

## Draft Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 1/27/2020

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

#### Members Present (11):

- Josh Hanford (*Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Michele Boomhower, designated by the Secretary of Transportation (arrived at 1:15pm)
- Jen Mojo, alternate designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- Michael Desrochers, designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
- Patricia M. Sears, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont. (via phone)
- David Allaire, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Michael McDonough, appointed by the governor, representing local government
- Bruce Cheeseman, appointed by the Governor, representing local government
- Chip Sawyer, designated by the Vermont Planners Association
- Greg Boulbol, designated by the Chair of the Natural Resources Board
- Tasha Wallis, designated by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Tom Torti, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Association of Chamber Executives

**Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members (6):** Chris Cochran, Richard Amore, Jacob Hemmerick, Gary Holloway, Juhey Kim, and Jenni Lavoie.

**Guests (7):** Meredith Dolan, Village of Johnson; Phillip Wilson, Village of Johnson; Meghan Rodier, LCPC; Greg Tatro, Jenna's Promise (via phone); Fred Saar, Town of Waterford; Irene Nagle, NVDA (via phone); Lori Hirshfield, Town of Hartford (via phone).

Josh Hanford brought the meeting to order at 1:00 pm in the Calvin Coolidge conference room, on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the National Life Davis building, Montpelier.

#### Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

There were no additions or deletions to the board agenda.

#### Election of Board Chair

Tasha Wallis made a motion to nominate Josh Hanford as board chair and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion carried 10-0.

#### 1. Approval of Minutes from October 28, 2019

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the October 28, 2019 minutes, no edits noted, and Laura Trieschmann seconded. The motion carried 7-0-2 with David Allaire and Jen Mojo abstaining.

#### 2. Public Comment Period

Josh Hanford opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments.

### **3. Village Center Designation– 2 – Richard Amore**

#### **Waterford Village – New Application**

The proposed boundary runs along Lower Waterford Road and Maple Street and includes three properties: the town offices/post office/library, the Lower Waterford Congregational Church, and the Rabbit Hill Inn. The town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program’s requirements.

Fred Saar, Waterford Selectboard member, noted that the town is actively engaging in ways to improve the village, with a current focus on the Congregational Church. The congregation currently owns the church, and with declining members, has asked the town to purchase the building. A feasibility study is currently underway to determine potential adaptive re-use of the structure and its maintenance needs.

Michael McDonough made a motion to approve village center designation for Waterford village and Michael Desrochers seconded. The motion carried 10-0.

#### **Johnson Village – Boundary Amendment**

The town is requesting a boundary amendment to include St. John’s Street and the former St. John’s Catholic Church. The boundary amendment includes 21 additional parcels, including 3 commercial properties (Mansfield Bed and Breakfast with adjacent lot and Lamoille Valley Auto Insurance company), 2 civic properties (St. John’s Catholic Church/future community and health center and the cemetery), 12 multifamily properties (including St. John’s Knoll housing complex), and 4 single family residential properties. The Town invited staff to tour the boundary area and discuss the boundary amendment and the importance of adding St. John’s Street and the future community health and recovery center. The Town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and provided a map that meets the program’s requirements.

Meredith Dolan, Village Manager, shared that the village brick and mortar stores are struggling. The village is encouraging businesses not commonly found online as a strategy to support village vitality. Greg Tatro, attending via phone, shared with board members the mission of his non-profit, Jenna’s Promise, a property included in the proposed boundary amendment. Jenna’s Promise aims to aid individuals and families struggling with addiction, with a safe, and sober location that will serve as an event center, with public addiction education, group talks, and speakers. He’s also invested in a local coffee shop with transitional housing on the upper floors, to assist those in recovery in rejoining the workforce and providing a safe and sober living and work environment.

Board members inquired about sidewalk connectivity to Jenna’s Promise. Meredith Dolan advised that there is not a current plan to extend sidewalks in this area, but once the facility is established, they will re-evaluate to determine need.

Michele Boomhower made a motion to approve the village center boundary amendment for Johnson village and David Allaire seconded. The motion carried 10-0-1, Tasha Wallis abstained.

### **4. Growth Center Extension Request – 1 – Jacob Hemmerick**

#### **Hartford Request for 5-Year Extension Review**

Hartford requests a six-month extension of its 5-year check-in from March 2020 to September 2020 to analyze a wastewater extension to Norwich. If approved, this would be the first extension of a 5-year review by the Downtown Board. Staff recommended a 3-

month extension to allow the review to proceed independently from the wastewater extension.

Lori Hirshfield, Planning and Development Director, attending via phone, informed board members that Hartford has been contacted by the neighboring Town of Norwich to inquire about the possibility of connecting their school's wastewater into Hartford's system. To aid in the discussion, Norwich is funding a capacity study of Hartford's system, to determine capacity and further the conversation.

Board members inquired if part of the extension request could lead to a potential Growth Center amendment request. Lori advised that was a possibility. Additionally, the board commented on the need to avoid setting a precedent and wanted the specific details of this request memorialized in the board meeting minutes for clarity in the event another extension request is submitted.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve Hartford's request for a six-month extension on their Growth Center Designation check-in, provided that the town submit in writing their reasons for the delay, those reasons are noted in the minutes, and if discussions with Norwich regarding wastewater are still unsettled, those issues cannot further delay the process and will need to be addressed at a later time. Bruce Cheeseman seconded. The motion carried 11-0.

Director Hirshfield submitted the following note to board members regarding the extenuating circumstances leading to the extension request:

As requested by the Downtown Board's approval to extend Hartford's Growth Center 5-year review/check-in, from March 2020 to September 2020, I am providing a summary of the reasons I mentioned for the extension request.

1. The Norwich School District has approached the Town of Hartford about the possibility of connecting to Hartford's municipal wastewater system. This request has triggered the need for some analysis of the Town's current and future capacity needs in order to determine if the Town can or is interested in accommodating Norwich's request. The outcome of this analysis could change the information on wastewater capacity that is part of the Growth Center 5-year review. The extension would allow the analysis to be completed, and to incorporate this information into the five-year update.

2. The Town is experiencing an unusual convergence of other critical work items that have created pinch points in staffing capacity. These include embarking on the 5-year state audit for Hartford's TIF District beginning in March; updating the Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan; preparation for the March 3, 2020 voter approval of the next set of TIF projects as the Town is nearing the 10-year sunset period for TIF financing; and implementation of several large TIF District infrastructure projects this summer. It is understood that this is a one-time extension to address an unusual set of circumstances, and that if discussions with Norwich regarding wastewater are still unsettled, those issues cannot further delay the process, and will need to be addressed at a later time.

## 5. Legislative Overview

Chris Cochran provided board members with an overview of the administrations Community Investment legislative package, which builds on Vermont's planning and land use goals, the designation programs, and public infrastructure investments to revitalize communities and create more homes for all Vermonters. Major components of the package include:

- Act 250 in State Designated Downtowns & Neighborhoods
  - Modifies jurisdiction exempt development-ready downtowns and neighborhoods
  - Transitions existing permits to municipal review
- State & Municipal Water/Wastewater Connection Permits

- Exempts state connection permits in willing and capable municipalities
- Requires communities improve maps of their sewer and water infrastructure
- Housing Ready Bylaws, Municipal Technical Assistance and Training
  - Provides incentives [downtown tax credits for income producing properties] to encourage communities to modernize their bylaws through the Neighborhood Development Area designation -- Z4GN (Zoning for Great Neighborhoods) guidebook on ways to make bylaws more housing friendly
  - Offers funding [\$150K to RPCs and \$150K to MPGs] to help municipalities update and adopt inclusionary housing bylaws
  - Funding [\$50K] to train “missing middle” builders and landlords to jumpstart development in all counties
- Tax Incentives
  - Increases tax credit cap [\$1.4M to \$4M total] to support re-investment and designated Neighborhood Development Areas
  - Eliminates capital gains on the sale of improved homes located within federally designated Opportunity Zones
- \$1M Vermont Housing Improvement Program Grants
  - Creates housing provider grants [\$1M] to bring unsafe, blighted, and vacant rental units up to code and back online
- \$250K “Better Places” Crowd-grants
  - Establishes a framework to leverage an additional \$250K in funding for placemaking projects in state designated centers

Board members inquired if single-family homes in Neighborhood Development Areas would be eligible for the expanded tax credits, if the home is a rental – then yes that property would qualify.

Richard Amore added details of the proposed Better Places crowdgranting program. Board members asked if this funding could fill a gap of a larger project and about the scale of projects. Richard indicated this funding could be used to fill gaps, and that other states have granted projects as small as \$1,000, indicating scale is appropriate for Vermont.

## **6. Old Business / New Business**

The February board meeting is canceled, the board will reconvene in March.

## **7. Adjourn**

Tasha Wallis made a motion to adjourn and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie