

# Small Town Build-Out Study

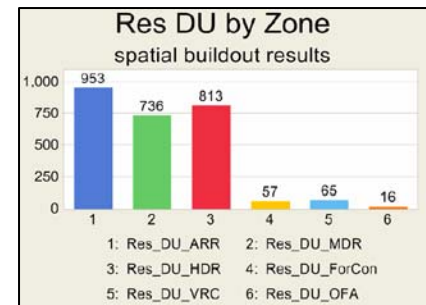
Revealing the unexpected

**Location:** Middlebury, Vermont

**Partners:** Town of Middlebury; Community Oriented Geography

**Context:** The Town of Middlebury lies in Vermont's wide Champlain Valley. Best known for its highly regarded college and for the historic village of Middlebury, the Town is also defined by its agricultural land, working farms, and agricultural services. In fact, about 36% of the town is zoned for agriculture, and agriculture is considered vital to the present and future character and economy of the town.

With a population of about 8200, Middlebury has experienced continued population growth in recent decades, with increased suburban-style development surrounding the village and in the rural areas. Population projections indicate continued growth, and "a need for 300-400 dwelling units per decade going forward." The Town has an active planning program, and in 2006 it was engaged in a review and update of its Town Plan. Planning Commission members wanted a good understanding of the town's overall growth capacity. The Town retained Community Oriented Geography to perform a build-out analysis to determine growth capacity associated with existing Zoning and Subdivision Regulations as a key piece of information for updating its Plan policies and related regulations.



*"The Build-Out analysis was invaluable in helping to see the need for amending our zoning to a more appropriate density for our rural agricultural areas, and the visualization of the information proved highly valuable during the public review process."*

—Fred Dunnington,  
Middlebury Town Planner

**Project Description:** Community Oriented Geography conducted a detailed build-out analysis for the Town as a whole, looking at both residential and non-residential buildings. Results of the analysis showed that build-out under then-current zoning would allow for over 2500 new dwelling units, more than doubling of the present number of units within the Town, and that there was plenty of land zoned for both residential and non-residential uses. The real surprise was that over 900 new, low-density residences could be built in the agriculturally zoned areas, a finding of great concern when viewed in relation to the Town's goals of encouraging new development in its growth areas and conserving agricultural lands.

The Town's planning program includes a strong effort to engage citizens in decision-making; the build-out analysis was shared at

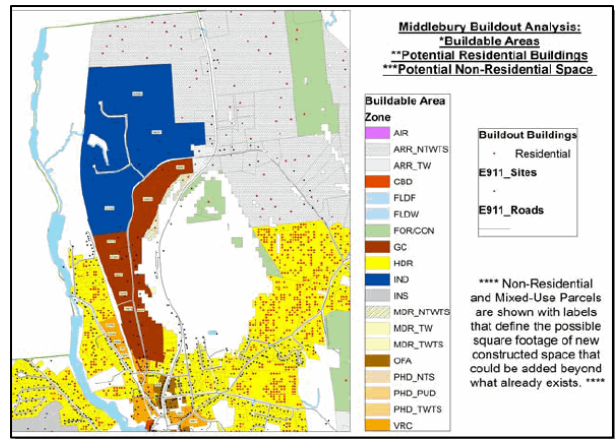
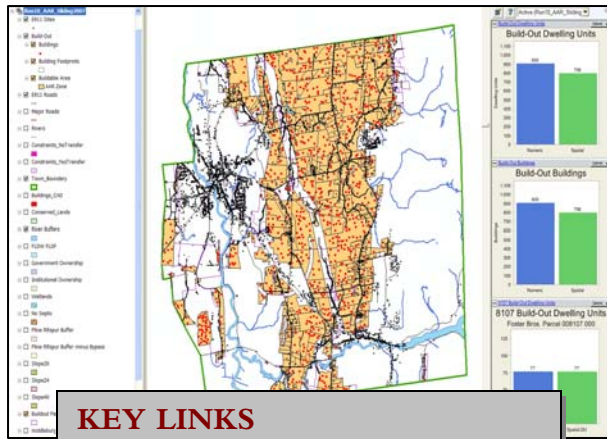
public meetings held by the Planning Commission and Select Board for the Plan and subsequent Zoning changes. Town staff made a special effort to reach out to large landowners in the rural areas to ensure that the proposed regulatory changes still provided them with a reasonable use of their lands.

**Technology and Tools:** CommunityViz 3.3 and the CommunityViz Build-Out Wizard; public meetings held by the Planning Commission and Select Board.

**Outcomes:** The Build-Out Study was completed during work on the new Town Plan. In June, 2007, the Town adopted the updated Town Plan, with policies reflecting the results of the build-out. No new growth areas were added. Because the build-out had shown that an alarming number of new residences could be located in the Town's agricultural district, the Plan suggested further limitations on the amount of development in the agricultural district. This suggestion was implemented, and in 2008, the Town adopted an amendment to its Zoning and Subdivision Regulations that had the effect of substantially reducing the number of residential units permitted in the agricultural district.

*“Seeing the results of the build-out in the rural area was pretty dramatic. The resulting change we made to our agricultural zoning should have a real effect on how development will occur in our rural areas in the future.”*

–John Barstow,  
Chairman of the Middlebury  
Planning Commission



**KEY LINKS**

- CommunityViz  
<http://www.communityviz.com>
- Town of Middlebury  
<http://www.middlebury.govoffice.com>
- Community Oriented Geography  
[geographer.vt@gmail.com](mailto:geographer.vt@gmail.com)