

**Approved Minutes
Vermont Downtown Board
10/23/2023**

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

Members Present (13):

- Alex Farrell (*Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Michelle Boomhower (*Vice-Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Charlie Baker, designated by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Bruce Cheeseman, appointed by the Governor, representing local government
- Billy Coster, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- Cathy Davis, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Association of Chamber Executives
- Michael Desrochers, designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Sarah Hadd, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Sabina Haskell, Chair of the Natural Resources Board
- Jaime Lee, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont
- Michael McDonough, appointed by the governor, representing local government
- Chip Sawyer, designated by the Vermont Planners Association
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer

Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members (6): Chris Cochran, Richard Amore, Gary Holloway, Amy Tomasso, Alice Dodge, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (11): Bob Flint, Springfield Regional Development Corporation; Donna Sweaney, Windsor Improvement Corporation; Don Preuss, Wells Village; Logan Solomon, Rutland Regional Planning Commission; Karen Duguay, Better Middlebury Partnership; Jen Murray, Town of Middlebury; Fred Kenney, Addison County Regional Planning Commission; Tammy Holcomb, Wells Village; Katie Raycroft-Meyer, Addison County Regional Planning Commission; Stephen Hayes, Town of Brattleboro; Sue Fillion, Town of Brattleboro

Welcome, Introductions, and nomination of Board Chair

Jenni Lavoie welcomed participants to the meeting and took nominations for a new Board Chair. Laura Trieschmann made a motion to nominate Alex Farrell as Chair; Michelle Boomhower seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, and Laura Trieschmann. The motion carried.

Alex Farrell brought the meeting to order at 1:04pm.

Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

There were no additions or deletions to the board agenda.

1. Public Comment Period

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

2. Consent Agenda Items:

- September 25, 2023, Draft Minutes
- Village Center Designation Renewals
 - Town of Middlebury – East Middlebury Village
 - Town of Sharon – Sharon Village

Charlie Baker made a motion to approve the consent agenda items, and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, and Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

3. Village Center Designations – 1

Town of Wells – Wells Village

Wells Village would be the 235th designated Village Center. The proposed boundary runs along VT Route 30 and includes the town offices, fire department, village school, post office, country store, library, two churches, veterans park, several businesses, multifamily and single-family residences. The town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets the statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program's requirements. Staff recommended the application be approved and the designation awarded.

Don Preuss, from the Wells Selectboard, presented on behalf of the town. He described Wells as a small town in the southwestern part of the state, on the New York border, that was historically one of the capitals of the slate industry. The village has stayed small, but their pace of development is starting to pick up. They have secured grants to improve their library and school, and are building a new Town Hall. There is a good tax base, including seasonal residents who enjoy Lake Saint Catherine.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve village center designation for the Town of Wells, and Laura Trieschmann seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, and Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

4. Downtown Designation – 2

Town of Windsor – Renewal Application

The Town of Windsor received Downtown Designation in 1999, and 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 was complete, no boundary changes proposed, and it met all the program's requirements. Staff noted the partnerships between the Town, the Windsor Improvement Corporation, and others, to make investments in Windsor around infrastructure, streetscape improvements, and the acquisition of industrial use spaces to repurpose for current economic development. The town development office works with WIC on seasonal events; recreational assets are a large part of the conversation in Windsor. Staff recommends we renew the downtown designation.

Donna Sweaney from the Windsor Improvement Corporation and Bob Flint from Springfield Regional Development Corporation presented on behalf of the town. They described how voters have consistently supported investments in the town. They have worked on remediating blight in the formerly industrial downtown, including at the former Goodyear site, a brownfield site now owned by Windsor Improvement Corporation and known as River Street Commerce Park. This major project now includes spaces for 15 businesses and solar panels, which provide power for the nearby Artisans Park (outside the downtown district). They created the Riverfront House project by lifting an old, blighted home out of the floodplain and investing in it as a demonstration project to spur similar investment. They are working with the town on housing infill, developing recreation, and restoring historic properties.

Laura Trieschmann noted that there are several significant properties in Windsor, including the Constitution House, which will be reopening, the Old South Church, and Stephen Jacobs House.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the renewal of Windsor's downtown designation; Michelle Boomhower seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, and Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

Town of Middlebury – Renewal Application with Neighborhood Development Area

The Town of Middlebury received Downtown Designation in 1999, and last renewed in 2015. 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 it met all the program's requirements. Staff added that Middlebury has a five-year strategic plan with the Better Middlebury Partnership, as well as a development review board and community reinvestment agreement. There is a Downtown Master Plan, and they have had tremendous successes with the large bridge & rail project and the Stone Mill public market. Staff recognized Karen Duguay for her work both with the Better Middlebury Partnership and leading the Vermont Downtown Coalition; she was instrumental in securing funding for the Downtown Vibrancy Grants, and has shown a deep commitment to the downtown program.

The town also submitted a complete renewal application for Middlebury's Neighborhood Development Area, as it renews with the underlying designation. The NDA was awarded in January, and no changes have been made since then. Staff recommends approving the renewal.

Karen Duguay of Better Middlebury Partnership and Jennifer Murray, Director of Planning & Zoning with the Town of Middlebury, presented on behalf of the town. They described the challenges and successes of the Neighbors Together project, which supported businesses through the bridge & rail construction project, which happened during covid. It marketed the town widely, and gave businesses a sense of control over their downtown, changing the community's response to the project and creating a strong foundation for future projects. Following that, the Better Middlebury Partnership initiated Kick Start Middlebury, a catalyst program for new businesses. The town has had major planning successes with the Downtown Master Plan, especially as it received funding from the bridge project to complete transformational change in a short period of time. There are now two new parks, Lazarus Park and Triangle Park, making downtown more walkable and inviting. The TIGER grant has reestablished rail between Burlington and New York, and with it, Middlebury received a DTF grant to install a new 300-foot covered rail platform. The Stone Mill Project used tax credits to turn an historic mill into a mixed-use center with office, restaurant, retail, and Airbnb spaces.

Fred Kenney, Addison County Economic Development Corporation, added their support for the renewal and looks forward to future collaboration with the town.

Michelle Boomhower related her experience at VTrans with the incredibly complex Rail and Bridge project, and reiterated Middlebury's adept navigation of community concerns. She believes this has become a model for how to work with communities on similar projects.

Michelle Boomhower made a motion to approve the renewal of Middlebury's downtown designation; Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, and Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the renewal of Middlebury's Neighborhood Development Area; Bruce Cheeseman seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, and Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

5. Neighborhood Development Area Designation – 1 Town of Brattleboro – Application for Boundary Amendment

The city proposed an expansion of the existing Neighborhood Development Area from downtown Brattleboro, with the addition of another Neighborhood Development Area surrounding West Brattleboro Village Center. These areas are not contiguous. The NDA was designated in 2020. This expansion will include the Winston Prouty campus, which is currently in predevelopment processes for creating more housing. The area surrounding West Brattleboro Village Center has the potential for more walkable housing; both proposed areas are connected by sidewalks and in areas that support dense infill, with a robust transportation network. The application received 10/10 for complete streets and 10/10 in the Design Guide. Staff completed a successful review of the application and recommends approval of the boundary extension.

Sue Fillion and Steve Hayes from Brattleboro added that they need to direct growth on the Vermont side of the river, as the New Hampshire side is mainly a state park. They have a housing action plan from two years ago that is in support of their town plan, and addresses the 500 dwelling unit housing shortage in the town. Within the proposed NDA boundaries, there are an estimated 450-500 potential dwelling units that would be made possible by the expansion.

There was a brief discussion of natural areas on the Winston Prouty campus, and whether ANR staff had input during this process. Billy Coster noted that the forested area under discussion is sandwiched between developed areas, and would not be considered critical habitat. The board looks forward to potential clarification of the process for reviewing critical habitat through the current designation reform recommendations.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the amendment expanding Brattleboro's existing Neighborhood Development Area; Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, and Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the amendment establishing an additional Neighborhood Development Area extending from West Brattleboro Village Center; Charlie Baker seconded. Ayes: Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, Bruce Cheeseman, Billy Coster, Cathy Davis, Michael Desrochers, Sarah Hadd, Sabina Haskell, Jaime Lee, Michael McDonough, Chip Sawyer, Laura Trieschmann, and Alex Farrell. The motion carried.

7. Old Business / New Business

There was a brief discussion of the board's approach to the Neighborhood Development Area designation, and the increase in housing pressures since the NDA designation was established. Board members would like to be proactive in addressing the potential challenges of greater density, including transportation. They would like to clarify the role of the state in engaging with municipalities and reviewing environmental issues in the absence of Act 250.

Amy Tomasso reported on the Homes for All program. Last week, there was a community tour with consultants working on the Missing Middle Housing Infill Toolkit. They visited five

case study communities around the state. There was tremendous local turnout and press to see public presentations about how the toolkit will help streamline development and how the new designs will fit within communities. There was a brief discussion of making sure the word is out about this program in areas outside of Chittenden county and central Vermont; Amy noted a positive article in the Bennington Banner and enthusiasm for the site visit in Arlington.

Chris Cochran reported briefly on the designation reform process. We have received some high-level preliminary recommendations from the consultants, and are anticipating a conversation regarding recommendations at the November board meeting. Thanks to ANR's Climate Action Office, there has been an addition to the scope to incorporate climate resilience with the designation reform; they have hired Lisa Churchill from Maine as an additional consultant.

8. Adjourn

Alex Farrell adjourned the meeting at 2:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie & Alice Dodge