

Draft Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 9/23/2019

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

Members Present (10):

- Josh Hanford (*Acting Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Jackie Cassino, alternate designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Jen Mojo, alternate designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- Michael Desrochers, designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann (*Acting Chair for the meeting*), State Historic Preservation Officer
- Patricia M. Sears, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont.
- 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 (via phone until 3:15pm)
- Tom Torti, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Association of Chamber Executives (via phone until 2:30pm)

Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members (5): Chris Cochran, Richard Amore, Gary Holloway, Jacob Hemmerick, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (17): Kellie Becker, Town of Chittenden; Steve Welch, Town of Chittenden; Sandra Levine, Town of Middlesex; Elias Gardner, Town of Middlesex; Theo Kennedy, Town of Middlesex; Michael Burris, Town of Milton; Bruce Johnson, Town of East Montpelier; Katie Raycroft-Meyer, ACRPC; Robert Bogdan, Town of Orwell; LaDonna Dunn, Town of Westfield; Pat Sagui, Town of Westfield; Alison Lowe, NVDA; Michael Miller, City of Montpelier; Daniel Richardson, Representing Alan Goldman; Emery Matthews, Representing Alan Goldman; Renny Perry, City of Vergennes.

Laura Trieschmann brought the meeting to order at 1:03 pm in the Calvin Coolidge Room, 6th floor of the National Life Building, Montpelier.

Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

Gary Holloway announced that the check-in with the City of Newport was postponed and he asked the board to remove this item from the agenda. He explained that the downtown organization is working to hire a new executive director and that the transition to the new board chair is not complete. A meeting to meet the new director and chair is planned in Newport in the coming months.

1. Approval of Minutes from August 6, 2019

David Allaire made a motion to approve the August 6, 2019 minutes, no edits noted, and Tom Torti seconded. The motion carried 8-0, with two abstentions.

2. Public Comment Period

Laura Trieschmann opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments from the public but Laura Trieschmann and Chris Cochran spoke about the passing of Paul Bruhn, Executive Director of the Preservation Trust of Vermont, who was a longtime champion of Vermont's downtowns and villages and historic preservation. A Celebration of Life for Paul is scheduled Friday, October 11 at 1pm at Shelburne Farms.

3. Village Center Designation New – 7 – Richard Amore

Chittenden Village

The proposed boundary runs along Chittenden Road, Holden Road and Dam Road and includes the town offices, town hall, a church, Barstow Memorial School, post office, historical society, library, country store, small businesses, multifamily and single-family residences.

The Town worked with staff to define the recommended boundary; however, the town wishes to submit a larger boundary that includes large areas of residential properties, undeveloped parcels, the school, post office, and country store. Including these residential properties, undeveloped parcels, and interrupted development densities conflict with the statutory definition and program guidelines of a designated village center as well as current board precedent because they are not part of the cohesive traditional core, are primarily residential and undeveloped uses, and do not include sidewalks.

Kellie Becker, with the Town of Chittenden, explained the process that the town used to engage community members in the designation including a town-wide survey, review of historic buildings, an inventory and conversation with every business in the proposed benefit district.

Board members deliberated on town's proposed boundary versus the staff recommended boundary. Several members explored reducing the proposed boundary to the Wooden Barrel Country Store.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to extend the boundary south to the Wooden Barrel Country Store and David Allaire seconded. The motion failed 6-4 as 7 votes are needed for a motion to carry.

Chip Sawyer then made a motion to approve the staff recommended boundary and Jackie Cassino seconded. The motion carried 10-0.

North Chittenden Village

The proposed boundary runs along Holden Road, Furnace Brook Road and Stoney Hill Road and includes the grange hall, park and ride, community church, emergency shelter, Dwight D. Eisenhower National Fish Hatchery, small businesses, multifamily and single-family residences.

The Town worked with staff to define the recommended boundary; however, the town wishes to include a several rental housing properties and single-family dwellings on eastern edge of the boundary. Including these residential and undeveloped properties, conflict with the statutory definition and program guidelines of a designated village center as well as current board precedent because they are not anchored by civic or commercial use, are primarily residential or undeveloped, and do not include sidewalks.

Kellie Becker said the town's proposed boundary was submitted with aim of helping future businesses. The board explained that it could consider a future boundary amendment if the facts and circumstances change.

Tom Torti made a motion to approve village center designation for North Chittenden village, with the staff recommended boundary and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. The motion carried 10-0.

North Montpelier Village

The proposed boundary runs along Route 14 and includes the former general store, former Masonic Lodge, Sibley Mansion apartments, mixed-used properties, small businesses, multifamily and single-family residences. The town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program's requirements.

Bruce Johnson, with the Town of East Montpelier, shared with board members the challenges that the proposed designated area faces with many historic buildings in need of restoration, and a shuttered general store. The village was once a thriving area of manufacturing and he hopes designation and the tax credits will encourage building owners to improve the quality of the rental housing in the village and reopen the general store.

Jackie Cassino made a motion to approve village center designation for North Montpelier village and David Allaire seconded. The motion carried 10-0.

Middlesex Village

The proposed boundary runs along Route 2 and Church Street and includes the town offices, Camp Meade property and businesses, fire station, United Methodist Church, Francis Foundation, the Roots Farmstand, train depot, thrift store, small businesses, multifamily and single-family residences. The town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program's requirements.

Sandra Levine, with the Town of Middlesex, shared with board members that the town hopes to develop a more pedestrian friendly multi-modal center within the proposed designated area.

David Allaire made a motion to approve village center designation for Middlesex village and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion carried 10-0.

Milton Village

The proposed boundary runs along Route 7, Main Street, Kienle Road, Railroad Street, and Church Street and includes a park, historical society, two churches, Masonic Hall, cemetery, former firehouse, historic creamery, numerous small businesses, multifamily and single-family residences. The town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program's requirements.

Michael Burris, with the Town of Milton, shared with board members that the town intends to encourage development and density in the designated village center area.

Bruce Cheeseman made a motion to approve village center designation for Milton village and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion carried 10-0.

Orwell Village

The proposed boundary runs along Main Street, North Orwell Road, Roberts Avenue, and Church Street and includes the town offices, three churches, village school, post office, bank, village green, library, masonic hall, Buxton's General Store, small businesses, multifamily and single-family residences. The Town worked with staff to define the recommended boundary; however, the town wishes to submit the same boundary as designated in 2009 which includes residential areas along the periphery. Including these residential properties conflict with the statutory definition and program guidelines as well as board precedent because they

are not anchored by civic or commercial uses, do not contain a mix of uses, and they are primarily residential uses.

Bob Bogdan, with the Town of Orwell, and Katie Raycroft-Meyer with ACRPC, said the town would like to restore the larger boundary they had in their original designation from 2009 – 2015. Richard Amore explained that the definition and application guidelines had changed since then. The updated statutory definition of ‘village center’ targets commercial and public buildings and generally excludes residential properties that are not eligible for the program’s incentives.

Tasha Wallis made a motion that the board recognize the larger area that the community views as the village and designate the smaller village center boundary that meets the statutory definition. Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion carried 9-0.

Westfield Village

The proposed boundary runs along Route 100 and School Street and includes the Hitchcock Museum and Memorial Library, Westfield General Store, post office, community center, town offices, congregational church, hardware store, farm stand, small businesses, multifamily and single-family residences. The town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program’s requirements.

Pat Sagui and LaDonna Dunn, with the Town of Westfield, shared with board members that the town distributed a survey which identified several vulnerable properties in town, including the recently closed assisted living facility.

David Allaire made a motion to approve village center designation for Westfield village and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. The motion carried 9-0.

4. Growth Center Designation– 1 – Jacob Hemmerick

Montpelier 5-Year Check-In

The City of Montpelier comes before the Board for its second, five-year review of its growth center pursuant to 24 V.S.A. §2793c.(e) to: 1) request that the Board determine that the designation continues to meet the standards for designation in effect at the time it was originally designated and 2) request approval of an amendment to the existing growth center boundaries. The proposed boundary removes an area of land north of the Statehouse and re-instates an area previously within the growth center described as “Crestview”. The City’s submission was complete, notice was issued in accordance with Board policy, and staff drafted findings for the Board’s consideration of the boundary amendment.

Mike Miller, Montpelier Planning Director, shared with board members the success of Montpelier’s Growth Center, with a high overall compliance with residential development, enterprise development, and subdivision development within the Growth Center. The city has also completed numerous plans and bylaws including; an economic development strategic plan, public art master plan, municipal master plan, and unified development regulations. The city has seen several important projects such as: the restoration of the French Block, the rehab of 39-40 Barret Street, Taylor Street reconstruction, the Taylor Street multi-modal transit center and housing, and the proposed hotel and parking garage. Mike also shared with board members that the proposed boundary amendment would be able to accommodate the projected growth for 20-years as designation necessitates.

Chip Sawyer made a motion determining that Montpelier’s Growth Center continues to meet the standards for designation in effect at the time it was originally designated and authorize the Chair to sign the findings as presented and David Allaire seconded. The motion carried

9-0. David Allaire made a motion to amend the Montpelier Growth Center boundary as proposed and Mike Desrochers seconded. The motion carried 8-0.

5. Downtown Designation– 3 – Gary Holloway

City of Vergennes – Boundary Amendment

The City is requesting a downtown boundary amendment to include two parcels adjacent to the City Green on North Street. Vergennes Residential Care (VRC) is located at 34 North Street, across from the City Green and is included within the historic neighborhood district. Operated as a reputable senior housing facility for decades, the property was recently purchased by Grand Senior Living (GSL). GSL has plans to significantly improve and expand the facility to accommodate more residents which may include the purchase of 40 North Street which is also included with the historic neighborhood district. The expanded boundary will enable GSL to take advantage of downtown tax credits to make necessary improvements to the existing facility at 34 North Street.

Renny Perry, with the City of Vergennes, said that the city hasn't experienced any growth of the size of this proposed senior living expansion in a long time. Board members asked which incentives would help the project. Gary said the tax credits or sales tax reallocation was most likely.

Dave Allaire made a motion to approve Vergennes' boundary amendment and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. The motion carried 8-0.

Town of St. Johnsbury – 4-Year Review

Gary met with Chad Whitehead and Joe Kasprzak from the Town and Tara Holt from the St Johnsbury Chamber of Commerce on August 22, 2019 in St Johnsbury.

St. Johnsbury deserves to be commended on their efforts to build community consensus on downtown as a priority; implement beatification projects and placemaking strategies to make downtown more inviting; expand housing opportunities; and make the long-term capital investments needed to ensure the downtown's economic, civic and cultural foundation remains strong and vital. The collaborative approach between the Town, Chamber of Commerce, community led committees and other partners has enabled the community to make strides in shared priorities which is now seeing the fruits of their labor.

The town continues to meet all downtown designation program requirements. As needed, Gary will check in with the town and provide technical assistance and resources to help support St Johnsbury's ongoing efforts.

City of Rutland – 4-Year Review

Gary met with Brennan Duffy with the Rutland Redevelopment Authority, Steve Peters and Michelle Delpha with the Downtown Rutland Partnership on August 8, 2019 in Rutland.

Rutland has demonstrated a commitment to invest in public space, through new parks, streetscape and beautification improvements. These efforts are helping to support the vitality of downtown and making Rutland a more attractive place to live and work. Investments in blighted neighborhoods, investments in private property adding new commercial space and housing units downtown, zoning changes to create predictable development regulations and a robust marketing initiative to attract new families and business are all contributing to the long-term goals of the City. The partnerships between the City, the Rutland Downtown Partnership and many other partners are key to this success.

The city continues to meet all downtown designation program requirements. Gary will follow up and provide the city technical assistance and resources to help support their revitalization efforts.

6. Old Business / New Business

October Meeting in Bethel

Chris Cochran provided board members with an overview of the agenda for the October meeting which will be held in Bethel on Monday, October 28, 2019.

7. Adjourn

David Allaire made a motion to adjourn and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie