

**Approved Minutes  
Vermont Downtown Board  
5/23/2016**

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

**Members Present:**

- Noelle MacKay (*chair*), Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- Michele Boomhower (*vice-chair*), Agency of Transportation
- Jen Mojo, Agency of Natural Resources (departed during the Act 250 9(L) presentation)
- Michael Desrochers, Department of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
- Peg Elmer Hough, Smart Growth Appointee
- Scott Murphy, Vermont League of Cities and Towns (by phone)
- Michael McDonough, Gubernatorial Appointee from Bennington
- Ron Redmond, Gubernatorial Appointee Representing Downtown Organizations
- Michael Munson, Vermont Planners Association
- Diane Snelling, Natural Resources Board (by phone)
- Tasha Wallis, Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Tom Torti, Vermont Association of Chamber Executives

**Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members:** Richard Amore, Chris Cochran, Annina Seiler, John Adams and Caitlin Corkins.

**Guests:** Ted Unkles, Selectboard Chair, Town of Bradford; Sherry Brown, Bradford Main Street Alliance; Eric Mach, Zoning Administrator, Town of Pawlet; Mary Lamson, Planner, Rutland Regional Planning Commission; Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning and Development, City of St. Albans.

Chair Noelle MacKay brought the meeting to order at 1:01 pm in the Calvin Coolidge Room, 6<sup>th</sup> 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 April 25, 2016**

Laura Trieschmann made a motion to approve the draft April 25, 2016 minutes and Michele Boomhower seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. The motion carried.

**3. Public Comment Period**

Noelle MacKay opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments.

**4. Downtown Designation – Richard Amore**

**De-Designation (1):**

### **Bradford**

The Town of Bradford did not submit an application for renewal of downtown designation choosing instead to withdraw from the downtown designation program and submit an application for village center designation. The community found it difficult to build the necessary capacity and financial support to effectively staff its downtown program. Richard introduced Ted Unkles, Selectboard Chair and Sherry Brown, from the Bradford Main Street Alliance, and invited them to address the Board. Ted acknowledged that this was a very difficult decision and that despite the hard work and commitment of many volunteers the downtown program was unable to succeed as originally hoped. The town intends to reapply in the future and will continue to work to build capacity in the downtown.

Michele Boomhower made a motion to de-designate Bradford downtown and Michael Munson seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. The motion carried.

## **5. Village Center Designation – 1 – Richard Amore**

### **New Applications (3)**

#### **Bradford**

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Bradford village center. Bradford's village center boundary runs along both sides of Route 5 (Main Street) incorporating churches, commercial businesses, civic buildings and multi-family residential uses. The requested boundary is almost identical to the former designated downtown boundary with the addition of the Grace United Methodist Church and neighboring properties. 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. Ted Unkles and Sherry Brown discussed challenges and the goal of educating the community about the benefits of the new designation. Staff is committed to assisting the community through the transition and would be happy to present at a community forum to share information about the designation benefits and the tax credit program.

Michael Munson made a motion to approve village center designation for Bradford village center and Michael Desrochers seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. The motion carried.

#### **Pawlet**

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Pawlet village center. Pawlet was previously designated from 2005 to 2015 and was de-designated as the town plan did not meet the designation requirements. The proposed boundary is identical to the previously approved designation. 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.

Tasha Wallis made a motion to approve village center designation for Pawlet village center and Peg Elmer Hough seconded. Michael Munson raised concerns about the largely

residential nature of the southern arm of the boundary and the extension of the boundary to capture Sheldon's General Store. Michael Munson requested a friendly amendment to the motion to amend the southern arm of the village center boundary and cut it off at the map symbol for image 12. Board discussion ensued. Michael McDonough noted that Sheldon's General Store provides a natural sense of entry into the community. Other members mentioned that Sheldon's is an important hub of commerce and activity which may qualify for tax credits and cited the town's plans to extend sidewalk to the store. Eric Mach affirmed the fact that Sheldon's store is a community gathering place and has long been part of the fabric of the community. He explained some of the nearby residential properties have served as boarding houses or bed and breakfasts in the past and still have commercial potential.

Michael Munson's friendly amendment to reduce the size of the proposed boundary failed to receive support. A roll call vote was taken on the original motion to approve the boundaries as submitted in the application.

Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. Nays: Michael Munson. The motion carried.

### **West Pawlet**

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for West Pawlet village center. West Pawlet was previously designated from 2005 to 2015 and was de-designated as the town plan did not meet the designation requirements. The proposed boundary is identical to the previously approved designation. The application is complete and staff recommends approval of the application for village center designation.

Board members raised similar concerns about the southern end of the village boundary including mostly residential and some mixed use properties. Following a lengthy discussion, Michael Munson made a motion to amend the southern end of the village center boundary to cut off beneath the symbol marked 9 on the map where a mixed use property sits across from a multi-family dwelling. Erich Mach stated that he would be amenable to this amendment. Michele Boomhower seconded and a roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. Michael McDonough abstained. The motion carried.

### **Renewal Applications (2)**

#### **Bethel**

The complete application for renewal of village center designation for Bethel village center was presented to the Board. The designated boundary was not altered and the map was updated to meet program standards. Staff recommends proceeding with approval of the application for renewal of the village center designation for Bethel village center.

Peg Elmer Hough made a motion to approve renewal of village center designation for Bethel village center and Laura Trieschmann seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. The motion carried.

### **West Rutland**

The complete application for renewal of village center designation for West Rutland village center was presented to the Board. The designated boundary was not altered and the map was updated to meet program standards. Staff recommends proceeding with approval of the application for renewal of the village center designation for West Rutland village center.

Peg Elmer Hough made a motion to approve renewal of village center designation for West Rutland village center and Laura Trieschmann seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. The motion carried.

### **6. Downtown Transportation Fund Grant Amendment – Chris Cochran**

The City of St. Albans was awarded \$100,000 in Downtown Transportation Funds (DTF) in 2013 for a project to improve the safety of a major intersection in the downtown core. Due to challenges with the railroad and cost increases, the city requested an initial amendment to the scope and extension of the completion date to October 31, 2016. The Board approved the amendment request at the November 2015 Board meeting and requested the city provide an update at the May Board meeting regarding the right of way planning and approval. The city has submitted a memo which includes the required update along with a request to further extend the completion date of the grant to October 31, 2017. The additional time is needed to complete the right of way negotiations and certification.

Chip Sawyer, the Director of Planning and Development, presented the Board with an update regarding the right of way approval process and responded to questions and concerns. Michele Boomhower noted the proposal included a realistic timeline and offered to provide assistance in negotiating with the railroad if necessary. Board discussion ensued.

Michael McDonough made a motion to approve the amendment request from the City of St. Albans extending the completion date of the grant to October 31, 2017. Peg Elmer Hough seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Jen Mojo, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, and Noelle MacKay. Nays: Scott Murphy. The motion carried.

### **7. Downtown Transportation Fund Grant Scoring Analysis – Annina Seiler**

At the previous Board meeting members requested that staff provide data and analysis of past scoring rounds so that they may have an informed discussion and evaluation of the Downtown Transportation Fund (DTF) grant scoring process. The reason for this stemmed from the perception that larger communities were routinely funded and that smaller communities are disadvantaged by the scoring process. Staff provided several possible changes to the scoring criteria and process for the Board to consider. Discussion ensued and Board members considered using a statistical solution to normalize scores. Tasha expressed reluctance to add steps that could make the scoring process less transparent to applicants. Ultimately, the Board preferred a solution in which applicants with 2 or more currently active grants are ineligible for funds. It was also observed that further clarification, education, and training on how to consistently apply the competitive criteria would address concerns about the large spread of scores in a few of the more narrowly defined criteria.

The Board determined that the new policy would be evaluated for efficacy after the next round of applications in 2017.

#### **8. Act 250 9(L) Overview – John Adams**

As requested at a prior Board meeting, John Adams presented an overview of guidance that explains Act 250 changes intended to direct more growth and development to Vermont's traditional centers. Board members thanked John for the presentation and discussed the importance of consistency in approving designation boundaries as they play a role in 9(L) determinations. Noelle thanked John for his work in developing the guidance and his efforts to engage stakeholders from across the state.

#### **9. Village Center Presentation Overview – Caitlin Corkins and Richard Amore**

Richard Amore and Caitlin Corkins presented the Board with an overview of the village center designation program and downtown and village center tax credits, as presented to interested communities across the state. The Board noted that this presentation would be helpful in training and orienting new Board members and thanked Richard and Caitlin for the work they do with communities.

#### **10. Old Business/New Business**

- Noelle announced that she will be resigning her position with the Department of Housing and Community Development at the end of June. She has accepted a position as executive director of the Burlington Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO). Lucy Leriche, ACCD Deputy Secretary will be taking over responsibilities as chair of the Downtown Board and introductions will be made at the June meeting.
- Board members were reminded to register for the Historic Preservation and Downtown Conference in Waterbury on June 10<sup>th</sup>. The conference includes tours of the newly renovated Waterbury State Office Complex.
- Noelle noted that the Bennington Battle Monument is celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the monument and that the new elevator is up and running. Additionally, the Calvin Coolidge presidential site has a seasonal exhibit featuring presidential gifts.
- Chris Cochran reminded the Board that the Downtown and Village Center Tax Credit applications would be due in July and that practice scoring is scheduled for the June meeting.

#### **11. Adjourn**

Tasha Wallis made a motion to adjourn and Laura Trieschmann seconded. A roll call vote was taken. Ayes: Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michael Desrochers, Michael Munson, Michele Boomhower, Peg Elmer Hough, Tasha Wallis, Diane Snelling, Scott Murphy and Noelle MacKay. The motion carried and the Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Annina Seiler