

Manchester Village Vermont

Inventory of Scenic Resources



Prepared by the Manchester Village Planning Commission with assistance provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission. Preparation of this report was supported by funding provided by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

Manchester Village Scenic Resource Inventory

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August 2007

Scenic Resources of Manchester Village, Vermont

Introduction

The scenic quality of the landscape always has been one of Manchester Village's most important assets. The community's visual appeal, and the quality of life that it represents, is important to residents, tourists, and businesses. An understanding of the features that contribute to the Village's unique beauty will assist in planning for the protection and wise use of its scenic resources.

The Village clearly understands the significance of these resources, as specific goals, guidelines, and policies in the Village Plan identify features that are particularly important in defining the character of the community. In addition, the Village's land use regulations include a design control district that includes the entire geographical extent of the Village. Special design guidelines apply to three distinct subdistricts to ensure that new development retains the scenic and historic character of the Village.

The purpose of this report is to expand upon the discussion contained in the Village Plan by providing a more thorough context for describing Manchester Village's scenic character and by identifying the critical elements that make the local scenery unique and valuable. It is evident that Manchester Village has benefited from a remarkable natural setting that has provided a constant background for a built environment that evolved over time to define the historic character of the community. A Village-wide inventory of views from public vantage points will provide specific examples of those features and the visual qualities that give special value to them.

The final section of this report will identify strategies for protection and enhancement of scenic resources. The guidelines used in the development of this report are taken largely from Vermont's Scenic Landscapes: A Guide for Growth and Protection, published in 1991 by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources. That document acknowledges the complexity of attempting to inventory scenic resources as well as the need to integrate any such effort with effective land use planning. This report is intended to provide a locally-driven framework for future planning, regulation, and decision-making.

Overall Landscape Context

The historic center of the Village developed along Main Street (VT Route 7A), a roadway that was laid to follow the Valley of Vermont from Bennington in the south to the busy cross-roads community of Manchester in the north. The location of the road in the area of Manchester Village was constrained by the Batten Kill Valley to the east and Mount Equinox to the west. Early development was concentrated on the relatively level and dry land at the base of Mount Equinox where the road forked, with Main Street continuing to Manchester Center and West Road providing a connection to Dorset. River Road was constructed in the first years of settlement also, establishing access from the Village to the Batten Kill and surrounding lowlands. The section of Main Street between the River Road and West Road intersections was thus established as a focus of activity and development within five years of the founding of the town.

The upper portion of Main Street remains



Rural landscapes viewed from village streets are typical Manchester Village scenes.



The landscape context of Manchester Village is strongly influenced by the surrounding natural environment. The great mass of Mount Equinox dominates the western side of the Village and the Batten Kill, flowing through the Valley of Vermont, establishes a clear eastern edge to the community. Development always has been concentrated on the relatively high and level land between Route 7A and the base of the mountain. The Village's historic district and concentrations of residential, commercial, and institutional uses are found in this area. The land east of Route 7A slopes down to the river valley below. With the exception of limited commercial and residential uses along the major roadways, the landscape appears very rural, with attractive homes and substantial open space areas. Particularly significant are the open lands associated with the Southern Vermont Art Center, those adjacent to the Orvis Store, and Hildene's Meadowlands at a southern approach to the Village. Two large golf courses near the geographic center of the Village add to the open space character and sweeping mountain vistas characteristic of the community.

a central focus of Village life today, with the grand Equinox Hotel, County Courthouse, First Congregational Church, and historic houses and retail stores. Together with this section of Main Street, Prospect Street, Taconic Road, and Seminary Avenue form a very prominent and important block centrally located at the base of Mount Equinox. The stately buildings of the Burr and Burton Academy campus lie on an attractively landscaped hillside at the intersection of Seminary and Prospect. The character of the remainder of this neighborhood is defined by attractive new and historic homes, large street trees, and occasional views to Mount Equinox or the Green Mountains.

From this centrally located neighborhood, River Road and VT 7A arc downward toward the Batten Kill and Manchester Center, respectively. The land between these two roadways slopes toward the river valley and contains extensive open space, including two golf courses and the Hildene Meadowlands. Only one road, Union Street, traverses this large area, running in a very straight east-west line from the center of the Village to the River.

Other significant open spaces surround the village center, reinforcing its distinct sense of place and the traditional Vermont development pattern of a relatively dense village center surrounded by a low-density rural landscape. The Hildene property includes significant undeveloped land at the southern approach to the Village, with the “meadowlands” that lie between River Road and the Batten Kill just at the entry to the Village, a particularly important landscape feature. The grounds of the Southern Vermont Arts Center occupy a prominent position at the northern edge of the Village along West Road while the open field and pond adjacent to the Orvis retail store provides an important open space that separates the Village from Manchester Center’s downtown along Route 7A.

The entire western side of Manchester Village is bounded by Mount Equinox and the forest lands at the base of the mountain and around Equinox Pond. This vast area forms an unbroken natural preserve, traversed only by footpaths, and provides a striking visual back-



The Village extends from the forested slopes of Mount Equinox on the west to the open valley lying along the Batten Kill on the east.

drop to the settled area to the east.

Although surrounding open spaces, natural forest lands, and mountain views provide definition to the geographic extent of the Village, it is the manmade structures that define the character of the community from within. Manchester Village contains some of the most appealing and significant architecture in Vermont. Buildings are representative of historic periods ranging from colonial times to the present day, and those structures combine with graceful trees, lampposts, walkways, and other elements to create a cohesive and unique streetscape. At the same time, the surrounding mountains and open spaces serve as a backdrop and a constant reminder of the natural beauty within which the developed area of the Village is located.

It can be seen, therefore, that Manchester Village represents the quintessential

Vermont landscape of a relatively dense grouping of structures surrounded by lower density development and open spaces. This development pattern ensures that the Village will remain unique and visually and functionally distinct from surrounding communities. Its eastern and western boundaries, the Batten Kill and Mount Equinox respectively, capture the character of this region of the State - mountain and valley - and the historic development between those two dominant landforms highlights the rich cultural history of the local community.



Foregrounds of attractive open spaces set against mountain backdrops are characteristic scenes in Manchester Village.



The Village's historic architecture is a critical component in defining the community's landscape context. The Burr and Burton Academy campus includes several historic buildings on a prominent hillside above the Village center.

Critical Scenic Elements

Many individual factors come together to create Manchester Village's unique and special visual landscapes. An appreciation of those scenic elements will improve our understanding of each view and will help determine how those resources can be protected.

Manchester Village contains such a rich variety of natural and cultural landscapes that efforts to distill them into specific elements can seem quite intimidating. Scenic views that are widely appreciated and enjoyed do clearly have a number of common elements even though not all may be present in every view and some may dominate more in some views than in others.

Those scenic elements in the Village reflect both characteristics that are unique to the local community as well as certain features that are widely recognized as adding visual interest to a landscape. The elements discussed in the following sections include: Mount Equinox, water features, historic architecture and streetscape, scenic vistas, scenic roads and gateways, and open spaces (and public access lands).

In some scenes the presence of a single critical element is the feature that makes the view memorable and in others it is the way in which the individual elements are integrated in a complex landscape. The following sections will include photographs of scenic resources from around the Village. Descriptions will highlight the contributions that particularly prominent or important elements add to each scene.



Sunrise over the Green Mountains is especially attractive when viewed over the pond at the golf course on Union Street.



Attractive foreground elements combine with distant views at the Hildene gardens.



Nearly every westward view from Manchester Village includes the dramatic backdrop of Mount Equinox, whose summit rises to an elevation of 3,829 feet, the loftiest peak in the Taconic Range. The mass of the mountain extends along the entire length of the Village, from Little Equinox in the south to Beartown Notch in the north. The forested slopes of the mountain are made more interesting by the many hollows, undulating ridges, rock slides and outcroppings, and diverse vegetation types that combine to make the landform appear different from every location and at various times of the year.

The vast eastern façade of Mount Equinox evokes a strong feeling of undisturbed natural beauty. It was primarily for this reason that many Manchester residents, as well as visitors, strenuously objected to a recent proposal to erect several large wind turbines on the Little Equinox ridgeline. It was felt that the proposed structures would be a stark and disturbing contradiction to the serene beauty of the Village mountain backdrop.

The east face of the mountain contains approximately 1,000 acres of land that includes within it an extensive network of paths and trails that are now and forever open to the public for non-motorized recreation. A short walk on the trails leads to Equinox Pond and one of the outstanding scenic vistas in the region, with the Deer Knoll portion of the mountain towering above the water. There are several other destinations reached from the trail system that offer spectacular views over the Village. The easiest to access is Robin's Lookout, just a short hike from Equinox Pond. A longer hike (or a drive to the top of the mountain and a short hike) leads to Lookout Rock, just below the mountain's summit and expansive views to distant mountain ranges, with Manchester Village nestled at the base of mountain in the center of the Batten Kill Valley.

Many of the natural lands on the eastern side of the mountain are owned by the Equinox Resort, which has generously donated easements to conservation organizations, thus permanently guaranteeing public access to the mountain preserve.

The mountain offers an interesting counterpoint to the long ridge of the Green Mountains across the valley. Both of these forested landforms reinforce the sense of being in a settled valley surrounded by wild natural areas. The proximity of Mount Equinox to the village center strongly reinforces this connection between the settled and natural parts of the local environment.

The verdant backdrop provided by Mount Equinox enhances many foreground features in the Village. In the village center area, the buildings of the Burr and Burton Academy are dramatically set against the mountainside; the view especially striking as one proceeds up Seminary Avenue. The views of the mountain



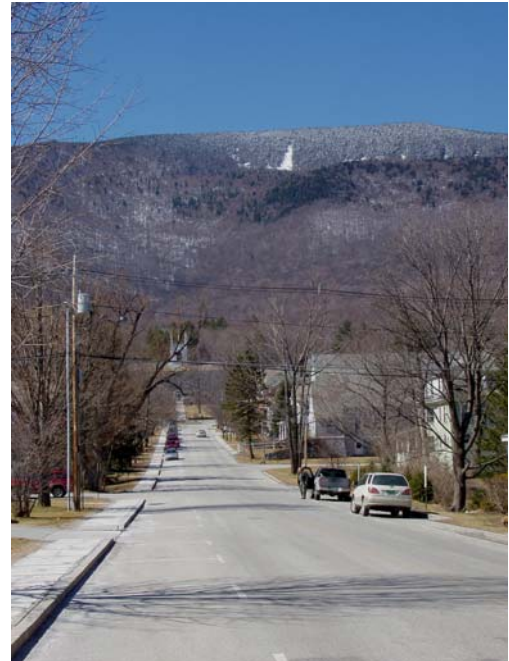
Mount Equinox stretches across the western skyline, visible as the backdrop to buildings and vistas in the center of the Village, as in this view from Route 7A near the Equinox Hotel.

from the rooms, grounds, and golf course of the Equinox Hotel are an important part of the image and visitor experience offered by that grand resort. There are also some views of the mountain over and between commercial properties along Route 7A, north of the village center. And residential streets near the village center provide striking views of the mountain framed by large trees and stately homes.

The view of the mountain that is obtained from the grounds of Hildene is especially dramatic. The summit of Little Equinox and the ridge that connects to the main summit provide a spectacular view from the gardens and lawns in front of the mansion; many special events and private gatherings benefit from the visual beauty of this location.



A scenic approach shot at the Gleneagles Golf Course.



Mount Equinox from the base of Seminary Avenue; the recent rock slide at the upper center of the mountain is especially prominent when covered by snow.



Union Street leads directly uphill and toward Mount Equinox.



The mountain is visible from the busy commercial area along Route 7A near Manchester Center.



A mountain backdrop adds to the beauty of many residential streets and properties in the Village.



The view from Robin's Lookout ranges from the village center to the Green Mountains that posed across the valley from Mount Equinox.



Deer Knoll above Equinox Pond in the winter.



Little Equinox is especially prominent from the lawn and gardens in front of Hildene where many private gatherings and community events are held.



The Batten Kill, forming part of the eastern boundary of the Village, is the best known water feature in the area, but there are an abundance of streams, waterfalls, ponds, and wetlands that play a key role in defining the community's scenic character. Water generally flows west to east in Manchester Village, rushing in mountain streams from the hollows on Mount Equinox, settling in ponds and small impoundments on more level ground near the village center, and then falling through cascades and waterfalls to the valley floor and the Batten Kill.

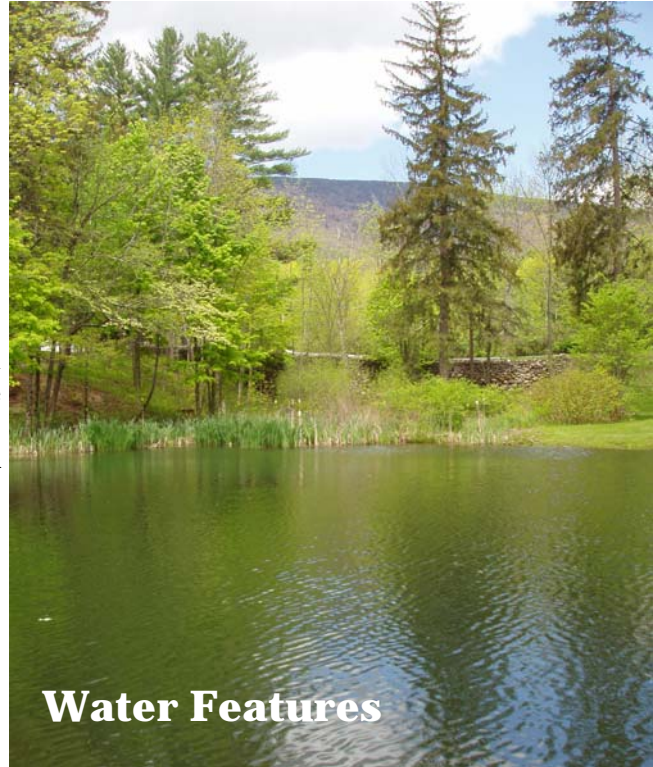
In the years after settlement, the local waterways served utilitarian purposes - providing power to small mills and water for domestic and agricultural uses. The Village's water resources today are treasured for the aesthetic appeal, for providing habitat for fish and wildlife, and for recreational uses.

Maintaining the quality of the water is an important objective that can be accomplished by limiting stormwater runoff and by protecting natural vegetation that grows along stream banks. Retention of streamside vegetation also provides cover for fish in the streams, prevents over-heating in summer months, and maintains habitat and travel corridors for birds and animals along the waterway corridors.

A number of significant streams and ponds can be viewed from roads and sidewalks in the Village. River Road follows the Batten Kill along the valley bottom and then climbs up toward the village center along a cascading stream. Ways Lane, West Road, and Route 7A also provide visual access to significant water features in the Village. Hiking trails at the Equinox

Preservation Trust give direct public access to Equinox Pond and several small streams, while trails at Hildene traverse some very interesting wetland complexes. Other water features are located on private lands; some, such as those at the Dellwood Cemetery, are generally accessible to the public, while others are not.

It is important to maintain physical and visual access to the most important of these natural resources because they add a significant component to the landscape diversity that makes the Village especially scenic and because they are important to the historic and cultural heritage of the community.



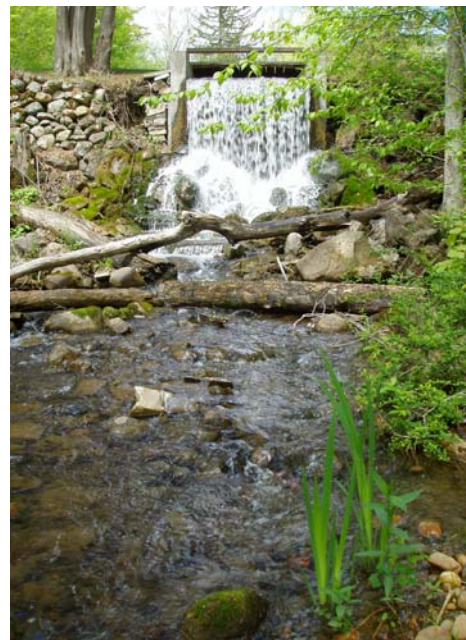
The Village's eastern boundary is the Batten Kill, seen here from the bridge over an old town road that is now a trail accessed from a private subdivision road.



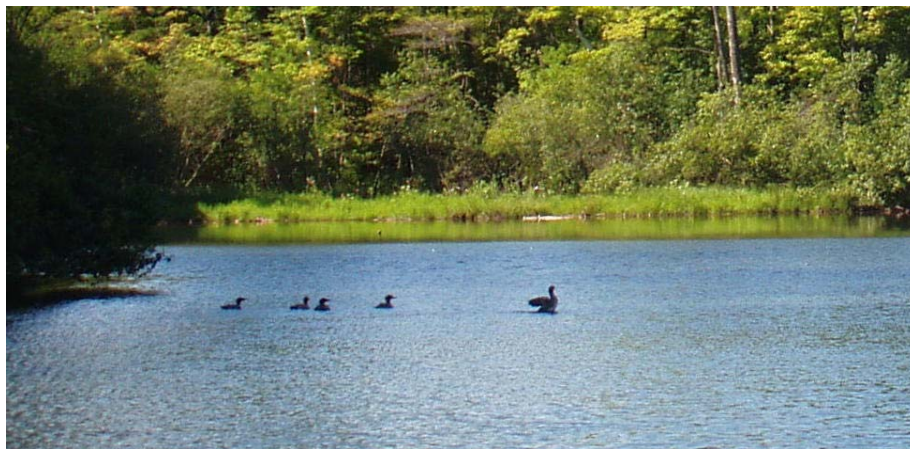
Munson Falls drops over a series of cascades as the stream flows toward the Batten Kill in the northeastern part of the Village. The Falls are reached from the north via a short scramble from the Maple Street School and border a private subdivision to the south.



Several small waterfalls are found along this stream that follows River Road steeply downhill near the Wilburton Inn.



Small waterfalls are found at the outflow of a number of small impoundments, like this one in the Dellwood Cemetery.



Equinox Pond through the seasons; easily accessed from the Village Center and under the ownership of the Equinox Resort, it is an important aesthetic, recreational, and wildlife resource.



A pond at the Gleneagles Golf Course provides a pleasant foreground for golfers and passing motorists on Union Street.



Fall colors at water's edge.



The pond near Orvis is a beautiful and serene setting along a busy commercial corridor. The parcel on which it is located was recently acquired by the Orvis Company; any uses planned for the site should incorporate public access and protection of the viewshed across the water to the Green Mountains.



The scenic character of Manchester Village is defined by both its natural environment and the attractive development that has occurred in the community over the years. The buildings that have been constructed include a variety of architectural styles, and residential, commercial, and institutional structures all contribute to the sense of a traditional Vermont village with a history as a regional center, a resort community, and a pleasant place to live. Those buildings blend harmoniously with each other and with the surrounding natural environment. In addition, landscaping and streetscape treat-

ments such as sidewalks, period lamp posts, and routing of overhead utility lines away from prominent street views also contribute to the overall character of the Village.

At the heart of the Village is the historic Equinox Resort hotel, related commercial buildings across the street, and the County Courthouse and First Congregational Church. The first hotel in Manchester was built on the site of the present resort less than ten years after the founding of the Town. The land and buildings in this area have always been a focal point for activity in the village and continue to set the tone for the character of the community to this day.

The segment of Route 7A, or Main Street, extending south from the Equinox and the Courthouse is a distinctive and important approach to the village center. The large historic houses set back from the street that is lined with maple trees, pedestrian-scaled lampposts, and recently reconstructed marble sidewalks presents a streetscape that is truly unique.

Historic residential buildings are found throughout the Village, with the greatest concentrations of such buildings occurring in the neighborhoods around Taconic Road, Prospect Street, West Road, and River Road. Newer residential development in the Village has tended to be consistent with the historic character of the community, including design elements of the older structures while reflecting the scale, siting, and site improvements of earlier buildings and neighborhoods.

Buildings associated with commercial and institutional uses also are important components of the characteristic fabric of the Village. Some of these buildings were once residential



These two historic structures along River Road as one approaches the Manchester Village line.

buildings, as is the case with Robert Todd Lincoln’s Hildene estate and some of the inns, offices, and stores along Route 7A. Of course, Burr and Burton Academy contains an impressive collection of historic and new buildings on its campus while the Orvis flagship store is an important structure near the northern gateway to the Village.

While the Village does contain an impressive collection of historic and attractive buildings, it is the landscape they are set in that makes the community as visually appealing as it is. The backdrop of the natural environment is very important, but so are many “streetscape” features ranging from street trees and gardens to man-made features like stone walls, sidewalks, statuary, and decorative railings.



The First Congregational Church, Bennington County Court House and the Equinox Resort are located around the small square at the intersection of Main Street and Union Street. The area has long been the focal point at the center of the Village.



South of the square, Main Street is a well-proportioned roadway lined by large trees, green lawns, marble sidewalks, and attractive period lampposts. Overhead utility lines have been rerouted to enhance the scenic character of the approach to the village center.



Historic homes contribute to the scenic character near the village center.



The attractive historic residential properties in the Village, including the renovated schoolhouse (above right), set the tone for future residential development in the Village. New homes such as the one shown at the lower right must utilize careful siting, landscaping, and building design, and are subject to design review, to ensure that the historic character and streetscape of the Village is retained.



This stately building sits on a small knoll at the northern entrance to the Village; it has housed a restaurant and a retail store in recent years.



Historic homes and mature trees along West Road create a particularly attractive streetscape near the Village Center.



The Reluctant Panther Inn was reconstructed after a fire destroyed the original historic structure.



Clear design standards enforced by Village boards result in attractive new structures, such as the Orvis Company's flagship retail store along Route 7A.



The Mark Skinner Library is an important historic structure that occupies an extremely prominent location in the center of the Village.



The Equinox Resort's pavilion, on the shore of Equinox Pond, is used for special events.



The Burr and Burton Academy campus includes a complex of significant historic and contemporary educational buildings.



Landscaping creates an attractive streetscape and entry to commercial establishments.



As one of Bennington County's two shire towns, Manchester is home to a county courthouse; an important institutional structure at the heart of the Village.



The 1811 House is one of several inns and commercial uses occupying historic structures along Main Street.



Hildene is an important Village landmark and an important historic, natural, and open space resource for the area.



Historic signs and lampposts, flower beds, the prominent statue at the “square” in the village center, marble sidewalks, and well-maintained stone walls all contribute the streetscape that is so important to the unique character of the Village.

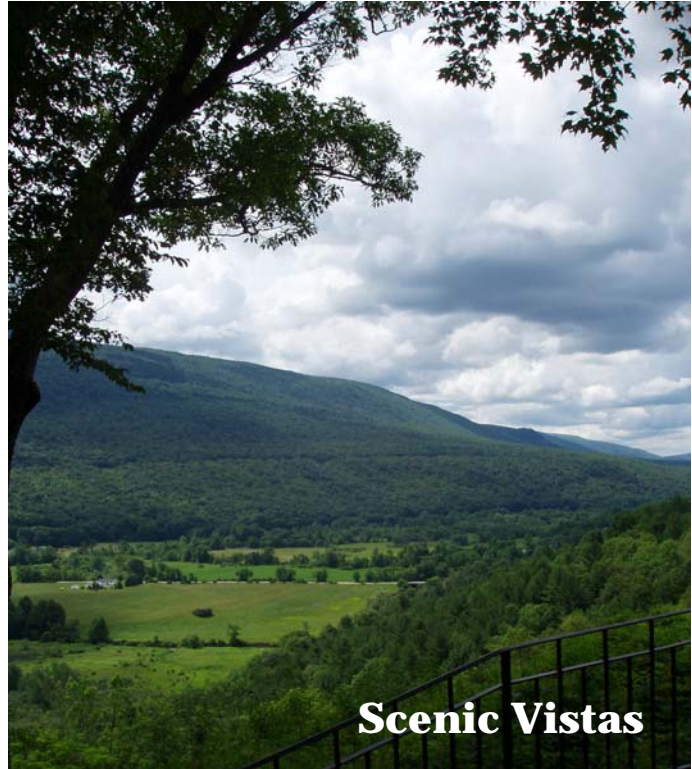
Scenic vistas, as described here, include distant views seen from some public vantage point. Such views typify the image that many people have when imagining a “scenic view” in Vermont. Because of its prominent location in the middle of a valley between two mountain ranges, there are many such vistas in Manchester Village. Some of the views are obtained from public roads, some from golf courses or maintained lawns, and some from viewpoints only reached by hiking trails. The views may be sweeping expanses extending horizontally across one’s entire field of vision or they may be focused through an opening in a tree line or by converging hillsides.

The direction of the vistas seen from the Village is determined by location. Because the highest elevations in the Village are generally found near the Equinox Hotel, locations south of the center tend to look down the valley to the south while locations north of the center tend to have views up the valley to the north.

Those north and south oriented vistas direct the eye to mountain ridges and summits in the Green Mountains rising over 2,000 feet from the valley floor. The eye tends to be drawn far up or down the valley, following the mountains to the distant horizon in those north-south oriented vistas. From some vantage points the Taconic Range appears to converge with the Green Mountain Range at the end of the valley.

There are a number of locations throughout the Village where dramatic views open up to the east or west. In contrast to the north-south views, these vistas are dominated by the broad facing wall of the Green Mountains lying directly across the valley to the east or the great mass of Mount Equinox lying directly to the west. In either case, the mountains provide a dramatic backdrop to elements of the Village landscape and reinforce the sense of Manchester as a community closely tied to the mountains and natural environment.

Although there are no mountain summits or mountainside lookouts within the Village itself, a short hike from the center leads to some dramatic vistas overlooking the community. The most accessible of these sites is the so-called “Robin’s Lookout” on a small promontory just above Equinox Pond.



Looking up the valley from the first tee at the Gleneagles Golf Course.



Southern vista from Hildene; the Taconic Mountains rolling off into the distance.



Distant view of Bromley Mountain looking north-east from the BBA campus.



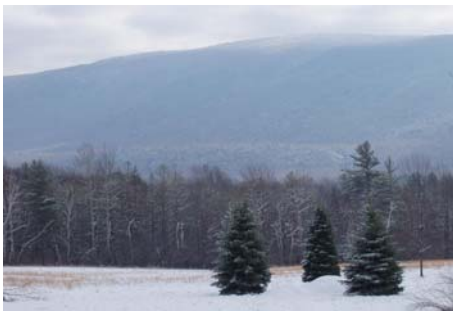
Northward view of the main ridge of the Green Mountains from Hildene.



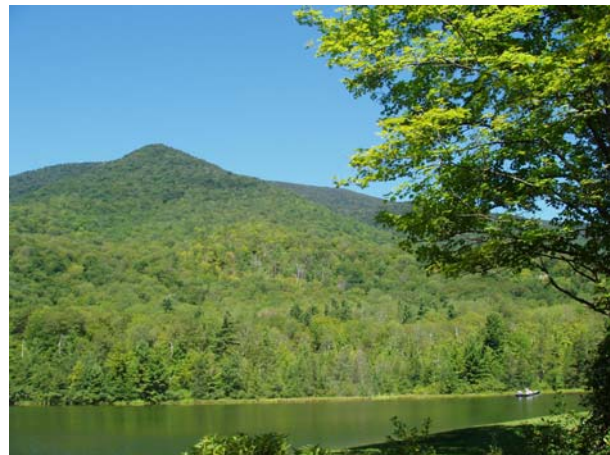
Looking south down the Valley of Vermont from the Wilburton Inn road.



The panoramic vista of the Green Mountains from the Orvis property near the Manchester town line on Route 7A is especially dramatic as the view contrasts nicely with the built up area along the rest of the highway.



There are a number of locations near the village center where views to the east across open fields can be seen between tree lines.



The view of Mount Equinox is especially dramatic from the eastern shore of Equinox Pond.



Golf courses are open spaces that provide plenty of visual access to distant mountain vistas.



The prominence of the Green Mountains is especially evident in this view over the village center from the hill above Burr and Burton Academy.



View over Equinox Pond from Robin's Lookout.



Looking northeast from Robin's Lookout.



The Village is most often viewed by the public from roadways. As such, public highways are extremely important to the community's overall scenic character. Roadways can be scenic features in and of themselves. A winding country lane lined by a stone wall or a village street passing under a canopy of mature trees are distinctive scenic resources. Roads also provide visual access to scenic views; indeed, most of the photographs displayed in this report were taken from the side of a public road.

Most of the roads and streets in the Village can be considered scenic. Some roadway segments are rural and

provide an appreciation of the countryside and some in more developed areas of the community showcase the historic character of the Village. This section will include descriptions and examples of the elements that contribute to a road's scenic character.

In general, narrow local roads that blend harmoniously with the surrounding countryside are more scenic than wide roads that don't follow natural or historic elements of the landscape. Landscape features that are adjacent to a roadway become a part of the road corridor: without stone walls, fencelines, trees, and similar elements the overall scenic value of a roadway can be significantly diminished. Some scenic roads also draw the traveler's eye along the centerline of the road to a unique view or distinctive landscape feature in the distance.

Of course, the views from roadsides are often just as important as the scenic character of the road itself. Some local roads offer delightful forays into deep forests while others bring motorists, bicyclists, and other travelers to views of fields, farms, mountains, or historic buildings. In these instances, scenic viewpoints are open to the principal view and are not blocked or disrupted by incompatible structures or other objects in the foreground. At the same time, attractive foreground objects can greatly enhance roadside views.

A visual "gateway" can be described as a point along a public highway where it becomes evident that the traveler is arriving at a unique place. Very often gateways are located at a



Ways Lane winds past attractive homes, trees, and a stream while serving as a connection between Main Street and West Road.



Attractive foreground plantings and mountain backdrops enhance the scenic qualities of Village roadways.

point of transition between the rural countryside and a more developed historic town or village center. In other places they are found where a view that includes locally significant visual elements first appears. Gateways offer an important first visual impression to a town.

The exact location of a gateway along a highway is somewhat subjective and is much easier to pinpoint along some corridors than others. Well-defined gateways enhance the character of the community and are an important scenic resource in and of themselves. Gateways can be improved by effective land use planning and integration of site features such as landscaping or historic district signs.

There are a number of gateways in Manchester Village. Particularly prominent is the southern approach to the village center near the Main Street/River Road intersection. The northern approach along Main Street has a sign, but it could be relocated to enhance a clearer and more attractive gateway. There also are clear points along Union Street, Prospect Street, and West Road where landscape features clearly announce an entry into the village center.



Restored stone walls lining River Road add to the scenic value of the drive from the village center to the Batten Kill.



The access road to the Southern Vermont Art Center follows the tree line as it gently ascends the hill, enhancing rather than detracting from, the visual quality of the scene.



Roadways traverse attractive landscapes and also provide access to scenic views.



Fall colors along a country lane.



The southern gateway to the village center appears after going down a hill and around a Bend on Route 7A.



After cresting a hill on Prospect Street, this gateway view of BBA and Bromley Mountain appears quite suddenly.



The northern gateway to the Village is marked by a sign that, unfortunately, gets lost in the roadside clutter of poles, street signs, and business signs.



The marble sidewalk, open space, and street trees at the northern approach to the Village marks an attractive gateway.

Manchester Village contains an unusually large amount of open space and undeveloped land, much of which is accessible to the public. While each of these large landholdings has a distinct character and each is dedicated to a different type of use, they all contribute to the scenic quality of the Village.

The Gleneagles Golf Course and the Ekwanok Country Club occupy a large amount of land just east of the village center. Gleneagles is part of the Equinox Resort and is, therefore, more accessible to the public, but both provide extensive well-managed and landscaped open spaces that are important for recreational and aesthetic values.



Hildene is a very large holding that includes the land around the mansion at the southern approach to the village center, as well as extensive wooded areas and fields along River Road and bordering the Batten Kill. The open areas around the house include beautifully restored gardens, lawns and fields that offer striking views of the surrounding mountains, look-outs on rocky outcroppings, and wooded areas interspersed with streams and wetlands. In addition to public tours of the house and grounds, the property contains trails used for hiking and cross country skiing, and special events ranging from band concerts to weddings are held on the property every year.

The Dellwood Cemetery is a very well-maintained facility that is both scenic and historic in character, and located near the village center between Hildene and the golf courses. Driveways wind through the cemetery among historical grave markers, trees that have been growing since the earliest settlements, and stream, ponds, and a small waterfall.

The Southern Vermont Art Center owns a considerable amount of open land at its facility in the northwestern portion of the Village. A large open field with views to Mount Equinox is located along West Road and lawns, fields, and forestland extends to the Village boundaries at the base of Mount Equinox. SVAC is an important cultural and recreational site for residents and visitors.



Equinox Pond on a calm morning.

The significance of Equinox Pond and the surrounding lands of the Equinox Preservation Trust have been noted earlier. The property covers 850 acres extending well up onto the eastern slopes of Mount Equinox. Equinox Pond, surrounding woodlands and trails, and an open field are located within the Village itself. The property is used extensively by guests of the hotel and by local residents.

The former Combe property is located on the east side of Main Street between the Orvis store and the northern boundary of the Village. This parcel consists of a large open field and a pond immediately adjacent to the road and sidewalk. Views across the property toward the Green Mountains are

spectacular and the open space provided by the parcel creates a pleasant break in the commercial corridor along the roadway from the village center to downtown Manchester Center. The property has recently been acquired by the Orvis Company; any future uses should consider the significant scenic value provided by this open space resource.

There are several important trails and trail networks that provide public access to some of the Village’s key open space areas. Most significant are the trails at Hildene, the Equinox Preservation Trust, and the Southern Vermont Art Center.



View through birch trees over the Gleneagles Golf Course — Union Street.



View from the formal gardens at Hildene.



Around the Hildene property (top to bottom): the mansion from the gardens, a large open field atop a small rise affords a view of the mountains, and a pasture and small barn along the access road.



A stream cascades from a small pond at Dellwood.



Natural and historic features blend at Dellwood.



Historic grave markers at Dellwood Cemetery.



The meandering access road runs alongside an open field at the approach to the Southern Vermont Arts Center.



On the grounds of the Southern Vermont Art Center.





Field at the Equinox Preservation Trust Property.



This stream is one of several that drains from Mount Equinox; it flows into Equinox Pond.



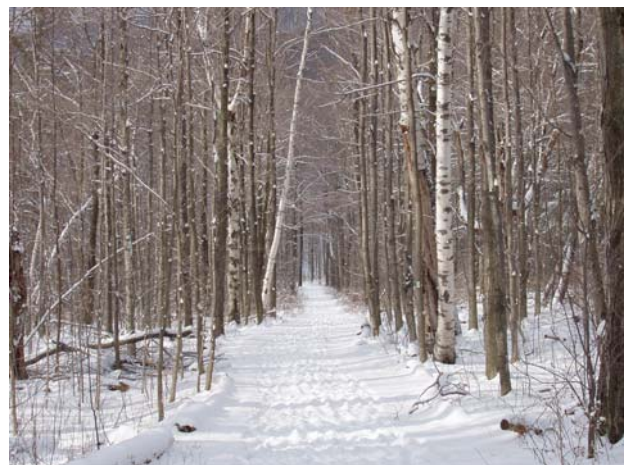
View of the Green Mountains from the public sidewalk adjacent to the Orvis property.



The Orvis Green is a very large open field in the middle of a busy commercial corridor.



Waterways are public resources, but access to them can be limited when they are surrounded by private land, as is the case with Munson Falls.



Public use trails provide access to beautiful forest land and recreational opportunities. Significant trails are found at Hildene, the Equinox Preservation Trust lands near Equinox Pond, and the Southern Vermont Art Center (trails there connect to those at EPT). In addition, an old roadbed now functions as a trail providing access to the Batten Kill off River Road. Continued access to these trails will ensure that the scenic resources they traverse will remain available to the public.



Visual Qualities

Understanding the particular qualities that make a view more attractive, and important, than others will help in subsequent efforts to preserve and enhance the Village's scenic resources. The publication, [Vermont's Scenic Landscapes: A Guide for Growth and Protection](#), identifies several specific attributes that make landscapes distinctive and appealing. Many of those features are present in the photographs displayed earlier in this report. In this section, a few scenic views will be presented that illustrate those qualities in the context of the Village's overall scenic character.

Landscape contrast refers to the natural visual contrast between different elements in a view. Rural scenes may have contrasting types of vegetation or a mix of distinct foreground, middle distance, and background landscape features. Water creates a vivid contrast in any land-

scape, as do other natural features such as rock outcrops, wildflowers, or stands of a single tree species. In a more developed environment the contrast between structures and natural features, either in the background or as integrated landscape elements, can create pleasing visual effects.

While contrasting elements add interest to many scenes, it is important that the built environment retain a certain **order and harmony**. A clear distinction between developed areas and open countryside helps promote this sense and is a defining characteristic of Vermont. Scenic qualities are enhanced in built environments when structures are sited in an orderly fashion, with architecturally related structures organized in traditional development patterns. Rural buildings and groups of buildings are more pleasing to look at when they are sited in a manner that subtly complements the surrounding natural environment.

Visual **focal points** can add meaning and even dramatic effect to a scene. Important civic buildings or prominent natural features can serve as focal points, drawing attention through a wider scene to that particular point. A distant mountain peak or a distinctive structure such as the First Congregational Church steeple can add important context to a scene that is otherwise quite ordinary.

Scenic views are enhanced by a **spatial quality** that includes contrasting elements which frame or define a view. An open space such as a field or view over a valley is more attractive when framed by contrasting elements such as a stonewall, wildflowers, or mature trees. Distant landforms such as mountains also can serve to frame a scene. Tree-lined streets often provide spatial quality for views in developed village locations. Historic buildings can provide an interesting contrasting element that frames a background view of the surrounding countryside.

A landscape that has preserved its traditional pattern and architectural forms can be considered to be visually **intact**. A historic farmstead set against a background of hills and fields, with no intrusive modern buildings, has retained its character and is visually pleasing. A new house sitting in a clearing carved out of a hillside above such a traditional rural scene would significantly diminish its scenic quality. Along village streets, a row of similarly scaled historic buildings is visually appealing while a contemporary building that is inconsistent in scale or architectural style set among those buildings can disrupt the visual quality of the scene.



The foreground of bright flowers contrasts with the dark tree line and the distant mountains in the background.



Water provides an interesting contrast in many landscapes, often reflecting background objects as with this pond on the Gleneagles Golf Course.



Regularly sited and architecturally related buildings contribute to a pleasing sense of order and harmony.



Careful siting of new buildings can reinforce the distinction between open and developed areas and support a feeling of order and harmony.



Attractive plantings set against historic buildings provide a sense of order and harmony in the village center.



The house and barn step back in a well-ordered manner toward the natural backdrop of the mountain.



The steeple of the First Congregational Church can be seen from many vantage points in the Village and serves as a focal point for a variety of views. The historic statue near the Church is an effective focal point for views along Main Street.



A striking natural feature such as this tree set against the mountain background can be a very effective focal point.



The split rail fence and Mount Equinox contribute to the spatial quality of this view of a field and colorful trees along Prospect Street.



Ornamental railing, flowers, and street trees, provide spatial quality for views in the historic district.



Stone walls and a partially wooded setting frame buildings such as this relatively new home on Prospect Street.



The view across Equinox Pond (left) remains intact, unlike the mountainside on the right (in another town) where a new home has significantly altered the natural rural character of the scene.

The scenic quality of a landscape can be affected, positively or negatively, by change. Removing an architecturally incompatible building from an historic district, adding attractive landscaping to a property, or clearing a view to an important focal point are examples of actions that can enhance the visual quality of a landscape. On the other hand, construction of an incompatible building in the center of a natural or historic landscape or erection of a new power line across a scenic vista can adversely affect an important resource. A number of land use planning tools are available that can help the Village protect and enhance its scenic resources.

Before beginning a brief discussion of these tools, it is worth noting the features that render some existing scenic resources particularly vulnerable to negative change. Attributes that make a landscape especially sensitive to change include:

- Views across open fields, especially when those fields form an important foreground;
- Prominent ridgelines or hillsides that can be seen from many public vantage points and thus form a natural backdrop for many landscapes;
- Historic buildings and districts and gateways to historic districts;
- Scenes that include important contrasting elements such as water.

Certain scenic views are highlighted in this report, but the Village should consider the presence of identified critical elements and the overall visual quality of any landscape when assessing appropriate protection strategies.

Manchester Village's **comprehensive plan and zoning regulations** are designed to encourage appropriate development near the village center and preserve a more rural character outside that area. This development pattern enhances scenic character by defining a clear line between village and rural areas, thus reducing the adverse consequences of unsightly sprawl and promoting natural gateways to the historic center of the community.

In some rural areas, it is appropriate to significantly limit the level of development to protect important natural resources. Reducing the allowable **building density** or requiring careful planning of residential development will protect those resources and at the same time maintain important scenic values.

Many municipalities also include **ridgeline and hillside protection** provisions in their zoning and/or subdivision regulations. In particularly sensitive areas developers can be required to site buildings and roads in a manner that minimizes the disruption of the natural appearance of a hillside or ridge. Locating buildings and paved surfaces at the edge of fields or in wooded areas can protect important vistas for the public and for owners of the newly developed property. In a similar way, limits can be placed on removal of natural vegetation and the color and type of building material can be prescribed.

Even in areas outside of hillside and ridgeline protection zones, it may be possible to guide development in a way that promotes and protects scenic resources. **Subdivision reviews can include designation of building envelopes** to ensure that structures do not encroach upon open fields or scenic roadside views and the Village Plan can clearly describe the desired character of new development.

Manchester Village has established **historic district and design control regulations** to maintain and enhance the character of the community. Those regulations can include





Design guidelines can ensure that new development is properly sited and architecturally compatible with the surroundings.



Environmental regulations protect sensitive natural areas like these wetlands along the Batten Kill.

guidelines for commercial developments that can be used to ensure proper siting and design of buildings, structures, driveways, and parking lots and to control lighting and require landscaping that will complement new construction. In addition, **historic preservation and community development grants** can be accessed to help maintain and re-use historic structures.

The Village **Sign Ordinance** is intended to complement the aforementioned historic district regulations and design guidelines. The size, orientation, lighting, and general design of signs will have to conform to standards that will ensure that they serve their function of informing the public without becoming a distraction that degrades the visual quality of important commercial or scenic rural areas.

Local and state environmental regulations also limit encroachment upon rivers, streams, and wetlands. Protecting these valuable waters from incompatible development also preserves visual access to the resources.

Of course, it is neither possible nor appropriate to rely on local and state land use regulations to protect all of a community's scenic resources. Manchester Village is fortunate in that many of its open spaces are under owned and managed in a way that will protect their resource values (i.e., Equinox Preservation Trust, Hildene, SVAC, and even the golf courses). In other instances, it may be appropriate to acquire **conservation easements** to prevent or strictly control development of an area. These easements are purchased from, or donated by, the landowner and are usually held by a conservation organization such as the Vermont Land Trust.

Particularly important views also can be protected by acquiring **scenic easements**,



Many of the Village's open space areas that contribute to scenic values are owned and managed in a way that will ensure that they remain undeveloped.



Attractive commercial signs support scenic values along highways. Route 7A could be considered for the state and federal scenic byway programs.

which are much like conservation easements. Scenic easements are designed specifically to protect a particular view. Development may be precluded from land covered by a scenic easement or the location and size of buildings may be clearly delineated to ensure that incompatible development does not intrude on an important view. The Transportation Enhancements program, administered by the Vermont Agency of Transportation, provides funding for many types of projects, including acquisition of scenic easements for critically important views from public highways.

Municipalities also can formally identify **scenic roads**. Locally designated scenic roads cannot be substantially altered in a way that would damage their scenic character without a significant level of public review. In addition, a state and federal **scenic byway** program has been established to help communities identify ways to protect and promote important scenic or historic highway corridors. **Roadway projects** can and should include features that promote visual quality. It may be possible to construct features that reinforce or create gateways at appropriate locations or to add landscaping, scenic pull-offs, or other streetscape elements that complement the visual environment through which the road passes. The Village should carefully review all new state and local highway projects—road reconstruction, paving, bridge replacement, and intersection redesign— and request appropriate treatments.



Roadway projects should be sensitive to the scenic character of surrounding landscape. In this case, roadway width has been maintained, but the design and expanse of the guardrails at important entry to the Village could have been improved.

A section of Vermont’s Scenic Landscapes: A Guide for Growth and Protection includes design considerations, suggestions, and illustrations that show that new development can be integrated into the landscape in a way that preserves scenic qualities.

Manchester Village’s scenic resources define the community’s character, create a sense of place for residents, and attract visitors and new businesses. The Village should periodically review this inventory to determine if the important elements that form the basis of its scenic character are being preserved and assess whether protection measures are maintaining the visual quality of important landscapes throughout the community.

