

## I. INTRODUCTION

Prior to the arrival of the first white settlers, the area now occupied by the Town of Sandgate was part of the hunting and fishing grounds of several Indian tribes. An important Indian trail traversed the town and a campground was located at a spring near Chunks Brook.

The Town of Sandgate was chartered on August 11, 1761 by Benning Wentworth, Governor of New Hampshire. The town was laid out as a square with each side approximately six miles long. Sandgate actually covers 27,072 acres of extremely rugged land in the middle of the Taconic Mountain Range. The east side of the town, which includes the valley of the Green River, is separated from the Camden Valley and West Sandgate by a high mountain ridge that is crossed by just one road that snakes through "The Notch" in that ridge.

Despite the relatively harsh physical environment and climate, settlers began arriving in Sandgate not long after its founding. Many of these original settlers migrated from Connecticut, including Reuben Thomas who, in 1769, was the first to arrive. The town's first inhabitants cleared the land, grew a variety of crops, and raised livestock; sheep husbandry became particularly important in the early part of the 19th century. The population of Sandgate steadily grew until 1810 when 1,187 people resided in the town. A variety of businesses sprang up to support this burgeoning population. By 1801 the town supported four inns, a sawmill, a grist mill, a fulling mill, a still house, a tannery, three blacksmith shops, a lime kiln, a shoemaker's shop, a clothing shop, and a trip hammer works. A number of neighborhood schools were also established to educate the town's children; there were ten schools operating in Sandgate by the mid-19th century.

Much of the town was settled in these early years, but the greatest concentrations of population were located in the valley areas in West Sandgate, along the Green River, and in "Beartown." Roads were soon constructed to connect these areas and to establish links with other communities. The roads leading from Salem, N.Y., through West Sandgate and The Notch to the Green River, then northeast to Manchester and Dorset via Beartown, had become an important travel route by the middle of the 19th century. Roads also connected Sandgate with Rupert to the north and Arlington to the south.

An interesting early settlement in Sandgate was established by Daniel Shays and his followers. Soon after the Revolutionary War, Shays led an unsuccessful rebellion in Massachusetts to protest exorbitant taxes and foreclosures. When the rebellion failed, Shays was charged with treason and fled to Sandgate where he started a settlement in the northwestern part of the town. This settlement consisted of a tavern, a store, a fort and block house, a mill, a schoolhouse, and 15 or 18 houses clustered around a village green. A dysentery epidemic in 1798 ravaged the town and may have caused the dissolution of Shays' settlement.

While disease claimed the lives of many early settlers, the principal reason for the steady decline in Sandgate's population during the 19th century was the emigration of residents to more fertile farmland in the midwest. Even so, numerous farms and businesses continued to operate in Sandgate through the 19th and into the 20th century. Several events in the 20th century have had a significant impact on the town: the arrival of the automobile led to the improvement of some roads and contributed to the abandonment of others; a disastrous flood in 1927 damaged or destroyed many roads,

bridges, and much private property; and electricity arrived in Sandgate in 1938. The town's last general store was torn down in 1944, and the last local school was discontinued in 1956.

Sandgate's population continued to decline until 1960, when only 93 persons resided in the town. Since that time, however, a steady increase in the town's population has occurred. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 353 persons now live in Sandgate. Many of today's residents, because of improved transportation and communication systems, either commute to work outside of town or work out of their homes. A number of people have also chosen to live in Sandgate following retirement. Many vacation or seasonal homes also are located in the town; these structures range from modest camps to expensive contemporary residences. Current economic activities in Sandgate include one inn, several small home-based businesses, a limited amount of farming, and logging. In addition, a Carthusian monastery is located high on the slopes of Mt. Equinox in the eastern part of the town.

Sandgate is best known today as a quiet rural community surrounded by the expansive forests of the Taconic Range. This outstanding natural environment, with its vast backcountry, cascading mountain streams, abundant wildlife, and spectacular vistas, contributes much to the quality of life for both residents of Sandgate and visitors to the town. Townspeople have long expressed a desire to maintain Sandgate's special rural character. Another long-standing interest has been the need to provide essential services without unduly burdening the taxpayers of the town.

In one effort to achieve these general objectives, the Town of Sandgate formed a municipal planning commission and, in 1975, adopted the first comprehensive plan for the town. Updated and revised plans were subsequently prepared in 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1994. The Town has also put into effect zoning, subdivision, and health regulations. The Vermont Planning and Development Act was amended in 1988 to include a set of common planning goals that municipalities, regions, and state agencies should strive to achieve. The Act now also strongly urges regional cooperation, and coordination among the various levels of government. Fortunately, Sandgate has historically espoused many of the same goals as those contained in the state planning law, and has for many years participated in regional planning through the Bennington County Regional Commission.

This Town Plan is the most recent manifestation of Sandgate's ongoing planning process. The plan has been updated to reflect current conditions, issues, and objectives, and should serve as a tool to be used by residents in their efforts to guide development and ensure that Sandgate will continue to be an outstanding community in which to live. Specifically, the Town Plan should be consulted when making public policy decisions, evaluating public investments, reviewing development proposals, and when considering new or amended bylaws and ordinances. The Plan should also provide clear guidelines to individuals who propose new developments in Sandgate. Essentially, this Town Plan will serve as the basic planning document for the town for the next five years.