

Draft Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 09/25/2017

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

Members Present (12):

- Katie Buckley (*chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Michele Boomhower (*vice-chair*), designated by the Secretary of Transportation (arrived after minutes approval)
- Jen Mojo, 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
- 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
- Chip Sawyer, designated by the Vermont Planners Association (arrived at 1:16pm)
- 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 (5): Chris Cochran, Jenni Lavoie, Richard Amore, Caitlin Corkins, and Gary Holloway.

Guests (10): Eric Vorwald, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission; Tyler Yandow, Town of Dorset Zoning Administrator; Jeff Schulz, Town of Northfield Town Manager; Carol Rossi, Town of Wheelock Town Clerk; Martin Langeveld, Town of Vernon Planning Commission; David Jescavage, Town of Swanton Town Administrator; Celia Bohannon, Saxtons River Planning Commission; Louise Luring, Chair of the Saxtons River village trustees; Al Voegel, Northwest Regional Planning Commission; Alison Low, Northeastern Vermont Development Association.

Katie Buckley brought the meeting to order at 1:01 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 July 24, 2017

Tom Torti made a motion to approve the July 24, 2017 minutes and Tasha Wallis seconded. Motion carried 8-0, Donna Casey and Jen Mojo abstained.

3. Public Comment Period

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

4. Village Center Designation – 12 – Richard Amore

New Applications (6)

Dorset Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Dorset village center. The proposed boundary runs primarily along Route 30 and Church Street including the Dorset Inn, Dorset Field Club, Dorset Union Store, Historical Society, Post Office, Library, Barrows House Inn, Union Church of Christ, Berkshire Bank, Dovetail Inn, several commercial businesses and multifamily and single-family residences. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet statutory definitions and provided a map that meets the program's requirements.

Tyler Yandow, Town of Dorset Zoning Administrator, described recent planning and revitalization efforts in the Dorset village center.

Michelle Boomhower made a motion to approve village center designation for Dorset village center and Tasha Wallis seconded. The motion passed 11-0.

East Dorset Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for East Dorset village center. The proposed boundary runs primarily along Mad Tom Road, Village Street and Route 7 including the East Dorset General Store, post office, Griffith Library, Congregational Church, town offices, fire department, several commercial businesses and multifamily and single-family residences. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet statutory definitions and provided a map that meets the program's requirements.

Tyler Yandow, Town of Dorset Zoning Administrator, described recent planning and revitalization efforts in the East Dorset village center.

Michael McDonough made a motion to approve village center designation for East Dorset village center and Tom Torti seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Northfield Falls Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Northfield Falls village center. The proposed boundary runs primarily along US Route 12, Mill Street and Gould Road, including the Falls General Store, the Rustic Restaurant, the Wood Mill, Post Office, MicroTek housing, St. Jacob's of Alaska Orthodox Church, several commercial businesses and multifamily and single-family residences. All requirements have been met. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet statutory definitions and provided a map that meets the program's requirements.

Jeff Schulz, town manager, described recent planning and revitalization efforts in Northfield.

Michelle Boomhower made a motion to approve village center designation for Northfield Falls village center and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Saxtons River Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Saxtons River village center. Previously designated from 2002-2016. The proposed boundary runs primarily along Main Street, Westminster Street, Academy Avenue, Grove Street and Pleasant Street including the Village Market, Post Office, Elementary School, Main Streets Arts, Historical Society, two churches, café, Vermont Academy, Warner Center, Montessori School,

commercial businesses and multifamily and single-family residences. The new proposed boundary removes large areas of residential and undeveloped lands in the northeast and southwest corners of the previously designated boundary and adds the Vermont Academy properties to the north. All requirements have been met. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet statutory definitions and provided a map that meets the program's requirements.

Celia Bohannon, Saxtons River Village trustee, and Louise Luring, Chair of the Village trustees, were on hand to describe recent planning and revitalization efforts in the Saxton's River village center.

Tasha Wallis made a motion to approve village center designation for Saxtons River village center and Michael Desrochers seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Vernon Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Vernon village center. The proposed boundary runs primarily along Route 142 and Governor Hunt Road including the town offices, police station, library, former grange hall, elementary school, Governor Hunt House, and multifamily and single-family residences. All requirements have been met. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet statutory definitions and provided a map that meets the program's requirements.

Martin Langeveld, Town of Vernon Planning Commission member, described recent planning and revitalization efforts in the Vernon village center. Board members noted the lack of zoning in Vernon could undermine their plans to shape development in the village. Members noted that incorporating the proposed village redevelopment master plan into the town plan could provide some protection. Members also commented that this was the first instance where the designation was viewed as a tool to create a new center and not recognize an existing one.

Tom Torti made a motion to approve village center designation for Vernon village center and Patricia Sears seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Wheelock Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for village center designation for Wheelock village center. The proposed boundary runs primarily along Route 122 including the Town Hall and Town Offices, Wheelock Village Store, Town garage, cemetery, and multifamily and single-family residences. All requirements have been met. The town and CP+R staff worked together to create the proposed boundary to meet statutory definitions and provided a map that meets the program's requirements.

Carol Rossi, Town of Wheelock Town Clerk, spoke to her hope that village center designation combined with recent historic preservation grants aimed at restoring the town hall will help and encourage revitalization efforts in the Wheelock village center.

Patricia Sears made a motion to approve village center designation for Wheelock village center and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Renewal Applications (6)

Swanton Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for renewal of village center designation for Swanton. The town is requesting a boundary amendment to include properties across the Missisquoi River in the northern gateway area and additional properties along York Street. The boundary amendment for the northern gateway includes 10 additional parcels, consisting of a park, commercial and multifamily residential uses. The boundary amendment along York Street includes 8 parcels, consisting primarily commercial and multifamily residential uses, including a health center. Two additional properties are included along Grand Avenue to clean-up the boundary and allow properties on both sides of the street to be included. The boundary amendments were developed by the town in coordination with staff. Application is complete and meets the program's requirements.

David Jescavage, Town of Swanton Town Administrator, spoke to the addition of the bridge within the new boundary adjustments and his vision that it will be a connector from businesses on either side of the river, while encouraging continued recreation on the riverfront. Members stated that Swanton is large enough to consider downtown designation when the community is ready.

Patricia Sears made a motion to approve renewal of village center designation for Swanton village center and Tasha Wallis seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Cambridge Village Center

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

Tom Torti made a motion to approve renewal of village center designation for Cambridge village center and Michelle Boomhower seconded. The motion passed 11-0. Tasha Wallis abstained.

Huntington Center Village Center

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

Tom Torti made a motion to approve renewal of village center designation for Huntington Center village center and Jen Mojo seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Huntington Lower Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for renewal of village center designation for Huntington Lower Village. The designated boundary was not altered and the map was updated to meet program requirements. Staff recommends proceeding with approval of the application for renewal of village center designation for Huntington Lower village center.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve renewal of village center designation for Huntington Lower village center and Michelle Boomhower seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

Lyndonville Village Center

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

Tom Torti made a motion to approve renewal of village center designation for Lyndonville village center and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed 12-0.

5. Review and Discussion of Downtown and Village Center Incentives – Caitlin Corkins

At its June meeting the board expressed interest in reviewing the use and outcomes of the “Technology Credit”. Caitlin followed up with data on the applicants and projects that received technology tax credits. Since 2013, 18 projects received technology credits and out of those, two involved a “technology business”. Discussion focused on; methods to encourage technology sector growth in downtowns, the potential barriers associated with having a professional engineer certify the cost of the technology installation or improvement, and a recommendation to remove the extra point for technology projects in the board’s scoring criteria.

To reduce the odds of tie scores in future funding rounds, staff also suggested increasing the scoring range of the competitive criteria. The Board agreed to this approach. Also discussed were policy options to break scoring ties. Possible considerations for tie breakers include geographic distribution, the prior amount of tax credits invested in the community, and if the project supported a new “technology business.” Finally, ground rules to establish how meeting guests interact with the Board and staff will also be established. Staff will draft specific recommendations based on this feedback for review at the November meeting.

6. Old Business/New Business

- **Spring Board Meeting:** Staff had recommended to the board in July, the possibility of holding a future meeting at an alternate location. Staff presented Bennington as an option for the March meeting. Board members agreed and planning will proceed.
- **November Board Meeting:** Staff recommends changing the date of the November meeting to Friday, November 17, due to the Thanksgiving holiday. Board members agreed to change the November meeting date.
- **December Board Meeting:** Staff recommends canceling the December board meeting due to difficulty in securing a quorum during the holidays. All members agreed and the December meeting will be canceled.

Announcements

- **Village Center Renewals** -- Richard Amore and Chris Cochran asked for board input on possible legislative action to align the five-year renewal cycle with the eight-year cycle town plans. The proposed change is in response to the growing number of villages and no new staff capacity. Extending the renewal cycle from five to eight years is supported by several external stakeholders, but further consultation is needed. Board members supported this recommendation.
- **Newport Downtown Renewal** -- Gary Holloway updated board members on the status of the City of Newport’s downtown designation renewal application due November 6, 2017. A recent article in the local newspaper indicated an uncertain future for the downtown group, Newport City Renaissance Corporation (NCRC). Maintaining an independent and viable local organization to coordinate revitalization efforts is a requirement of the program.

Gary explained that the downtown program's designation renewal process includes early consultation with the community to flag and resolve issues or concerns. This ensures the renewal process goes smoothly and predictably. Per this procedure, Gary met with the City and NCRC on August 3rd for an update on City and NCRC initiatives and to offer suggestions to ensure a successful renewal process.

As requested, Newport submitted its draft application on August 7th. Gary sent written feedback to the City on August 11th. His comments noted the fact that the draft application did not include a five-year strategic plan from the downtown organization, a municipally adopted map including the designated downtown boundary or a plan for filling the vacant NCRC staff position. Gary also expressed concern about NCRC not having an Executive Director for over three years and no staff since November 2016.

Gary shared that the newspaper article indicates the NCRC board is considering the possibility of replacing NCRC with a municipally-created commission. While staff has not discussed the recent article with the City, Gary has previously explained the aim of these commissions is to fledge new downtown groups. Commissions are not intended to replace established organizations. Staff will continue to engage with the community on this matter.

Gary also noted that Newport will participate in a Vermont Council on Rural Development community visit process starting in November. This event provides an ideal opportunity for the NCRC, the City and the community to develop a shared vision for downtown Newport and identify strategies and projects to bring their vision to life.

Gary also mentioned that on August 23rd DHCD staff participated in a community presentation by real estate advisors, White + Burke, along with members of Preservation Trust of Vermont, Northern Vermont Development Association, Northern Community Investment Corporation, City staff and a recently appointed downtown steering committee. White + Burke presented its feasibility study for the Renaissance Block and other potential re-development opportunities. DHDC shared written feedback on recommendations with the City and NCRC on August 30th.

7. Adjourn

Tom Torti made a motion to adjourn and Tasha Wallis seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:37 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie