

**Approved Minutes
Vermont Downtown Board
02/27/2017**

Calvin Coolidge Conference Room, 6th Floor, National Life Bldg., Montpelier

Members Present (10):

- Katie Buckley (*chair*), Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- Michele Boomhower (*vice-chair*), Agency of Transportation
- Jen Mojo, Agency of Natural Resources (by phone)
- Michael Desrochers, Department of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
- Vacant, Smart Growth Appointee
- Scott Murphy, Vermont League of Cities and Towns (by phone)
- Michael McDonough, Gubernatorial Appointee from Bennington
- Liz Gamache, Gubernatorial Appointee from St. Albans
- Chip Sawyer, Vermont Planners Association
- Diane Snelling, Natural Resources Board (arrived after Approval of Minutes)
- Tasha Wallis, Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Tom Torti, Vermont Association of Chamber Executives (by phone, departed during Old Business/New Business)

Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members (4): Chris Cochran, Annina Seiler, Richard Amore and Gary Holloway.

Guests (4): Kate McCarthy, Vermont Natural Resources Council; Peggy Day Gibson, Old Stone House Museum, Brownington; Andrew Strniste, Underhill; Seth Jensen, Lamoille County Planning Commission.

Katie Buckley brought the meeting to order at 1:04 pm in the Calvin Coolidge Room, 6th floor of the National Life Building, Montpelier.

1. Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

There were no additions or deletions to the Board Agenda.

2. Approval of Minutes from January 23, 2017

Michele Boomhower made a motion to approve the draft January 23, 2017 minutes and Michael McDonough seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Michael Desrochers, Tom Torti, Jen Mojo, Scott Murphy and Katie Buckley. The motion carried.

3. Public Comment Period

Katie Buckley opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments.

4. Village Center Designation – 4 – Richard Amore

New Applications (2)

Brownington Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Brownington village center. The village center boundary runs along Hinman Settler Road and Old Stone House Road, and includes the Old Stone House and Barn, Twilight Homestead, Lawrence Barn, Eaton House, Congregational Church, Grammar School, Observatory, Samuel Reed House and single family residences. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet statutory definitions and provide a map that meets the program's requirements.

Peggy Day Gibson, Executive Director of the Old Stone House Museum, noted that the benefits of village center designation, including downtown and village center tax credits, are important for the community's continued preservation and revitalization efforts. Board members thanked Peggy for her hard work and resourcefulness and expressed great admiration for all that the community has accomplished.

Michael McDonough made a motion to approve village center designation for Brownington village center and Laura Trieschmann seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Chip Sawyer, Diane Snelling, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Michael Desrochers, Tom Torti, Jen Mojo, Scott Murphy and Katie Buckley. The motion carried.

Underhill Center Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Underhill Center village center. The village center boundary runs along River Road and Pleasant Valley Road and includes the town hall, the post office, the country store, a school, recreation park, St. Thomas Church, Wells Corner Market, the town green, and single family and multi-family residences. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet the statutory definition and provided a map that meets the program's requirements. Andrew Strniste, Underhill Planning Director, responded to questions from the Board regarding the proposed boundary's location within the water conservation zoning district, which does not align with the characteristics of the village. Andrew noted that the planning commission hopes the designation benefits will assist in the development of a new village zoning district that would support new development that is consistent with the village character. Richard added that the village center designation program has no requirements for zoning but the program does offer technical assistance and resources for improving local zoning.

Michael McDonough thanked the town for the detailed application and historical photos, which provided important context for Board review of the application. He suggested that staff consider recommending a similar approach for other village center applications, where appropriate. He continued by raising for debate the question of whether a motion either encouraging or requiring the town to address the zoning would be helpful to the community. Discussion ensued.

Michael McDonough made a motion to approve village center designation for Underhill Center village center and encouraged the community to take advantage of support services offered through the village center designation program in updating zoning bylaws to better align with the character of the village center. Chip Sawyer seconded and a roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Chip Sawyer, Diane Snelling, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele

Boomhower, Michael Desrochers, Tom Torti, Jen Mojo, Scott Murphy and Katie Buckley. The motion carried.

De-Designations (2)

Norwich Village Center

Norwich's municipal plan does not currently meet statutory requirements and therefore an application for renewal of village center designation for Norwich village center was not submitted. The town is working to update their municipal plan and intends to reapply for designation this summer. Staff recommends that the Board proceed with de-designation.

Tom Torti made a motion to de-designate Norwich village center and Michael McDonough seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Chip Sawyer, Diane Snelling, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Michael Desrochers, Tom Torti, Jen Mojo, Scott Murphy and Katie Buckley. The motion carried.

Williston Village Center

Williston's municipal plan does not currently meet statutory requirements and therefore an application for renewal of village center designation for Williston village center was not submitted. The town is working to update their plan and intends to reapply for designation this summer. Staff recommends that the Board proceed with de-designation.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to de-designate Williston village center and Laura Trieschmann seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Chip Sawyer, Diane Snelling, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Michael Desrochers, Tom Torti, Jen Mojo, Scott Murphy and Katie Buckley. The motion carried.

5. Downtown Transportation Fund Grant – Amendment Request

City of Rutland

Gary Holloway presented the amendment request from the City of Rutland for the Downtown Pedestrian and Gateway Improvements Project. The city was awarded a \$100,000 Downtown Transportation Fund (DTF) grant in 2015 for a project to create four pedestrian crossings in the downtown, to include bump-outs, branding and plantings. The project includes approximately 1,000 linear feet of new curbing, 150 linear feet of new sidewalk, 5 new designated parking spaces, green space, and planting of 18 trees and buffering vegetation. Due to unforeseen increases in estimated project costs, the city is requesting an amendment to the scope and budget. Specifically, the city asks to remove the banner sign structure element from the budget and scope. The current cost is double the original application estimate and the removal of this aesthetic and branding feature from the project will not impact the proposed safety improvements. These funds will be redistributed to cover the increased cost of the remaining items in the project scope.

Board members questioned how the removal of the banner structure might impact the efficacy of the proposed safety improvement and whether the community has investigated the cost of signage and structure alternatives. Gary reiterated that the gateway structure was not a safety improvement but an aesthetic marketing element that may still be completed in the future.

Acknowledging the community's efforts to keep the project on schedule, within budget, and focused on the important safety improvements, Michele Boomhower made a motion to approve the amendment request to remove the banner structure element from both the budget and scope. Chip Sawyer seconded and a roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Chip Sawyer, Diane Snelling, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Michael Desrochers, Tom Torti, Jen Mojo, Scott Murphy and Katie Buckley. The motion carried.

6. Downtown De-Designation – 1 – Gary Holloway

Town of Morristown

On May 13, 2016, the Town of Morristown was sent a letter to remind local officials that the application to renew downtown designation was due November 7, 2016. No application was received and the Board voted on November 26, 2017 to suspend Morristown's downtown designation. Per Board policy, the town was granted 90 days to submit its application to renew downtown designation. The notice stated that the downtown designation would be withdrawn if the application was not submitted by February 6, 2017. No application was received and staff recommends that the Board proceed with de-designation.

Tom Torti made a motion to de-designate Morristown downtown and Laura Trieschmann seconded. Discussion ensued.

Michael McDonough noted that it was unfortunate that unlike with other de-designations, which often result from difficulties in sustaining the required effort and support to remain in the program, that this exit from the program involves a voluntary component. He continued by expressing great regret in having to approve this de-designation while recognizing that procedure requires its removal. Gary added that the Department was saddened by Morristown's decision and he looks forward to helping the community with a new application for designation when the town is ready. Seth Jensen, from the Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC), was invited to comment. He expressed similar regret, shared by LCPC staff and board. LCPC remains committed to mediation and understanding and resolving the concerns of the community. Finally, he stated that the designation has been extremely valuable to the local community and to regional community development. LCPC would similarly welcome a new application for designation.

A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Chip Sawyer, Diane Snelling, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Tom Torti, Jen Mojo, Scott Murphy and Katie Buckley. Michael Desrochers abstained. The motion carried.

7. Old Business/New Business

- **Downtown Day at the State House, February 17:** Chris and Katie thanked staff for a successful and well organized event at the state house. Gary also thanked Chip Sawyer, who offered testimony on the downtown program and associated benefits in the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs. Leaders from downtown organizations, member municipalities and partner organizations were in attendance to meet with the Governor, attend his press conference and meet with their legislators and the majority leaders of House and Senate.
- **Downtown Organization Training, February 22:** Gary organized and hosted a training on Fundraising and Board/Volunteer Development for downtown

organizations and other non-profit organizations. The training sold out with over 60 attendees representing 35 organizations.

- **Downtown Conference, White River Junction, June 8:** Gary offered another reminder to Board members that this year's downtown and historic preservation conference will be hosted in White River Junction. Staff welcomes any suggestions for session topics.
- **Legislative Report:** Chris Cochran highlighted several bills (S. 100 and S.99) that have been recently introduced and support the Governor's proposals based on recommendations made in the Act 157 housing report. Michael McDonough, informed the Board and staff that he has stepped in as Interim Director of Economic and Community Development for the Town of Bennington. He also shared that the Better Bennington Corporation recently changed its name to Bennington Downtown Alliance to better reflect the organizations focus on the downtown. Lastly, he discussed the coalition of municipalities pressing for an expansion of the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) cap to allow Bennington to participate and benefit from the program. He identified the program as a critical tool for downtown redevelopment and though understanding the concerns raised in opposition believes the expansion would serve communities access the state by expanding access to an important infrastructure financing tool.
- **Policy Discussion:** Diane Snelling noted that there have been numerous bills proposing changes to Act 250. She suggested that some proposals are born of a misunderstanding of the important role Act 250 plays in larger planning and land use strategies and the connection between state designation programs and Act 250.

8. Adjourn

Chip Sawyer made a motion to adjourn and Michele Boomhower seconded. The motion carried and the Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 2:06 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Annina Seiler