

Approved Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 9/25/2023

The Hub, 67 Merchant's Row, Rutland, VT

Members Present (12):

- Alex Farrell, *alternate* designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development, arrived at 1:23
- Amy Bell, alternate designated by the Secretary of Transportation,
- Billy Coster, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources (remote), arrived at 1:06
- Michael Desrochers, designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer (remote), arrived at 1:04
- Jaime Lee, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont.
- Sarah Hadd, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Michael McDonough, appointed by the governor, representing local government, arrived at 1:20
- Bruce Cheeseman, appointed by the Governor, representing local government
- Chip Sawyer (chair), designated by the Vermont Planners Association
- Peter Gill, alternate Executive Director 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, Jacob Hemmerick, Caitlin Corkins, Alice Dodge, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (17): Mayor Mike Doenges, Devon Neary, Ed Bove, Barbara Spaulding, Tiffany Saltis, Sarah Pelkey, Nic Stark, Melissa Manka, Nicola Anderson, Kirsten Shapiro, Angela Ulman, Penny Sirjane, Nick Atherton, Paul Conner, Ruth Tucker, Sharon Needham, Peter Harvey, Tara Cheney, Marge Drexler and Katie Raycroft Meyer

Chip Sawyer brought the meeting to order at 1:02pm via MS Teams virtual conference call.

Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

Chris Cochran informed the board that Josh Hanford, chair, and Michelle Boomhower, vice chair, were unable to join the meeting. Chip Sawyer agreed to chair the September meeting.

Charlie Baker made a motion to allow Chip Sawyer to chair the meeting, and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. Motion carried. (Roll call vote not taken at this point in the meeting, as no board members had joined virtually at the time of the vote)

1. Public Comment Period

Chip Sawyer opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments.

2. Consent Agenda Items:

- June 26, 2023, Draft Meeting Minutes
- West Brattleboro Village Center Designation Renewal
- Essex Junction Village Center Designation Renewal

- Riverside/Underhill Flats Village Center Renewal
- Richford Village Center Renewal
- Westford Village Center Renewal
- Essex Junction Neighborhood Development Area Renewal
- Westford Neighborhood Development Area Renewal

Charlie Baker made a motion to approve the consent agenda items, and Michael Desrochers seconded. Ayes: Amy Bell, Billy Coster, Bruce Cheeseman, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Peter Gill. Sarah Hadd abstained. The motion carried.

3. Downtown and Village Center Tax Credits – review and approval vote

Caitlin Corkins reported that we had received 55 eligible applications for tax credits at the July 3 deadline, plus an additional three ineligible or incomplete applications. She believed this was the most ever received, and thanked the board for their time and effort in reviewing the applications. They were ranked by average score, due to several board recusals on specific applications. There was a multi-party tie in scoring, so the board's tiebreaking policy was activated. This meant awarding bonus points for tied applications in communities and counties without other funded projects, resulting in a two-way tie between two projects in Orange county; staff recommended a proportional split of remaining funds between the two project requests.

Peter Gill moved to accept the slate of 29 fully funded projects, and to partially fund the Fairlee and Strafford projects on a pro-rated basis with the remaining funds available, for a total of \$4,275,650 in credits awarded. Bruce Cheeseman seconded. Ayes: Amy Bell, Billy Coster, Bruce Cheeseman, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Peter Gill, Sarah Hadd. The motion carried.

Caitlin Corkins noted that in addition to this round of funding for FY24, we will be offering another round with a January 8, 2024 application deadline. There will be approximately \$1.5 million in funding available, focused on flood recovery projects. Those who did not receive funding during this round will be eligible to reapply.

4. Downtown Designations – 2

Note that this agenda item was moved up to allow time for Village Center applicants to arrive at the meeting.

Town of Poultney – Renewal Application

The Town of Poultney received Downtown Designation in 2000, and last renewed in 2014. The Town worked with staff on the application to ensure all program requirements were met and to offer any recommendations. The application was complete, with no boundary changes proposed, and met all the program's requirements. Staff recommended that the renewal be approved.

Jaime Lee spoke on behalf of Poultney. She emphasized that although Poultney has had challenges, including the closure of Green Mountain College and of a community bank, there has been tremendous community involvement and interest in Poultney's future. She believes that, with Raj Bhakta's purchase of and plans for the Green Mountain College campus on one side of town, and the strength of the Slate Valley Trails on the other, Poultney is well-positioned for new investment. The Poultney Downtown Revitalization Committee has been raising awareness of the benefits of designation, including tax credits, and sees synergy with many groups in the town. Gary Holloway wanted to recognize the efforts of Jonas Rosenthal in Poultney's revitalization, and notes that he is deeply missed. Michael McDonough

commented that Poultney is an example of a community that has made things happen despite significant limitations.

Michael McDonough moved to renew the designation for Poultney, and Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Amy Bell, Billy Coster, Bruce Cheeseman, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael McDonough, Peter Gill, Sarah Hadd, Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

City of Rutland – Renewal Application

The City of Rutland received Downtown Designation in 2000, and last renewed in 2014. The City worked with staff on the application to ensure all program requirements were met and to offer any recommendations. The application was complete, with no boundary changes proposed, and it meets all the program’s requirements. Staff recommended that the designation be renewed.

Tiffany Saltis, Barbara Spaulding, and Ed Bove presented on behalf of the Rutland Downtown Partnership. They highlighted the Business Incentive and Assistance program, which provides grants to small businesses funding by a portion of solar tax revenues. The city also offers tax stabilization incentives, and a revolving loan fund for building renovations, with low-interest loans for developing upper floors as housing. There has been tremendous recent investment in downtown, including almost \$10 million in private investment and \$1.5 million in public investment; there have been 55 façade renovations, 49 businesses opened, and 29 closed, and 148 jobs created. There is a significant commitment to public art, and they received a \$1 million USDA grant to fund trees in the downtown. Their future plans include an emphasis on infill housing, storm response and resiliency planning.

Michael McDonough commended Rutland on their transformation, and moved to accept and approve the renewal; Jaime Lee seconded. Ayes: Amy Bell, Billy Coster, Bruce Cheeseman, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael McDonough, Peter Gill, Sarah Hadd, Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

5. Village Center Designation – 1

Town of Cornwall – New Application

The proposed boundary for the Cornwall Village Center runs along Route 30 and includes the Bingham Memorial School, First Congregational Church, town hall, town green, 1830 School House, Daughters of the American Revolution building, several 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. Staff noted that the town is doing great work with recreation, and making improvements to public and private buildings. Staff recommended approving application and awarding the designation.

Marge Drexler presented on behalf of the Town of Cornwall. She said that Cornwall is small, with its school at the center of the community, as well as the town hall, and the First Congregational Church of Cornwall, which has a small congregation but significant public engagement with community events. The Cornwall Outdoor Recreation Association is very active and would like to build pickleball and tennis courts on a two-acre plot owned by the town. They are also planning trails between the town hall and the school, including a fitness trail and accessible trail; they received a Health Equity Capacity Building grant from the Vermont Department of Health to help with plans. They hope to raise funds for the pickleball courts through the Better Places program. Cornwall recently had their first History Day, which opened four historic buildings to the public, including an historic blacksmith shop. They would like to add a creemee stand. Sarah Pelkey added a public comment that there are many opportunities and lots of momentum happening in Cornwall.

Amy Bell moved to award the Village Center designation to Cornwall Village Center, and Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Amy Bell, Billy Coster, Bruce Cheeseman, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael McDonough, Peter Gill, Sarah Hadd, Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

6. Neighborhood Development Area Designation – 1 South Burlington – Boundary Amendment

Responsive to a development opportunity, the city proposed expanding the neighborhood development area. The city worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program's requirements. The city will be coming in for New Town Center renewal in 2024 and is considering additional expansion of the NDA at that time. South Burlington's New Town Center Market Street is a good example of a new complete street, with a new municipal building and library, senior housing, public art, housing development, and significant activity. The proposed expansion was a small part of the planning area and will include the location of the former Holiday Inn on Williston Road. Additional buildings are proposed on the same site. Staff noted that the city received 10/10 in complete streets and for their building and lot patterns, and recommended approval. Nick Atherton and Paul Conner joined virtually from South Burlington in support of the application and did not have additions to the staff review but look forward to telling the board more about South Burlington with their renewal application early next year.

Bruce Cheeseman motioned to approve the boundary amendment for the South Burlington NDA; Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Amy Bell, Billy Coster, Bruce Cheeseman, Charlie Baker, Chip Sawyer, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael Desrochers, Michael McDonough, Peter Gill, Sarah Hadd, Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

7. Old Business / New Business

Chris Cochran updated the board on the Designation 2050 engagement process to reimagine the state designation programs. On September 12, DHCD hosted a successful public summit for 130 guests, including a good cross-section of interested groups, including legislators, sister agencies, cities and towns, and state house advocates. DHCD's consultant team, Smart Growth America and Community Workshop, are currently incorporating input from the summit into their recommendations, which will be finalized in the coming weeks. These will likely include an easier process for designation, fewer designations, potentially larger designated areas, and Act 250 relief for municipalities meeting certain state standard. These are some of the expected recommendations, but we do not yet know where they will land. Board members are invited to sign up for updates at <https://www.vtdesignation2050.org/>. There will be more opportunities for to offer feedback and ideas in the coming weeks. While there is a tight timeframe for public input on the recommendations, we hope the table is set for success as we approach the legislative session January. Michael McDonough pointed out that as part of this process, we may be due for a name change from the Vermont Downtown Board to something more reflective of the board's scope.

8. Adjourn

Chip Sawyer adjourned the meeting at 2:26 pm. The board and staff wish to thank Poultney, Rutland, and their respective downtown organizations for their hospitality and for offering informative and enjoyable tours of Poultney and Rutland.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie & Alice Dodge