

Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 3/26/2018

Oldcastle Theatre, Bennington, VT

Members Present (9):

- Katie Buckley (*chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Michelle Boomhower (*vice-chair*), alternate designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Jen Mojo, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- Michael Desrochers, alternate 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 until 3:00 pm)
- Gabrielle Ciuffreda, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Michael McDonough, appointed by the governor, representing local government
- Liz Gamache, appointed by the Governor, representing local government
- Rod Francis, designated by the Vermont Planners Association (arrived at 1:10 pm)
- Donna Casey, 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 (3): Chris Cochran, Gary Holloway, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (27): Stuart Hurd, Town of Bennington; Zirwat Chowdhury, Town of Bennington; John Shannahan, Bennington Downtown Alliance; Diane Perry, Bennington Downtown Alliance; Bill Colvin, Bennington County Regional Commission; Richard Morgan, Bennington Highway; Eric Peterson, Bennington; Linda Foulsham, BDA; Kathy Carey, BDA; RJ Jolly, Town of Bennington; Lynn Green, Grow Bennington Initiative; Susan Plaisence, Bennington Banner; Michael Keane, Bennington; Jeanne Conner, Bennington Selectboard; Jeannie Jenkins, Bennington Selectboard; Edward Darren, Bennington Banner; Michelle Marrocco, Bennington County Regional Commission; Jonathan Cooper, Bennington County Regional Commission; Jana Lillie, Oldcastle Theater; Kayla Becker, UW / Catamount Connections; Krista Speroni, Green Table; Amy Anselmo, Green Table; Allison Cavanagh, Bennington Chamber of Commerce; Scott Tucker, Town of Wilmington; Gretchen Havreluk, Town of Wilmington; Meg Staloff, Wilmington Works; Susan McMahon, Windham Regional Commission.

Katie Buckley brought the meeting to order at 1:01 pm at the Oldcastle Theater, 331 Main Street, Bennington, VT 05201

1. Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

There were no additions or deletions to the Board Agenda.

2. Approval of Minutes from February 26, 2018

Tom Torti made a motion to approve the February 26, 2018 minutes and Gabrielle Ciuffreda seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Gabrielle Ciuffreda, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael McDonough, Tom Torti, Trish Sears, and Katie Buckley. Jen Mojo abstained.

3. Public Comment Period

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

4. Putnam Block Presentation

Bill Colvin, Assistant Director with the Bennington County Regional Planning Commission, joined the meeting to present an overview of the Putnam Block Redevelopment Project. With funding from the state's Municipal Planning Grant and Brownfield Programs, the Town of Bennington created strategic economic development and downtown area-wide plans that helped stakeholders buy-in to this ambitious project. Bill showcased the importance of good timing, strong partnerships and the many sources of public funding required to make the numbers work. The project has multiple phases. The initial phase includes some demolition and renovation of approximately 73,000 square feet of historic buildings. The next phase includes an additional 94,000 of square feet of new multi-story buildings and condos. A mix of uses are planned to include housing, retail, and a food co-op.

5. Downtown Renewal Designation – 2 – Gary Holloway

Town of Bennington

Michael McDonough recused himself from the deliberations and vote on the Town of Bennington's downtown renewal designation. Gary presented the complete renewal application meeting all statutory requirements for Bennington's downtown designation. Gary noted the following items to the board: the five-year strategic plan outlines clear goals, the newly approved Tax Increment Financing district to make public investments needed to attract new businesses; and, a new marketing video, *Vermont Begins Here*, as a successful tool to draw more visitors to downtown. Gary recommended renewal of the designation with the following recommendations:

- Focus on short term goals that can help the downtown while larger goals such as the Putnam Redevelopment Project take shape. The goals identified in the five-year strategic plan are great examples including installing wayfinding signs, beautification efforts, supporting existing businesses, expanding and improving trails & parks and ongoing events.
- Continue to build off arts, culture and entertainment as a key asset and work with the Vermont Creative Network to help expand and strengthen relationships and visibility.
- Continue to apply for funding and get technical assistance from state and other funding sources to implement recommendations from plans and studies such as the Bennington Downtown Area-Wide Plan and Cultural Plan.

Zirwat Chowdhury, Bennington Community Development Director, presented highlights of the past five years to board members including; the installation of electric vehicle charging stations, new Amtrak bus service in town, free public wi-fi in the downtown, community pocket park plans, farmers markets, and the beautification of Main Street with holiday decorations.

State Historic Preservation Officer, Laura Trieschmann, commented that it is refreshing to hear how Bennington appreciates its rich history, historic preservation, and understands how it's past can be leveraged to build a brighter future.

Tom Torti made a motion to approve renewal of the downtown designation for Bennington, Gabrielle Ciuffreda seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Gabrielle Ciuffreda, Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Rod Francis, Tom Torti, Trish Sears, and Katie Buckley. Michael McDonough was recused.

Town of Wilmington

Gary presented the complete renewal application that meets all statutory requirements for Wilmington's downtown designation, along with the proposed boundary amendment. Gary highlighted the following items from the application to the board: financial commitment from the town is evident with infrastructure rebuilding post Tropical Storm Irene, increased accessibility to businesses with the expanded network of sidewalks, establishment of a 1% local option tax which has helped to fund façade grants, provide matching funds for grants, and supported several beautification efforts. Gary encourage the town to work with downtown program staff and other state and partner organizations on technical assistance and funding for the Old School Community Center Property. Gary recommended renewal of the designation and approval of the boundary amendment with the following recommendations:

- Work with downtown program staff and other state and partner organizations on technical assistance and funding for the Old School Community Center property.
- Continue to implement recommendations from the Vermont Downtown Action Team (V-DAT) report.
- Continue to use the local option tax as a mechanism to support economic development, infrastructure and marketing efforts to attract new businesses and visitors to the area.

Gretchen Havreluk, Town of Wilmington Economic & Community Development Consultant, and Meg Staloff, Wilmington Works, presented highlights of the past five years to board members including: how tax credits helped rebuild downtown buildings after Tropical Storm Irene, community events such as the Blueberry Stroll, and efforts to increase downtown accessibility and walkability with new sidewalks and a pedestrian bridge. They also noted a few challenges including vacant downtown buildings, the lack of decent affordable housing, and the ability to attract and retain the young people in the community.

Board members inquired as to the types of businesses they are seeking to attract to the downtown. Meg and Gretchen indicated their target was the technology sector and that the downtown area would benefit with the development of maker or co-working spaces, more artist galleries, a bakery, a grocery or co-op, and a sporting goods store. Additional board questions involved the impact of the proposed foreclosure of the Hermitage Club ski resort to the downtown. Gretchen and Meg said they share this concern and they have proactively reach out to business to discuss the proposed foreclosure how that may impact the local economy. They said they believe a solution is within reach and they will continue to monitor this situation as it unfolds.

Board members questioned water and wastewater capacity in the proposed boundary expansion area given there is a moratorium on new hook-ups to the existing system. Gretchen and Meg explained the community is exploring several solutions and that sufficient capacity remains to support proposed redevelopment within the downtown. Additionally, board members inquired about the inclusion of the community field within the proposed boundary amendment as large tracts of open space are not typically included within the designated boundary. Gretchen and Meg explained how the parcel line follows a physical boundary created by the Beaver Brook, how the area is actively used by the community, and future plans install sidewalks to improve access and connectivity.

Tom Torti made a motion to approve renewal of the downtown designation and boundary amendment for Wilmington, Michael McDonough seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Gabrielle Cuiffreda, Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael McDonough, Rod Francis, Tom Torti, Trish Sears, and Katie Buckley.

6. Vermont Neighborhood De-designation – 1 – Chris Cochran

Harrington Village (Shelburne)

Shelburne's Vermont Neighborhood was approved on March 25, 2013 and it expires this month. It is the only remaining designated Vermont Neighborhood. Shelburne's designated Vermont Neighborhood, Harrington Village, is now built-out and the program benefits for the project are secure.

Staff has reviewed the options for designating a Neighborhood Development Area with Shelburne's Director of Planning. At this point, the town is not ready to proceed with designation and they have decided to let the Vermont Neighborhood designation expire. An application to designate at Neighborhood Development Area is expected within the next year or two.

Tom Torti made a motion to de-designate Shelburne's Harrington Village Vermont Neighborhood designation, Gabrielle Ciuffreda seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Gabrielle Ciuffreda, Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael McDonough, Rod Francis, Tom Torti, and Katie Buckley.

7. Old Business / New Business Announcements

Chris Cochran informed board members that Downtown Day, March 13, 2018, at the Statehouse was a success. Additionally, the Governor's office was pleased to participate in the announcement of the National Life Main Street grant award winners. Initially National Life pledged \$50,000 in grant funds and due to the large demand and great applications, they added an additional \$20,500, awarding \$70,500 in funding to seven communities. The Vermont Community Foundation awarded another \$15,000 to the seven award recipients.

The annual Downtown and Historic Preservation conference will be held on June 8, 2018 in Bristol, VT.

The May Downtown meeting falls on Memorial Day this year and will be rescheduled to May 21, 2018.

Gary Holloway announced that there will be eight Downtown Transportation Fund and six Electric Vehicle Charging Station grant applications to review in preparation for the April 23, 2018 meeting.

8. Adjourn

Tom Torti made a motion to adjourn and Gabrielle Ciuffreda seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie