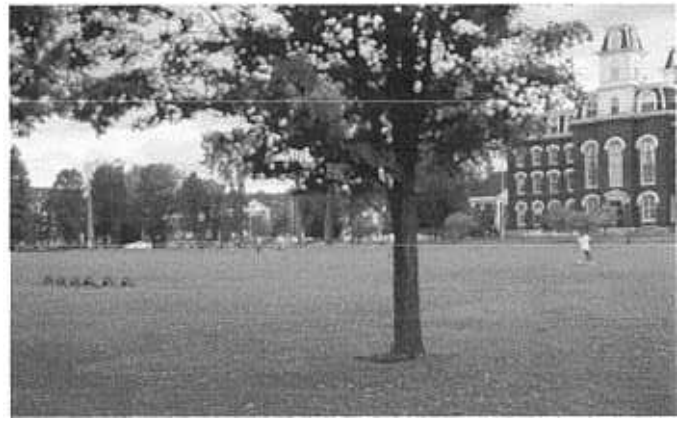
Property	Foreground to Distant Views	Important Element In Urban Views/ Highly visible	Contributes Visual Diversity	Currently Unprotected	Total Score	Comments
Sabin's Pasture (Zorzi)	X	X	X	X	4	Upper portions of the meadow offer excellent views; mix of field and forest important
Nuissl Hill Street		X	X	X	3	High meadow; Very prominent in views all over the city
Slinkman/ Hooper (Breezy Acres Farm)	X		X	X	3	Foreground to important view of city; unsuitable for development but keeping open may be an issue.
Pearl Street Motors (Gove and Emmons)			X	X	2	Currently compromised by storage; classic flat floodplain farmland
VINS North Branch Nature Center	X		X		2	Views over property to Worcester Range
Pembroke Farm (Goldman)			X	X	2	Some middleground hills visible beyond meadows; large area; fairly diverse in form
England Farm			X	X	2	Provides a sense of rural character at the fringes of the city.
National Life Property (south)			X	X	2	Not highly visible from public areas; good views from the meadow itself; development could potentially be visible from I-89.
Hoare Farm (Foodworks)			X	X	1	Currently Proposed as Demonstration site for alternative technologies, classic river floodplain meadows.

* The table includes only those meadows in Montpelier that are visually significant due to their size, relative visual prominence, general intactness, distinct form or shape, or importance as a foreground to distant views.

4. Parks, Plazas, and Greens

Currently the City has a range of passive and active green spaces, plazas and wilder natural areas. Existing formal green spaces like the Statehouse lawn and Vermont College green are heavily used and highly valued visual elements of the city according to the public survey. So are small urban spaces like the Christ Church Plaza.

Ranking the relative visual importance of existing parks and formal greens would be a meaningless exercise since each serves a very different function and locale. But **Vermont College Green** has no formal protection, even though it has been part of the cityscape for over a hundred years. Ensuring the protection of existing green spaces as well as providing new public and private parks, plazas and greens will be of vital importance as the City continues to grow.



III. Recommendations

A. High Priorities for Protection

Several different types of scenic resources have been identified in this report. The list below identifies those properties that would be priorities for protection based upon the following criteria:

- Property's scenic values are immediately threatened by development
- Property is visually prominent in the cityscape (is seen from many vantage points)
- Property received high scenic value ranking in applied methodology
- Property received high scenic value ranking in public survey

The following properties are identified as having a high priority for protection based upon the criteria described above These properties meet at least three of the four criteria. Possible methods for protection are discussed.

1. Sabin's Pasture (Zorzi)

This is an extraordinary piece of property. It is a large open meadow with spectacular views within easy pedestrian access of downtown and Vermont College. It is visually important as seen from a distance and offers impressive views from the upper meadows. From a distance the property appears to contain the denser urban development of Montpelier, and provides pleasing visual diversity with its rolling terrain and mixture of field and forest. This visual diversity is even more apparent when one is on the property. There is a mix of vegetative types, streams and the dramatic old quarry site. Views from the high elevation meadow include the turrets of College Hall, the gold dome of the Statehouse, and the Green Mountains and Worcester Range to the west. The property could provide a greenway network connecting the upland areas to the east with the downtown and the residential neighborhoods off College Street and Town Hill Road with the Winooski River corridor and bike path.

Protection Options: Several approaches may be needed including the purchase of open space easements to protect the upper meadow areas, sledding hills, valuable woodland areas and potential linking corridors. The City must be sure its planning and zoning documents support the protection of the important portions of this property. Development along Barre Street could be very appropriate on this piece, but it is critical that development protect the foreground views from the upper pastures. Any development in the upper meadow areas would be highly visible in addition to destroying an important scenic resource. Development should be designed to protect a visually meaningful and contiguous piece of open space. It should be large enough to retain the image of a farm meadow that visually contains the denser urban growth to the west. It may be necessary for the City to work proactively with potential developers in order to encourage a type of development that can work on this highly sensitive piece of land.

2. Nuissl Meadow

This meadow and surrounding high elevation woodlands are prominent features in many of Montpelier's most important views. Its openness and high elevation make this property very sensitive to development. To date there have been no proposals for the development of this property.

Protection Options: This property is noted in the City of Montpelier Master Plan as a proposed "Visual Open Space Buffer" (Figure 11, Open Space Network, p. 51), and as Conservation Land on the Future Land Use Map (p.77). Protection of the property through conservation easements, or other means should be secured over the open meadow and high elevation portions of the property. Given its proximity to the city boundary and other important farmland in Berlin, a combination of rural scale development and open space protection would be the best option for this property. Collaboration with the Berlin Planning and Conservation Commissions may be needed.

3. Goldman Property/Pembroke Farm Meadow

Two portions of the Goldman properties are visually important. Of most importance is the hillside facing State Street. This hillside forms an important backdrop for the city. Development on this east-facing hillside could potentially detract from the visual prominence of the Statehouse. The hillside has been proposed for development in the past, and there are rough gravel roads through portions of the property. With careful planning, portions of the property could be developed without creating serious aesthetic impacts.

The meadowlands associated with the former Pembroke farm off Terrace Street are another visually important portion of this property. Here too, well-planned development could be accommodated provided reasonable portions of the open meadowland seen from Terrace Street remain intact.

Protection Options: Easements would be the most logical approach to protecting both of the visually important portions of this property. Zoning and planning regulations should be updated to be sure they encourage patterns of growth that will protect the valuable scenic resources.

4. Carr Lot/Confluence Park

The Carr lot extends from the confluence of the North Branch and Winooski Rivers to Taylor Street. Its prime downtown location and river frontage makes it a highly important piece of land for Montpelier's future. Its visual importance was ranked very high in the Views and Vistas survey. Various plans have been put forth including a "Confluence Park", landscaped walkway/recreation path, and transit center. At present the use and condition of the property creates an eyesore. Maintaining public access to the riverbank in this area is extremely important. Enhancing the river edge and creating pleasant walking, viewing and recreational space will be the second step.

Protection Options: The city could purchase a "city pathway/greenway" along the riverbank; or it could encourage private development of this public outdoor space, possibly through a cooperative agreement. Funding will be required to develop the physical amenities of pathway and green or park space.

5. Riverbank Access and Management

The overwhelming interest in the rivers in the public survey suggests that the protection and enhancement of river corridors is of paramount importance. This could be accomplished in a number of different ways including protecting land immediately adjacent to river corridors, developing a greenway/river way system that provides access along most of the length of Montpelier's two rivers, enhancing riverbanks through vegetative management, erosion control, planting, screening eyesores such as parking lots along river corridors, and improving the riverside public front of buildings in the area.

Protection Options: An overall management and protection plan for the river needs to be developed. Protection could involve a combination of cooperative agreements with landowners, the purchase of protective easements, the acquisition of funding for riverbank enhancement projects. A comprehensive plan is beyond the scope of this report.

6. Vermont College Green

Vermont College Green is Montpelier's only formal green. It is well used by Montpelier residents as well as students, and received a very high ranking of importance in the public survey. It is a focal point for the campus, and provides an important foreground setting for College Hall. The College has faced difficult financial times over the years and sale of the campus has been part of the discussion. Although not an immediate concern, this green is so important to citizens of Montpelier, that its future should become secure.

Protection Options: Vermont College will need to take the lead on any actions to formally protect the Green, but the City can offer technical and possibly financial support. Protective easements are the most feasible approach.

7. National Life

The National Life property has a prominent position at the gateway to the city. It is highly visible from I-89 as one approaches the city, and from downtown. While no plans currently exist for its development, it may be important to begin to identify some of the more visually critical portions of the property. Most of these are too steep to develop. They include the hillsides facing Memorial Drive and the Interstate Access down to the Main Street bridge. The hillsides facing I-89 along with the open meadow area are also very visually sensitive.

Protection Options: National Life must take the lead on any actions. However, the City can initiate discussions, as well as technical and possibly financial assistance. Easements are the most feasible approach along with development review.

8. Backdrop to Statehouse (Gilbertson and Heney)
Two currently undeveloped private properties are part of the green backdrop to the statehouse. Inappropriate development of these properties could potentially compromise this important view by distracting from the visual importance of this important focal point. Both properties are relatively high in elevation so that development could appear out of context with existing development patterns in the area.

Protection Options: Both properties are adjacent to Hubbard Park and would be appropriate additions to the park. Easements and planning options should also be explored.

B. Moderate Priorities for Protection

The following properties contribute to Montpelier's scenic environment, but are less visually prominent, and are not immediately threatened with inappropriate development. However, development proposals could shift some of these properties into a higher priority. Protection does not mean that development should not occur on these properties. Rather it suggests that they are visually sensitive, and that careful planning to retain the scenic values should be part of any development proposal (see Section IV of this report.)

1. England Farm
This beautiful farm extends over both sides of Town Hill Road close to the border with East Montpelier. The meadows are not in the foreground of distant views, or highly visible from other parts of the city, but nevertheless they contribute to a sense of rural character at the edge of the city.

2. Pearl Street Motors Farm/Vermont Tree Service (Gove and Emmons)
This is a good example of floodplain farmland. The meadows permit views to the North Branch of the Winooski River.

3. James Johnson Meadow (Town Hill Road)
This meadow connects with Sabin's pasture. It offers a quick glimpse of College Hall driving west on Town Hill Road.

4. Elks Club
This is a large property that provides a green backdrop for development along Routes 2/302 east. It is close to the edge of the Winooski River and includes an important ridgeline. The property offers beautiful views south over the Steven's Branch valley and west toward Camel's Hump.

5. 112 Northfield Street

This 53 acre parcel is a wooded hillside that provides a backdrop to Prospect Street and the southern part of the downtown area. It currently contains growth up this steep hillside. It could potentially serve as part of an upland trail network connecting the Nuissl property with the downtown.

6. Breezy Acres (Slinkman/Hooper)

This property is likely to be too steep and wet to develop. But maintaining it as open meadow is critical to retaining the spectacular views over the City and toward Hubbard Park to the west.

7. Ridgeline Protection

Key ridgelines are identified on Maps 5 and 6. Given the sensitivity of these upland areas to development, it would be useful to begin a process that explores their protection. In addition to providing an important backdrop to the developed areas of the city, many of these ridgelines could potentially form an upland greenway network. The upland areas north and east of Hubbard Park may be particularly desirable to examine given the existing wildness of this area, its contribution to views from the Hubbard Park tower, and the potential for expanding the existing Hubbard Park trail system. Further reducing the impacts of existing high elevation developments should also be considered.

8. Architectural Prominence of Spires, Domes, and Turrets

The prominence of domes, spires and turrets greatly enhances many views of the cityscape. Ensuring that these views remain needs to be an important planning goal.

C. Scenic Enhancement Opportunities

1. River Views

- Development Review to ensure protection and enhancement of existing river views
- Enhancement of views along Memorial Drive and River/Berlin Streets by screening parking and unattractive buildings and utilities.
- Enhance river access by providing recreational and pedestrian spaces near river.
- Promote vegetative management to help stabilize riverbanks. Use native species adapted to the riverine environment.
- Improve views of the river along the bike path
- Develop Confluence Park
- Develop a network of parks along the river corridors

2. Hubbard Park Tower

- Consider thinning trees in selected areas to develop filtered views (glimpses through trees of middle and background scenic elements, e.g. distant mountains, river, downtown).

3. Berlin Street Heading West

- Reduce clutter of development along Berlin Street (street trees, screen parking, sign and lighting controls).

4. Upland Corridors

- Develop a network of open space that extends along the city's ridges
- Provide an interconnecting trail system between uplands and river corridors

5. Parks and Plazas

- Provide a variety of types and sizes of parkland and plazas
- Focus formal parkland, greens, and plazas downtown, especially along river corridors
- Enhance and expand existing parklands.
- Provide a variety of types and sizes of parkland along river corridors
- Encourage the planning of usable open space in private developments.

IV. Integrating Development and Scenic Resource Protection

Integrating new development into the landscape in ways that demonstrate a respectful relationship with the site and surroundings will help protect Montpelier's scenic character. The following principles will assist in planning and designing development projects.

- **Clearly identify the scenic resources**
  The resource may be a distant view, an open meadow, a water body, a ridgeline or highly visible hillside, or a historic setting. Many of these resources have been identified in this report. Nevertheless, all sites should be analyzed for the visual contributions they make to the public landscape. In some cases, a site may contain eyesores that can be addressed through the design process.

- **Develop compactly and efficiently so that the resource can be retained**
  When buildings are closely woven together, it reduces the need for excess roadways or driveways. This kind of pattern usually creates a better pedestrian environment as well. Small green spaces such as parks, greens, or landscaped areas should be planned, not just left-over spaces that serve no useful purpose. Visually, it is far more appealing for development to be concentrated, leaving clearly defined and contiguous open areas, rather than to spread development out throughout the available open land. The degree of concentration should reflect patterns in other similar urban neighborhoods of Montpelier. Overly dense development can also seem out of scale and out of place.

- **Reflect historic settlement patterns in the design and layout**
  Certain settlement patterns have characterized human settlements since the dawn of cities. We find a particular variant of these throughout Vermont and New England. These patterns include buildings located at right angles to each other, and with a similar and close relationship to the street. Important public buildings are dominant in terms of scale and detailing. Often they may be set back slightly with a foreground public space. In most New England villages parking is on the street, or in courtyards behind buildings. Sometimes buildings are organized around a common space such as a green which may be of any shape, but is clearly defined. There is usually a hierarchy of streets which diminish in size from arteries to lanes to courts. Open meadows are also part of Montpelier's heritage. Design new developments around open meadows in ways that a significant portion of the meadow remains intact. The size and shape should retain the sense of the existing meadow even if portions are developed. All of these patterns can be found in Montpelier and should be used as models for future development.

- **Reflect historic architectural patterns in the design of buildings and structures**
  The best architecture draws from the past but finds new and innovative was to express the needs of the current culture. Variety is the spice of urban design. But some threads which connect architecture to its place are important. These can be expressed in its siting, such as in physical proximity and connections to neighboring buildings, in the scale or size of the building, or in

architectural detailing such as roof shape, window patterns (fenestration), color, material, building shape, or decoration. In Montpelier, building orientation, relation to the street, and human scale are very important in visually unifying the cityscape.

Design at a pedestrian scale

Pedestrian scale means creating places which are comfortable and inviting to walk in. This should always be the test of good design, and should be considered important even in industrial areas (after all, people work there). Pedestrian scale is a result of clear, inviting and safe areas to walk, in which the automobile is subservient to the pedestrian. Montpelier's downtown and many of its residential neighborhoods are good examples. Buildings are of reasonable, not overwhelming scale (maximum 4 stories), there is a comfortable, logical, and close relationship between buildings and the sidewalks, there is sufficient architectural detail and other elements of visual interest (e.g. paving patterns, plantings, benches) to make the experience of walking visually interesting, the street layout is logical, and night lighting is good but not overly garish. Also contributing to the pedestrian environments in Montpelier are the many links to riverside and woodland walks from the downtown, and the residential neighborhoods. Parts of Montpelier lack pedestrian scale such as Berlin and River Streets, where one seldom sees anyone walking for good reason. In a few sprawling suburban neighborhoods where wide roads, driveways and garages dominate ones view, the scale and monotony tend to discourage walking.

- **Minimize the visibility of cars, parking, storage, and utilities**

  Large parking areas, dumpsters, and utilities, although necessary parts of the urban environment, detract from our visual experience of the city. Fortunately, it is relatively easy to minimize their visibility with proper planning. Utilities can usually be easily screened either with plantings, attractive fences, or including them inside an architectural structure. Parking areas can also be screened. Large trees in islands or around the periphery of parking lots tend to reduce the apparent scale of the lot. (A large planting area is preferable over many small areas for trees as they will be much healthier.) Large shade trees combined with low shrubs underneath leave a window of visibility so parking areas can be seen, but don't dominate the view. Evergreen trees like arborvitaes or salt tolerant spruce and pine species can create a more complete screen. Parking areas can also be screened by placing them behind buildings.

Appendix A. Planning Support for Protection of Scenic Vistas and Open Space

Montpelier's Master Plan (September, 2000) is generally very supportive of the recommendations described in this report. Most of the areas recommended for open space protection are also designated as "Land Conservation" on the Future Land Use Plan (Figure 16, p. 77). The few areas of potential discrepancy are as follows:

- All of Sabin's pasture is designated for General Business and Single Family use. The scenic importance of this property suggests that conservation of the upper meadow areas are critical. Typical suburban single family residential patterns may be too inefficient a land use and could discourage land protection. A more compact development pattern focused close to Barre Street would be more appropriate.
- It is unclear whether interstate gateways are adequately protected from highly visible development along the I-89 corridor. In particular, business and residential development on the National Life property close to I-89 must be adequately screened This would also be true of residential development proposed on the Goldman property along I-89. Focusing development on flatter slopes and ensuring sufficient vegetative buffers will be important.
- Business and Residential Development on the hillside at the west end of State Street could compromise this important hillside which is a focal point along the length of State Street. This importance of this hillside is identified in the Master Plan (p.12)

> *Montpelier's steeper slopes provide a strong visual benefit and physical edge to the downtown area, and are an important feature which defines Montpelier's central business district...Vistas along several downtown streets, such as State and Main Streets, are terminated by the steeper wooded slopes that occur at the base of the surrounding hills.*

The following list identifies goals and objectives in the Master Plan which support the recommendations in this report.

- *Goal: Control future development on ridgelines and hillsides as well as other key natural features such as designated wildlife habitats and rare plant and animal communities, wetlands, meadowlands, woodlands, agricultural lands, and unique views and vistas.*
- *Goal: Improve the quality of and access to Montpelier's rivers and riverfronts for the use and enjoyment of all citizens.*
    - *The conservation Commission should take the lead in developing a plan to improve visual access and the appearance of Montpelier's riverfronts.*
    - *The Planning Commission should develop specific development review standards, such as design guidelines, site plan review standards, and conditional use criteria, for development along Stone Cutters Way and all river corridors that consider appropriate locations for new structures, orientation*

toward the river, physical or visual access to the river, appearance and scale of new structures and site elements, and harmonious landscaping.

- *e) Pocket parks should be created along the North Branch, a Gateway Park along Route 2 across form the Green Mount Cemetery, Stone Cutters Way and other locations along the City's Rivers.*
- *Design and map a landscaped riverfront walkway and park in the City's urban core in cooperation with affected private landowners and the State;...*
- *Design and implement the North Branch Riverwalk*

- *Goal: Reinforce Montpelier's neighborhoods, both commercial and residential by encouraging diverse, compatible, and dense land uses that build upon the existing variety and character in these neighborhoods.*
  - *Ensure that new development complements its surrounding neighborhoods where possible. Where development cannot tie into and reinforce existing neighborhoods, the scale and diversity of the development should follow Montpelier's existing patterns.*

- *Goal: Continue working with the State to plan for the needs of the Capitol Complex including traffic, parking, public facilities and amenities as well as office expansion*
  - *Maintain a high level of quality in the design and construction of public infrastructure and public works projects that affect the public environment in such a way that the public realm is enhanced and beautified by their presence....*
  - *Encourage improvements in the design and placement of utilities which affect the public environment such as placing propane tanks underground or behind screening, concealing utility meters and dumpsters, and burying or relocating overhead power, phone, and cable lines to minimize or eliminate their visual intrusion from public ways.*

- *Goal: Develop a framework for addressing bridge improvements that balances historic preservation with functional considerations*
  - *Initiate a process to identify the aesthetic and historic value of bridges in Montpelier and to preserve them as appropriate including reuse for a different purpose.*

- *Goal: Future land use should preserve the primary qualities which make Montpelier unique. Among those qualities are a compact settlement pattern with a mixture of uses and human-scale development.*
  - *Enact through zoning, policies to protect hillsides and ridgelines, preserve and enhance riverfronts, and existing neighborhoods.*
  - *Encourage new development as extensions of the city, rather than on isolated parcels.*

- *Encourage the provision of public amenities in future development such as playgrounds, parks, community rooms, public art, performance spaces and exhibition space.*
- *Consider the addition of a Shoreline Overlay District to the zoning ordinance.*
- *Control the adverse effects of strip development along Berlin and River Street by utilizing design and landscaping guidelines.*
- *Design guidelines that can preserve and enhance riverfronts.*

APPENDIX B
MONTPELIER VIEWS AND VISTAS SURVEY

Total Returned: 39

1. How important is it for Montpelier to continue to acquire or protect the following types of open space?

	very important	somewhat important	neutral/unsure	not important
a) Small greens, plazas, or parks	20	5	1	2
b) Larger wild lands w. trails	16	7	2	3
c) Linear open space corridors (e.g. along rivers or uplands)	21	4	1	2
d) Green backdrop of undeveloped hillsides around downtown	15	10	1	2

2. What features of the City, in your opinion, contribute most to Montpelier's visual environment?

Responses were numerous and diverse. Listed below are responses which were repeated more than once.

Most Frequent Responses

Statehouse Dome/Capitol Complex (13)
River Corridors (13)
Hillsides/Ridgelines (12)
City Nestled in Hills/Built-Natural Combination (10)
Urban Overviews (8)
Nature Trails/Woodlands (5)
Hubbard Park (5)
Open Meadows (5)
Historic Architecture (3)
Steeples (2)

3. Please list any views or viewpoints that you feel are important to your experience of Montpelier.

Numerous Montpelier views were noted. Below are those that were repeated most frequently.

Viewpoints	View of
Bridges and Streets	Rivers (19)
North Street	City, Surrounding hills, mountains (14)
Berlin Street	Downtown, Statehouse, River, Sabin's Pasture (14)
Hubbard Park Tower	Distant Mountains, hills, downtown, wildlands (7)
Sabin's Pasture	Distant Mountains, statehouse, College Hall, south and east (6)
Northfield Street	Looking north toward downtown (3)
~~State Street~~	~~Forested hillside looking west from downtown (3)~~
County Road (city line)	Meadows just before city line (2)

4. Please identify any open lands that you feel are especially valuable to the City

Open spaces listed by at least 2 respondents:

Sabin's Pasture (13)
Hubbard Park (9)
Vermont College Green (8)
Statehouse Lawn (5)
Forested Hill west of Statehouse (3)
Recreation Fields (3)
Land North and west of Hubbard Park (2)

5. Please identify any visual characteristics of Montpelier that you consider to be an eyesore or to detract from the Cityscape.

Responses were extremely numerous but the following were most frequently mentioned.

Berlin Street and River Streets east of Main Street (9)
Back Lots along River between State Street and Memorial Drive (8)
Car Repair businesses (Barre, Elm Streets) (4)
Granite Sheds in poor repair (2)
Court Street Parking (2)

Appendix C
Useful References for Understanding and Protecting Scenic Resources

Above and Beyond, Visualizing Change in Small Towns and Rural Areas by Julie Campoli, Elizabeth Humstone, and Alex MacLean, American Planning Association, 2002. An extremely well illustrated and useful guide to thinking about how to integrate new development into rural landscapes in ways that protects rural character.

Designing Your Corner of Vermont: A Guide to Siting New Houses in Rural Vermont and Protecting Your Property Investment Through Good Site Design, by Mollie Babzie and Walter Cudnohufsky, Vermont Council on the Arts, 1991. Oriented to property owners building a single family residence in a rural area. Discusses subdividing also.

Massachusetts Landscape Inventory: A Survey of the Commonwealth's Scenic Areas, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, 1982: The inventory categorizes lands as Distinctive, Noteworthy, and Minimal landscapes within each of the state's physiographic regions.

National Forest Landscape Management Volume 1, Forest Service (Agricultural Handbook Number 434: This is the basis for the U.S.F.S. Visual Management System noted below. It discusses a number of visual concepts that are relevant in landscape planning

National Forest Landscape Management, Volume 2, Chapter 1,The Visual Management System (Agricultural Handbook Number 462): This booklet explains the system used by the USFS to categorize all its holdings for scenic quality. Within each physiographic region, lands are ranked as distinctive, common and minimal. The system is the basis for numerous methodologies used for assessing scenic quality and management objectives. Additional chapters apply the system to Roads, Ski Areas, Mining Areas, etc.

The Rhode Island Landscape Inventory: A Survey of the State's Scenic Areas, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, 1990. Prepared after Massachusetts similar survey but improves the methodology with respect to the relationship of built and natural environments.

Rural By Design: Maintaining Small Town Character Randall Arendt, APA Planners Press, 1994. Case studies with excellent illustrations demonstrating how dense development can be integrated into rural landscapes in ways that protect the rural character, scenic resources and open space of the landscape.

Vermont's Scenic Landscapes: A Guide for Growth and Development by Elizabeth Courtney, Published by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources: A well illustrated guide, useful for communities involved in comprehensive planning efforts.