

# 4.

# Utilities & Facilities

**The Utilities and Facilities chapter outlines policies and actions to ensure that Irasburg’s public infrastructure, utilities and services continue to meet the needs of the town’s citizens, in accord with the Irasburg planning principles of respect for the environment, sound economics and regard for community values.**

Community efforts by volunteer groups are integral to maintaining and improving many of the town’s facilities, such as the Leach Library, the village water system and the Fire Department. The Selectboard, along with town employees and volunteer support, oversees the maintenance and improvement of other facilities such as the Town Hall, the Town Clerk’s Office, and the Town Garage.

## **Community Facilities**

The town of Irasburg owns several facilities in the village center. Many of these buildings are historic structures. Chapter 5, Natural, Historic and Scenic Resources, provides more detailed information about their history. Here, the Plan addresses the condition and future needs of public buildings.

A 2011 professional energy audit funded by NVDA identified needed improvements in energy efficiency and conservation in the Town Hall, the Town Garage, the Leach Public Library and the Town Clerk’s Office.

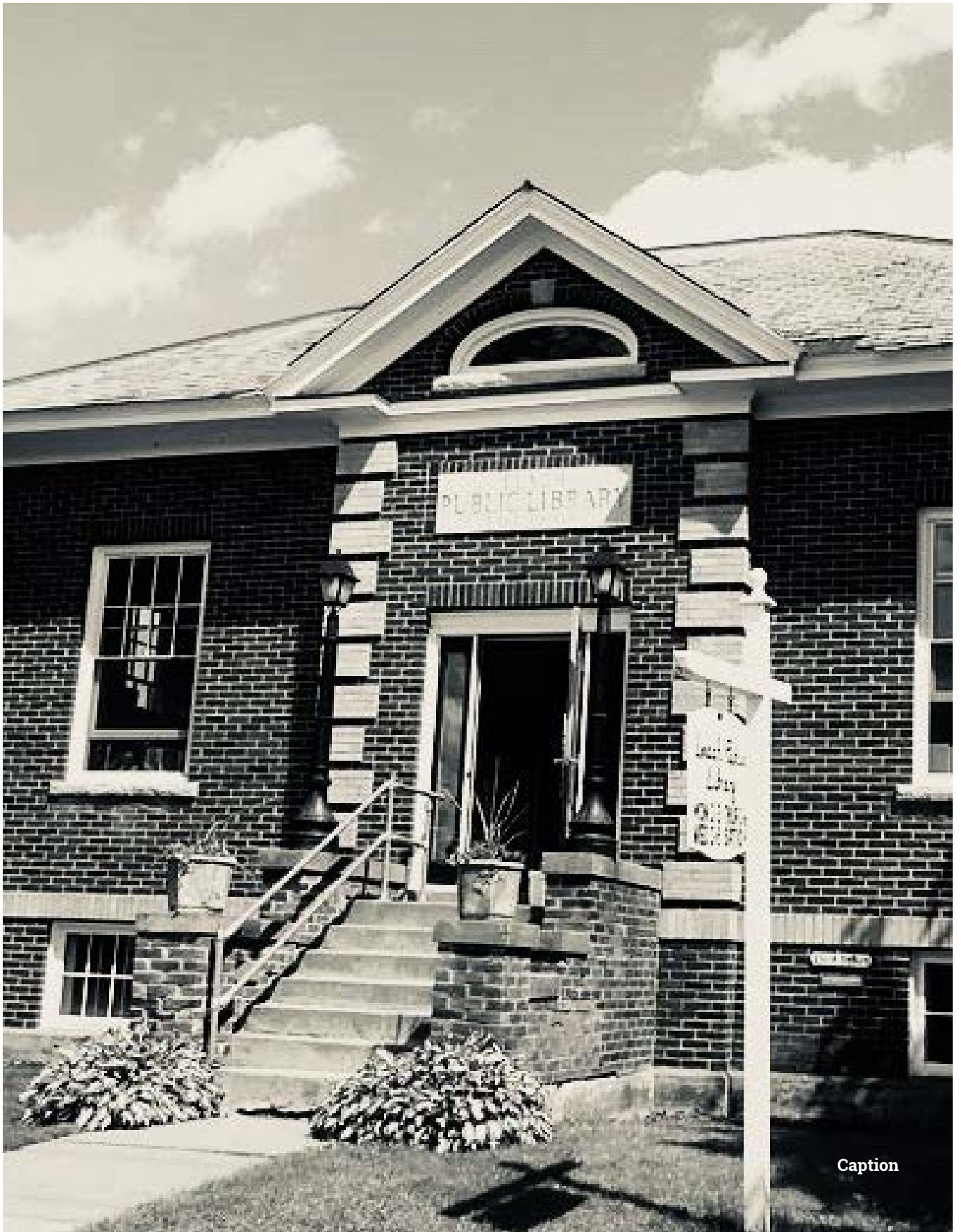
Buildings owned by the faith community include the Irasburg United Church and the St. John Vianney Catholic Church, both in the center of Irasburg; and the New Hope Bible Church on Route 14. The United Church serves some semi-public functions, including monthly “senior meals.” A Masonic temple sits on the north side of the Common.

Besides the buildings listed below, the town owns the Fire Department radio shed and a landfill, which is currently closed, locked and brush hogged. The town also owns the Partlow Lot, a green space by the Black River. Appointed sextons oversee Irasburg’s two cemeteries. One of the cemeteries, the Catholic Cemetery, has no more plots available.

**Town Common** Irasburg grew around the Town Common in the center of the historic village. Four cannonballs marked the corners of the common when it was laid out in 1816. Two are still in place. Today, the Common is the site of many community activities and events, among them the annual Irasburg Church Fair on the third Saturday in July, culminating in one of America’s briefest parades, and fireworks. Walkers, joggers, bicyclists and, in winter, cross-country skiers make daily use of the path that encircles the Common’s perimeter. Little League baseball teams use the ball field in the southwest corner.

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**Caption**

The Common includes a seldom-used bandstand for summer events. A combination of local volunteers and hired contractors takes care of landscaping. The Selectboard plans to make structural improvements to the bandstand to increase its utility. Irasburg Fire District #1, the village water board, has installed a dry hydrant water connection in the northeast corner of the Common, for use during the Church Fair and, potentially, for a farmer's market.

**Leach Library** The library has an extensive collection of children's books, recently enhanced by the start of a dedicated "Farm to Story" collection funded by the Children's Literacy Foundation. In 2016, well-known Irasburg author Howard Mosher dedicated his personal book collection to the library. Dedicated bookshelves house the collection. The library's free Wi-Fi and free computer access are an important service to residents in an area where high-speed internet access is problematic at best. A 2015 architect's report, funded in part by a grant from the Sincerbeaux Foundation of the Vermont Preservation Trust, found the library building to be in generally good condition. Repairs in Fall 2017 fixed the leaky slate roof. However, the library does not meet ADA requirements and requires significant upgrades to permit universal access. The library trustees are currently working with the Preservation Trust to investigate options for making the building accessible while respecting its architectural and historic integrity.

**Town Hall** The Town Hall, completed in 1912, not only houses Irasburg's annual town meeting, but rents its gracious space for social events such as wedding receptions,

anniversaries, fundraisers and other gatherings. The Leach Library's after-school enrichment program for Irasburg students holds classes at the Town Hall. The building received a new roof and repairs to the fire sprinkling system in 2015. An energy audit identified desirable efficiency improvements, including upgrading insulation in all the walls. Energy-efficient lighting upgrades were partially funded through a grant in 2015, with future cost savings expected. To the extent allowed by the budget, the Selectboard plans for future energy improvements, including replacing the heating system, replacing inefficient windows, and further insulating the building to increase energy efficiency and conservation and lower long-term operating costs.

*In 1994, the Town Hall was added to the National Register of Historic Places.*

Recent improvements to the town hall include flooring refinishing and interior paint, as well as a new locking system. Further improvements to this center of community activity are a high priority for the Selectboard.

In 1994, the Town Hall was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

**Town Clerk's Office** Formerly part of a historic school, the town office is located on Route 58. It houses the Town Clerk's office and is the site for meetings of the Selectboard, Planning Commission, and listers. The listers use the lower level for office space. Recent improvements include a downstairs safe, basement renovations, an ADA-accessible bathroom, a new roof, windows and doors; video surveillance, flooring, and paint. The septic system has received a "temporary fix" and needs to be upgraded with a system that meets regulations. Notwithstanding these improvements and despite attempts to save space, a larger or additional safe may be needed to store required records. A larger meeting room would better suit the many boards and groups that use the office. There is currently no place for a private conversation; those must take place outside, encouraging brevity in winter. Plans call for an addition to allow for a larger meeting room and a small lobby for posting materials. The

addition would allow for the separation of the bathroom and kitchen, currently co-located. A modular storage system has been installed in the safe and will be augmented as needed.

**Town Shed & Fire Department** The town shed houses the Fire Department and the town garage. Recently, the roof was replaced and insulation added to the roof for increased thermal energy efficiency. A video surveillance system was installed for added security. A new salt shed was constructed in 2018 to allow easier access for town equipment and better containment to reduce loss of salt and protect water quality in the nearby Black River. The Fire Department recently partitioned off a small meeting room and office space within the existing building.

### **Public Services and Utilities**

**Electricity** Chapter 9, Energy, provides information about the three electric utilities that provide electricity to Irasburg. Several homeowners have installed residential-scale renewable energy infrastructure. The Energy chapter discusses in more detail Irasburg’s network of distribution and transmission lines as well as a VELCO substation located on Route 14.

**Wastewater** Irasburg does not have a municipal wastewater treatment facility. Homes and public buildings use on-site septic systems permitted by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

**Water** The central village of Irasburg comprises a municipal water district operated by a three-person “Prudential Committee of Irasburg Fire District #1,” commonly known as the Irasburg village water system. The system serves approximately 100 residential connections, or about 250 users. The system comprises two wells and a control house/ treatment plant and covered reservoirs. The system supplies about 15,000 –

17,000 gallons per day, or 4,500 gallons per month per household (less than the average Vermont usage). The committee is considering expanding its board to five members, developing a long-range plan, and raising funds for improvements such as replacing old pipe sections and valves, pumps and pressure tanks. At this time, there is limited potential for expanding the system.

Properties not connected to the municipal water system use artesian and spring wells as their water supply.

**Refuse** Irasburg and Albany have a joint agreement for solid waste and recycling disposal. The town operates a metal recycling facility. Most residents use local haulers for refuse disposal and for recycling. Casella Waste Management operates Vermont’s only landfill in neighboring Coventry. Residents take their refuse here, but so does the rest of the state and even communities from outside Vermont. To reach the landfill, 15 to 20 tractor trailers pass directly through Irasburg on Vermont Routes 14, 58 or 5. Trucks hauling waste to the landfill cause extensive damage to the roads and add significantly to vehicle miles traveled in Irasburg, especially since Vermont’s other landfill in Moretown was closed in 2013. The truck

traffic is noisy and disruptive to village life. Many trucks exceed the 30-mile-an-hour speed limit through the village center, creating a hazard for pedestrians and children.

**Stormwater** There are four state-installed storm drains in Irasburg, all near the village center. They drain down Mill Hill ultimately into the Black River.

**Portland-Montreal Pipe Line** With lines traversing Irasburg since the 1940’s, the Portland-Montreal Pipe Line was built to carry crude oil underground from Portland, Maine to Montreal, Quebec. One pipeline passes within 100 yards of the water system, making the village water system vulnerable in case of a pipeline leak. Currently, a 12-inch pipeline is no

*The Irasburg Fire Department provides fire protection service.*

longer used; two pipelines are “operational,” an 18-inch and a 24-inch. The 18-inch pipeline has been out of service since November 2010. The 24-inch is currently being used for oil. The town of Irasburg receives \$55,000 annually in taxes from the pipelines. Pipelines are aging, leading to concerns about possible leaking and ruptures.

**Public Safety** The Irasburg Fire Department provides fire protection service. In 2015, voters approved purchasing a new fire truck tanker for the department. The Fire Department has future ideas to expand, either by an addition or purchase of nearby property. The Orleans County Sheriff’s Department and the Vermont State Police provide law enforcement services. The 2016 Irasburg community survey showed satisfaction with fire service (78 percent) but revealed concerns about adequate ambulance / rescue service (51 percent). Respondents indicated police protection is lacking, with only 31 percent saying it is adequate.

The town’s emergency management director is the Selectboard chair. Irasburg maintains a local emergency operations plan, an annually updated document that identifies local points of contact, shelters, and high-risk populations for emergencies and natural disasters. As flooding can be a concern to Irasburg residents, the town may want to consider developing a hazard mitigation plan to reduce the risk from natural disasters. Orleans Emergency Unit provides 911 Emergency Medical Services to Irasburg residents.

**Telecommunications** Telecommunication capability is integral to life in the 21st century. Essential services, businesses and public safety require fast, reliable and affordable telecommunications service, from phones to the internet. Vermont’s dispersed, rural population presents challenges to providing universal coverage. However, Irasburg residents strongly support efforts to increase cellular and broadband internet coverage throughout all parts of town.

*Only 17 percent of respondents said Irasburg’s telecommunications were adequate.*

In the 2016 community survey, only 17 percent of respondents said Irasburg’s telecommunications were adequate. Eighty percent of respondents support home-based business. Improving telecommunications was a highly-rated priority for town consideration. It is common for traditional, hard-wired landline phones to be integrated in one device that offers internet. Television, internet and phone service can be delivered through one medium. Additionally, wireless fidelity (or “Wi-Fi”) provides “hotspots” for mobile connectivity. A Wi-Fi router is essentially a telecommunication network provided from a single router. Wi-Fi is currently available in Irasburg at the Leach Public Library, the Town Hall, the Town Clerk’s office and the Irasburg Village School.

Much of Irasburg is served by Comcast or Consolidated Communications (formerly Fairpoint) for television, internet and phone service. DirecTV and Dish Network offer satellite service. VTel Wireless service is available for other residents. Nevertheless, many parts of town have no service. Drop zones for cellular phones are common throughout the village center. The town should give consideration to identifying key locations of tall structures that might host an antenna. A switching station is housed in a brick building on the eastern border of Irasburg off Route 14 on Telephone Lane.

**Recreation Facilities** Recreation is a part of daily life in Irasburg, with a playground essentially in residents’ backyards. Residents ski and snowshoe in winter; canoe, kayak and swim in nearby lakes in summer; hunt and fish in season; run road races; ride bicycles; play baseball and basketball. In winter, snowmobilers hold a charity “poker” event. The United Church hosts a senior lunch on the third Thursday of each month. Organized bicycle tours pass through Irasburg and stop at

the Common for lunch in summer. People use both paved and dirt roads for jogging, biking, and other forms of recreation. The annual Kingdom Run, a benefit road race that begins and ends in Irasburg in August, draws runners from across the country.

**H**owever, in the 2016 survey, residents rated facilities for recreation activities very low, with only 8 percent finding them adequate. The town may wish to consider developing a community recreation area with opportunities for children and adults. It might include a covered area for picnics, playground equipment, and nature trails, for example.

For formal recreation facilities, trails on the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) system traverse private property connecting trail networks and destinations and facilities. The VAST trails require membership to use. A new Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association (VASA) trail has recently been developed and will be expanded. The town should investigate the feasibility of developing hiking trails, perhaps in conjunction with existing logging roads.

Publicly available recreation spaces include the town Common and the Irasburg Village School. Tree Corners Campground operates a swimming pool that is open to the public. The River of Life Church conducts a summer camp for children and young people and operates a corn maze in autumn.

**Health Care** The closest health-care clinic is in Barton. Irasburg residents use North Country Hospital in Newport, about 20 minutes away, for emergency and other medical services, including kidney dialysis. Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, NH and UVM Medical Center in Burlington serve more critical or complex medical needs. The Rural Community Transit (RCT) system provides some transportation to and from medical facilities. Otherwise, transportation is by private vehicle. Northern Counties Health Care, a federally qualified health center, operates a dental clinic in Orleans.

## Goal

Irassburg's public infrastructure, utilities and services continue to meet the needs of the town's citizens, in accord with the Irassburg planning principles of respect for the environment, sound economics and regard for community values. Irassburg protects maintains and preserves the Common and historic buildings for future generations.

## Actions

- Pursue Village Center Designation.
- Ensure that all public buildings in Irassburg meet ADA standards for accessibility.
- To the maximum extent that budgets permit, ensure that public buildings meet the highest standards of energy efficiency and conservation.
- Preserve, maintain and improve the Town Hall as a center of community life. Support the efforts of the Town Hall Committee.
- Maintain the Irassburg Common in good condition as a center of community life.
- Consider crosswalks and speed bumps to make the Common more accessible to pedestrians. Consider pedestrian-level lighting and gazebo enhancements.
- Encourage improved telecommunications facilities.
- To achieve aesthetic and other goals, Irassburg should seek party status in the permitting process for new and expanded telecommunication and other facilities.
- Encourage a weekly farmers' market on the Common.
- Encourage formation of a citizens' Recreation Committee.