

**Approved Minutes
Vermont Downtown Board
5/22/2023**

**Calvin Coolidge Conference Room, 6th Floor, National Life Bldg., Montpelier
& Via MS Teams Virtual Meeting**

Members Present (12):

- Josh Hanford (*Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Amy Bell, alternate designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Billy Coster, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- Robert Sponable, alternate, designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
- Jaime Lee, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont.
- vacant, 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, arrived 1:12pm
- Chip Sawyer, designated by the Vermont Planners Association
- Sabina Haskell, Chair of the Natural Resources Board
- Charlie Baker, designated by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Cathy Davis, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Association of Chamber Executives

Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members (7): Chris Cochran, Richard Amore, Gary Holloway, Amy Tomasso, Jacob Hemmerick, Alice Dodge, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (13): Will Baker, Town of Worcester; Richard Turner, Town of Williamstown; Jeremiah LaCross, City of St. Albans; Chad Whitehead, Town of St. Johnsbury; Gillian Sewake, Discover St. Johnsbury; Mike Doenges, City of Rutland; Andrew Strniste, City of Rutland; Shannon Hagggett, City of Vergennes; Peter Garon, City of Vergennes; Cathyann Larose, Town of Colchester; Kathi Walker-O'Reilly, Town of Colchester; Patrick O'Brien, S.D. Ireland; and Paul Simon.

Josh Hanford brought the meeting to order at 1:03pm via MS Teams virtual conference call.

Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

There were no additions or deletions to the board agenda. A change was made to the agenda, to consider St. Johnsbury's Downtown Renewal application following St. Albans' application, and to consider St. Johnsbury's Neighborhood Development Area Designation application before those of Rutland and Vergennes.

1. Public Comment Period

Josh Hanford opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments.

2. Consent Agenda Items:

- April 3, 2023, Draft Meeting Minutes

- Benson Village Center Designation Renewal
- East Fairfield Village and Fairfield Center Village Center Designation Renewal
- Greensboro and Greensboro Bend Village Center Designation Renewals
- East Poultney Village Center Designation Renewal

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the consent agenda items, and Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

3. Village Center Designations – 2

Town of Worcester – Worcester Village Center

Previously designated from January 2004 to January 2017 but designation lapsed due to town plan expiration. The proposed boundary runs along Worcester Village Road (Route 12) and Calais Road and includes the town hall, school, post office with café and farm store, fire station, Ladd recreation fields, hydroelectric dam, general store, historical society, methodist church, 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.

Will Baker, Planning Commission Chair from Worcester, described how Ladd Field, which would be included within the new boundary, has become essentially a town green and a focus of village life. It includes recreation fields and has great potential for future opportunities under the designation. Laura Trieschmann inquired as to whether Worcester has considered creating an historic district. Laura also asked for clarification as to whether there can be residential properties included along the boundary of Village Centers; Richard Amore responded that the boundary must be anchored by commercial or civic properties, though residential properties can be within the boundary and the boundary must include both sides of a road.

Laura Trieschmann made a motion to approve village center designation for the Town of Worcester, and Chip Sawyer seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

Town of Williamstown – Williamstown Village Center Boundary Amendment Application and Renewal

The town is requesting a renewal of their village center designation and boundary amendment to add 1 additional property that includes the Williamstown Veterans Memorial Park. The proposed boundary runs along Route 14, Meadow Street, Becket Street, and Deport Street and includes the library, town hall, historical society, post office, mason building, two churches, hardware store, the new Veterans Memorial Park, 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.

Richard Turner, Chair of the Planning Commission in Williamstown, spoke about the importance of Veterans Memorial Park to village life, including Williamstown's large annual Memorial Day celebration. He also spoke about the town's intention to add sidewalks and crosswalks within the designated village center to improve safety and children's access to school.

Jaime Lee made a motion to approve the renewal application and boundary amendment for Williamstown Village Center, and Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

4. Downtown Designation – 2 St. Albans – Boundary Amendment Application

Chip Sawyer recused himself from discussion of the application.

The city is requesting a boundary amendment to add two parcels located at 12 North Elm Street. The city approved the expansion of the Design Review District to include the property being considered with this amendment. The property owner has expressed interest in applying for historic state tax credits to help with improvements to the historic Elm Street School which is listed on the State Register of Historic Places and is now multi-family housing. Staff recommended approval of the boundary amendment.

Bruce Cheeseman made a motion to approve the boundary amendment for St. Albans' Designated Downtown, and Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

Town of St. Johnsbury – Renewal Application

St Johnsbury is one of the first communities to receive designation in 1999. They last renewed in 2015. The Town worked with staff on the application to ensure all program requirements are met and to offer any recommendations. The application is complete, no boundary changes proposed, and it meets all the program's requirements.

Gillian Sewake, Director of Discover St. Johnsbury, and Chad Whitehead, Town Manager, gave a short presentation to the Board summarizing their accomplishments in the last 8 years. These include significant revitalization, overcoming many of the challenges listed in their 2015 renewal. Accomplishments include the terminus of the LVRT, significant rehabilitation of the New Avenue Building, MSI Building, and others resulting in few vacant storefronts and many new businesses (31 since the start of the pandemic), and engagement with the creative economy. They have leveraged both the tax credit program and Better Places grant program. They have begun a rental improvement grant program using ARPA funds, lifting the value, quality, and quantity of available rental housing.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the renewal of St. Johnsbury's designated downtown, and Amy Bell seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

5. Neighborhood Development Area Designation – 3 Town of St. Johnsbury – New Application

This town proposes boundaries beyond the planning area, requiring that at least 80% and no fewer than 7 members of the Downtown Board reviewing the NDA agree that boundary meets criteria (A)-(D) in the application. The Downtown Board's motion must acknowledge the extension. Staff finds that the proposed Neighborhood Development Area meets the requirements for designation.

The small portion of the proposed NDA that extends beyond the planning area is adjacent to existing development and consistent with smart growth principles due to its higher density, walkable distance to commercial uses, and pedestrian infrastructure.

Chad Whitehead, Town Manager, noted that their next focus will be on the Portland St. area included in the proposed NDA for a Complete Streets project, and because of connections made to property owners through their rental improvements program, they will be conducting outreach to property owners in this area to encourage tax credit applications. On the question of the proposed boundary extending beyond the Planning Area, Amy Tomasso noted that much of the Planning Area has steep slopes or is river corridor; Josh Hanford noted that the proposed area is a different shape, but not larger than the Planning Area and is directed to the area that makes most sense and has opportunity for infill.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve St. Johnsbury's Neighborhood Development Area, and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

Rutland City – New Application

The city proposes boundaries beyond the planning area, requiring that at least 80% and no fewer than 7 members of the Downtown Board reviewing the NDA agree that boundary meets criteria (A)-(D) in the application. The Downtown Board's motion must acknowledge the extension. Staff finds that the proposed Neighborhood Development Area meets the requirements for designation.

The proposed NDA is almost entirely established with compact, historic and pre-existing development, with not many new opportunities for subdividing and creating new lots, nor many new opportunities to build upon existing vacant land.

Andrew Strniste, Planning & Zoning Administrator, and Michael Doenges, Rutland City Mayor, reiterated Rutland's commitment to removing barriers to housing; they noted that the proposed NDA includes many older but run down properties that would greatly benefit from the tax credit program. Jacob Hemmerick commented that Rutland should be commended for rebooting their bylaw amendment processes; they are hoping to come back with even more areas ready for rehabilitation and are working on developing a Tax Increment Financing District.

Charlie Baker made a motion to approve Rutland's Neighborhood Development Area, and Amy Bell seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

City of Vergennes – New Application

This city proposes boundaries beyond the planning area, requiring that at least 80% and no fewer than 7 members of the Downtown Board reviewing the NDA agree that boundary meets criteria (A)-(D) in the application. The Downtown Board's motion must acknowledge the extension. Staff finds that the proposed Neighborhood Development Area meets the requirements for designation.

The expansion of the proposed NDA outside the 0.5 mile planning area of the designated downtown is appropriate for Vergennes given the compact nature of the city. This includes a tiny extension in the southeast area, and an extension into the Northern Gateway district.

Shannon Haggett, Chair of the Planning Commission of Vergennes, added that the city has made many regulatory updates since 2017 in order to prepare for the designation. Charlie Baker asked why they did not include part of the Main St. residential district, and Shannon responded that they wanted to build population density where there are smaller lots and fewer older mansions. There was a discussion of Vergennes' participation in a large

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Environmental Linkages study, which they hope will benefit Vergennes residents living in the NDA.

Bob Sponable made a motion to approve Vergennes' Neighborhood Development Area, and Chip Sawyer seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

6. New Town Center – 1 Town of Colchester – Renewal

The Town submitted a completed application for renewal of their New Town Center designation. Staff recommended approval of the application. There were no changes to the boundary map.

Cathyann Larose, Director of Planning & Zoning in Colchester, reported that since the Board specified that the town green and gazebo should be owned by the town and programmed, that has been going well. They have created programming including an autumn festival, and the space is used by two daycares; library and recreation events reinforce the idea that the space is public and open to all town residents.

Paul Simon, a developer with property abutting the New Town Center, joined to discuss hydraulic sewer capacity upgrades and to ask about the Board's intent regarding regulations around planned growth. Staff noted that the intent of the program is to create predictable regulatory conditions and development-ready places, and Colchester has stated in their application that they have both hydraulic and treatment capacity for the New Town Center, under current review. The matter of Growth Center capacity can be taken up when the Growth Center is under review in 2024. Patrick O'Brien of SD Ireland joined to note that they have received a permit from VTTrans to create a turning lane that will allow better access to the commercial part of the New Town Center to support additional commercial buildout. Michael McDonough initiated discussion of which buildings on the master plan have been constructed; Cathyann Larose estimated that all the buildings shown had been constructed and yellow areas on the exhibit illustrate potential additional buildout.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to renew Colchester's New Town Center designation, and Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Bruce Cheeseman, Cathy Davis, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Amy Bell, Sabina Haskell, Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

7. Old Business / New Business

Josh Hanford summarized legislative work, including the housing bill (S.100), as well as funding in the budget for Downtown Board per diem reimbursements for unpaid members starting in July, and for \$25,000 grants to downtown organizations. He noted the project limit for the Better Places program has been broadened from 1 to 3 per municipality. He acknowledged that the budget may face veto and that the legislature has scheduled a veto session in June

Chris Cochran updated the board on the review of the designation program, which has begun. We have contracted with a national consultant, SmartGrowth America, to assist with the program review and assessment and Vermont consultants, Rebecca Sanborn Stone, and Faith Ingulsrud and Sharon Murray design and lead the public engagement process.

The June board meeting will be held virtually June 26, 1-4 pm. The July meeting will likely be held in-person at a remote location in Rutland with tours of Rutland and Poultney; staff asks Board members to hold the entire day on July 24 for this meeting.

8. Adjourn

Bob Sponable made a motion to adjourn, and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie & Alice Dodge