

**Approved Minutes
Vermont Community Investment Board
1/26/2026
MS Teams Virtual Meeting**

Members Present (11/16):

- ☒ Alex Farrell (*Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- ☐ Jonathan Cooper, designated the Regional Development Corporations
- ☒ Jen Mojo, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- ☐ Bruce Cheeseman, appointed by the Governor, representing local government
- ☐ Cathy Davis, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Association of Chamber Executives
- ☒ Christian Meyer, designated by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, arrived at 1:22PM
- ☒ Chip Sawyer, designated by the Vermont Planners Association
- ☒ Jaime Lee, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont
- ☒ Kevin Chu, representing the Office of Racial Equity, arrived at 1:35pm
- ☒ Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
- ☒ Michael Desrochers, designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- ☒ Michael Gaughan, (*Vice Chair*), designated by the Vermont Bond Bank, left meeting at 2pm
- ☐ Michael McDonough, appointed by the governor, representing local government
- ☒ Peter Trombley, (alternate) State Treasurer's Office, arrived at 1:38pm
- ☒ Matthew Arancio, designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- ☐ Josh Hanford, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns

Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members (6):

Chris Cochran, Natalie Elvidge, Gary Holloway, Jacob Hemmerick, Jenni Lavoie and Susie Powers.

Guests (3): Andrew Brown, UVM Center for Rural Studies; Jess Savage, VCRD; Denise Smith, VCRD.

1. Start of Meeting:

Alex Farrell brought the meeting to order at 1:06pm. Alex welcomed everyone to the meeting and facilitated introductions.

2. Additions or Deletions to the Board Agenda

Alex added to the agenda the Community Investment Board election for a Chair and Vice Chair. Alex opens the meeting to the board to nominate a new Community Investment Board Chair and Vice Chair. Laura Trieschmann nominates Alex Farrell,

as Chair, and Michael Gaughn, as Vice Chair. Chip Sawyer made a motion to close the nominations. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried. Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve Alex Farrell, as Chair, and Michael Gaughn, as Vice Chair, and Michael Desrochers seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

3. Public Comment Period

Alex Farrell opened the meeting to public comment; there were no public comments.

4. November 24, 2025, Draft Meeting Minutes

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve November 24, 2025, Meeting Minutes, and Laura Trieschmann seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

5. Downtown Transportation Fund Grant – Amendment Requests (2)

Town of Chester

DHCD staff presented the possibility of an amendment to their existing 2022 Downtown Transportation Fund (DTF) grant to extend the grant term to 11/30/2026 and to adjust the scope of work to include one additional project element in the budget.

Manufacturing delays have impacted the Town's ability to complete the project in its entirety.

Board members inquired whether the requested extension timeline is typical for a three-year grant. Staff advised that, because the one-time funding has been exhausted, Chester will not be eligible to apply to the DTF program as a Village Center in the future. Staff further noted that any remaining funds could be used toward gateway signage.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve Chester's DTF amendment request, and Michael Gaughn seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

Town of West Rutland

DHCD staff presented the possibility of an amendment to their existing 2022 Downtown Transportation Fund grant to extend the term from 1/31/2026 until 5/31/2026. The amendment would allow the contractor to complete the installation of lampposts when the ground is no longer frozen. Board proposes an amendment date of 8/31/2026 to ensure the project has adequate time for completion.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to amend Town of West Rutland's Downtown Transportation Grant and extend the date to August 31, 2026. Matthew Arancio seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

6. Designation Transitions and Center Step-Up Process

DHCD staff provided an overview and update on the Designation Transitions and Center Step-Up Process, noting that applications are now live and the first community has begun the step-up application process. While the Board is no longer directly involved in designation decisions, staff will provide regular updates as communities advance or

change designation status. Staff reviewed how legacy designations transition into the new framework. Legacy Downtowns transition to Step 3 Centers, Village Centers and New Town Centers will transition to Step 2 Centers, and planned growth and village areas will transition into Neighborhood Designations. Municipalities without prior designations will begin at Step 1 once FLUA maps are approved. Centers may advance incrementally through an administrative process conducted by DHCD staff, without Board approval, with requirements and benefits increasing at each step. Step 2 requires an approved municipal plan. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis, with DHCD decision issued within 30 days. DHCD staff will update the Board as step changes occur.

The Board requested clarification on how legacy New Town Centers, particularly those not based on historic settlement patterns, will be treated under the new designation framework and whether they will remain eligible for program incentives. Staff clarified that legacy New Town Centers are retained under prior law and will transition into Step 2 Center Designations once regional plans are approved. Although the New Town Center designation will be phased out, these areas will continue to be recognized as Centers if mapped in approved regional plans and may advance to Step 3 (Downtowns) under specific statutory provisions applicable to legacy New Town Centers. Staff further noted that moving forward, new Center designations must be anchored by a traditional, historic, civic or commercial center, as required by statute.

7. Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA)

Andrew Brown, from University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies provided an overview of the Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance (VERTA), a collaborative project with the University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies, funded through UVM's Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships. The project, guided by a core team and steering committee, aims to improve the coordination and effectiveness of rural technical assistance programs across state agencies. DHCD staff highlighted the four actionable priority areas identified through the evaluation: 1) increase State agency participation, 2) develop shared service tools, 3) enhance engagement and leadership development, and 4) increase local capacity and provide flexible resources. The project also focuses on understanding existing systems, exploring potential partnerships, embedding project managers regionally or locally, and coordinating or consolidating funding streams to reduce duplication.

Next steps include ongoing communication with the steering committee, monthly meetings to advance actionable items, and continued team-based strategies to maintain momentum and implement both immediate and long-term improvements in rural technical delivery.

Representatives of the Steering Committee, Jess Savage and Denise Smith of the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD), highlighted VCRD's long-standing role in providing technical assistance to Vermont's rural communities, focusing on facilitating local action and connecting towns to resources. Based on VERDA findings, they are making a legislative ask of \$500,000 for FY27 to support implementation, with funding directed primarily to communities while maintaining

coordination and capacity among technical assistance providers. The initiative aims to provide simple, flexible resources to towns, maximize the impact of investments, and support local priorities such as housing and community development.

8. Old Business / New Business

Incentives – Establishing Board Criteria and Priorities

Alex Farrell updated the Board on follow-up discussions with General Counsel regarding the Board's authority over program funding in designated areas under the future land use mapping process. The concern was ensuring program funds are prioritized for centers with historic components without excluding other applications. It was noted that while statutory changes would make it explicit, the Board has broad authority to include scoring criteria or priorities favoring historic centers to ensure funding is directed appropriately. The board agreed to continue monitoring potential impacts of future land use maps on program funding.

Legislative Updates

Alex Farrell reported ongoing discussions around the Downtown and Village Center tax credit, including past proposals to increase the cap from \$3M to \$5M and suggestions for a rolling application process without a cap. A no-cap approach is unlikely to pass, but the program remains well-regarded. Proposed legislation may tie funding specifically to historic centers. DHCD staff continues work in advocacy and education for the Homes for All initiative. DHCD staff are scheduled to testify in the Senate of Natural Resources and Housing Committee. The Downtown Transportation Fund budget remains flat. The Downtown Vibrancy Fund proposed an increase in budget to support anticipated growth in new downtowns.

Bus Tour 2026

Staff proposed a second annual Community Investment Board bus tour to explore regional projects and topics of interest. The board was asked to consider for the next meeting regions, focus areas, and timing, with warmer months preferred.

9. Adjourn

Kevin Chu made a motion to adjourn the meeting Laura Trieschmann seconded. All were in favor. Alex Farrell adjourned the meeting at 2:44 p.m.

The next Community Investment Board meeting will be on February 23, 2026.

Respectfully submitted, Susie Powers