

Ridgeline & Hillside Development Bylaws



View of the Holyoke Range from Interstate-91

What are the objectives of Ridgeline and Hillside Protection Bylaws?

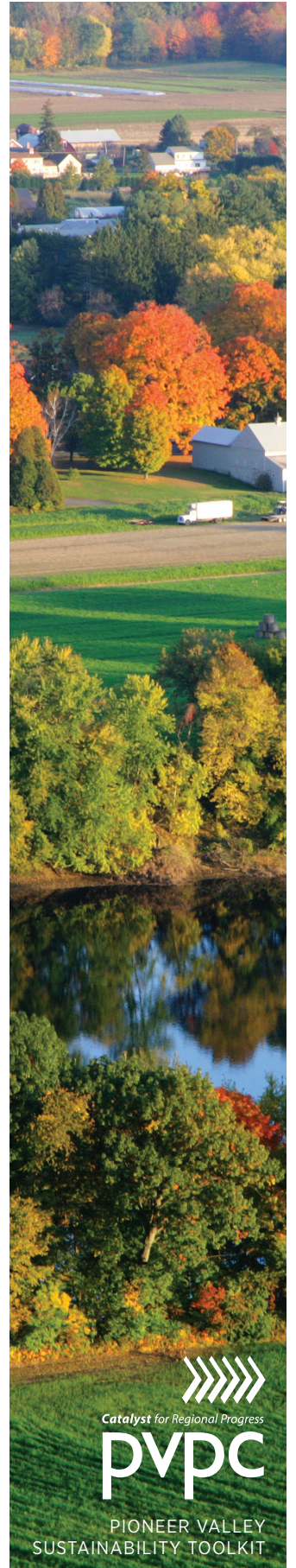
To protect scenic areas, such as prominent ridge lines, or exceptional vistas, as important resources which contribute to the character and quality of life in a community. These bylaws encourage carefully designed low-impact development which minimizes the removal of native vegetation and limits the excavation and alteration of land in order to reduce environmental impacts. Such bylaws also preserve and enhance biodiversity, wildlife habitat, corridors and open space linkages.

Why do we need Ridgeline and Hillside Protection Bylaws?

Most member communities of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission are fortunate to have large areas of undeveloped hillsides, valleys and ridgeline areas which not only contribute considerable scenic and aesthetic value to the community's historic character, but also have special environmental and public health and safety concerns associated with their development. Inappropriate development of these fragile areas can result in excessive cuts and fills, unattractive slope scars, and erosion and drainage problems which can further result in septic tank failures, sedimentation, flooding, water pollution and the destruction of scenic qualities or natural resources.

How does a Ridgeline and Hillside Protection Bylaw work?

Adopted as an Overlay District, these regulations are designed to ensure that the development of such areas is done in an environmentally sensitive manner which protects the public health, safety, and welfare. Ridgeline and Hillside Protection Bylaws



are designed to be flexible, allowing for development to be tailored to the unique individual characteristics of each site and encouraging innovative approaches to ensure minimal environmental impacts. Bylaws include guidelines for appropriate site planning, buildings, utilities, grading, landscaping and erosion and sedimentation control. Development projects are reviewed by an advisory board that makes recommendations to the permitting authority ensuring that they comply with the purpose of the bylaw by balancing the development of the site with minimizing site alterations and impacts on the natural setting.

DID YOU KNOW...

Ridgeline and Hillside Protection Bylaws have two major objectives: the protection of views and the protection of natural features associated with hillside ecosystems.

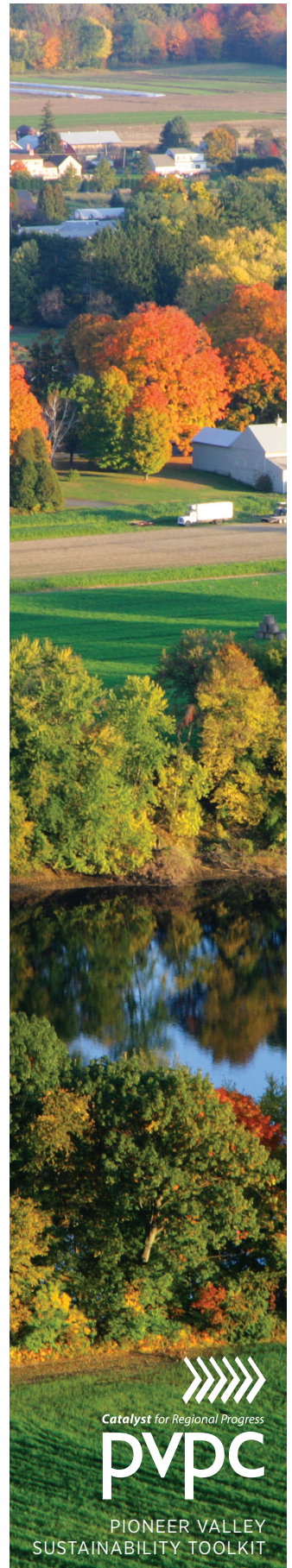
(“Aesthetics, Community Character, and the Law”, American Planning Association)



EXAMPLES FROM THE PIONEER VALLEY

Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke Ranges

In addition to ridgeline and hillside protection zoning bylaws, an intergovernmental compact is another way to protect these resources. The Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke Ranges’ unique attributes and vital natural resources are key components in defining the region’s character and quality of life especially in the Towns of Amherst, Belchertown, Granby, Hadley, and South Hadley, and the Cities of Easthampton and Holyoke. On April 21, 2001, the “Summit on the Range” was held and included participants from throughout the Pioneer Valley. Participants agreed to work cooperatively toward the protection of the Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke Ranges. Through a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), the Towns of Amherst, Granby, Hadley, and South Hadley, the cities of Easthampton and Holyoke, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, as well as other signatories to the agreement agreed to work cooperatively to seek protection of the Mount Tom and Mount Holyoke Ranges and their scenic, natural, recreational and historic attributes.



The following PVPC communities of have adopted Ridgeline and Hillside Protection Bylaws:

- » Hampden
- » Monson
- » Wilbraham

A model bylaw or strategy is included in the Pioneer Valley Sustainability Toolkit.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

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