

**Approved Minutes
Vermont Downtown Board
2/26/2024
via MS Teams Virtual Meeting**

Members Present (12):

- Alex Farrell (*Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Charlie Baker, designated by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies, arrived at 1:57 p.m.
- Michelle Boomhower (*Vice-Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- 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 (7): Richard Amore, Chris Cochran, Alice Dodge, Natalie Elvidge, Jacob Hemmerick, Jenni Lavoie, and Amy Tomasso.

Guests (15): Brandon Garbacik, Town Planner, Town of Barre; Chris Violette, Town Manager, Town of Barre; Cedric Sanborn, Barre Town Planning Commission Chair; George Clain, Barre Town Planning Commission; Alice Farrell, Barre Town Planning Commission; Brian Voigt, Program Manager, CVRPC; Will Pitkin, Land Use Planner, CVRPC; Christian Meyer, Executive Director, CVRPC; Emily Clark, Grand Isle Planning Commission Chair; Chris Yuen, Community Development Director, City of Essex Junction; Jennifer Marbl, City Planner, City of Essex Junction; Diane Nelligan, Housing & Development Coordinator, Randolph Area Community Development Corporation; Julie Iffland, Executive Director, Randolph Area Community Development Corporation; Sue Coakley, Planning Commission Chair, Town of Putney.

Alex Farrell brought the meeting to order at 1:03 pm.

Additions or Deletions to the 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:

- January 22, 2024, Draft Minutes

- Village Center Designation Renewals (6):
 - Town of Arlington – Arlington Village and East Arlington Village
 - Town of Putney – Putney Village
 - Town of Waterville – Waterville Village
 - Town of Readsboro – Readsboro Village
 - Town of West Rutland – West Rutland Village
- Neighborhood Development Area Designation Renewal (1):
 - Town of Putney

Michael McDonough motioned to approve the consent agenda items, and Jaime Lee seconded. All were in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

3. Village Center Designation – New Applications – 6

Town of Barre – East Barre, Lower Graniteville, South Barre, and Upper Websterville

Richard Amore presented staff findings and recommendations on applications for four new village centers in the Town of Barre. The Barre Town Manager, Town Planner, and several members of the Planning Commission joined him. All proposed villages are part of Barre Town's Town Plan, updated in 2020.

East Barre: The proposed boundary for East Barre Village runs along Mill Street and includes the fire station, a church, post office, Vermont Flannel Company, the library, 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. The proposed area is listed in the state register of historic places and is in a high-density zoning district. The Town has recently improved the transportation system in the village. Staff recommended approving the application and awarding designation.

Chip Sawyer motioned to approve the application and award East Barre Village the Village Center designation, and Michael McDonough seconded. All were in favor, and none opposed. The motion carried.

South Barre: The proposed boundary for South Barre Village runs along VT Route 14 and includes the post office, 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 approving the application and awarding designation.

Chip Sawyer motioned to approve the application and award South Barre Village the Village Center designation, and Sabina Haskell seconded. All were in favor, and none opposed. The motion carried.

Lower Graniteville: The proposed boundary for Lower Graniteville runs along Graniteville Road and includes the post office, a church, a general store, a playground, and multifamily and single-family residences. Staff noted the success of their annual RockFire event in bringing visitors to the village. 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 approving the application and awarding designation.

Jaime Lee motioned to approve the application and award Village Center designation to Lower Graniteville Village, and Chip Sawyer seconded. All were in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

Upper Websterville: The proposed boundary for Upper Websterville runs along Church Hill Road and Brook Street and includes the post office, Lawson's Store, playground, and multifamily and single-family residences. Staff noted the successful construction of a bike

path in 2006 and annual ice cream social events in Upper Websterville. 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 approving the application and awarding designation.

Sabina Haskell motioned to approve the application and award Village Center designation to Upper Websterville Village, and Chip Sawyer seconded. All were in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

The Board congratulated the Town of Barre and noted the record time in which these designations were awarded; Michael McDonough commented that this speaks to the vitality, interest, and commitment from the Town of Barre for all the Village Centers and thanked the CVRPC team for supporting the town's applications.

Town of Grand Isle – Grand Isle Village

Richard Amore presented the findings to the staff, and Emily Clark, Chair of the Grand Isle Planning Commission, joined on behalf of the town. The proposed boundary for Grand Isle Village runs along US Route 2, Hyde Road, and East Shore N Road. It includes the elementary school, former lodge, tavern, Methodist church, library, fire department, town garage, town clerk's office, post office, supermarket, catholic church, 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 noted Grand Isle's success in constructing a new volunteer fire department facility, town garage, salt shed, reestablished childcare center, and preliminary planning for new town center buildings. Emily Clark noted the village green and their plans to apply for a capital projects grant for the town library. The application was complete and met all requirements, and staff recommended approving the application and awarding the designation. Grand Isle Village would be the 240th designated Village Center.

Chip Sawyer motioned to approve the application and award Village Center designation to Grand Isle Village, and Jaime Lee seconded. All were in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

4. Neighborhood Development Area Designation – 2

City of Essex Junction – Boundary Amendment

Amy Tomasso presented staff findings and Chris Yuen and Jennifer Marbl presented on behalf of the City of Essex Junction. The staff determined that the application was complete and noted that progress has been made since the NDA was awarded in 2016. The NDA accelerated permitting for multi-family and mixed-use properties, including Chittenden Crossing, which will add 200+ housing units across five new buildings.

Staff explained that the city's proposed boundaries extend beyond the ¼ mile planning area. This requires that at least 80% and no fewer than 7 members of the Downtown Board agree that the proposed boundary meets criteria (A)-(D) in the application. Moreover, its motion must acknowledge the boundary extends beyond the ¼ mile planning area. Staff found that a portion of the proposed Neighborhood Development Area meets the requirements for designation and that expanding the proposed NDA outside the ¼ mile planning area of the designated village is appropriate for Essex Junction Village. However, staff recommended excluding the Highway Arterial District from the proposed expansion area until the Pearl Street corridor planning process is complete. Staff also noted the inequity in the proposed exclusion of several single-family neighborhoods that could easily accommodate new housing.

The city planning staff explained that public transit is a significant consideration when planning for additional density and that the city is in the process of selecting a consultant to

assist with updating the zoning in this auto-oriented district. They argued that the frequency and use of this transit corridor along Route 15 is one reason to include the Highway Arterial District in the NDA. Additionally, city planning staff highlighted multiple housing developments within the Highway Arterial District that would benefit from the NDA. The Board entered into a rigorous discussion with city staff regarding specific plans for the area and the best ways to encourage density. The city believes including this area in the NDA will be the best way to guide growth and align it with smart growth principles. Several board members commented on the pressing nature of the housing crisis and the need to weigh program guidelines against timely approval and construction of housing projects. Charlie Baker, joining the meeting late, noted that Chittenden County-specific issues are at play here. Each board member offered an opinion on including the Highway Arterial District, and the consensus was clear that the board would prefer to accept the city's proposed boundary over the staff-recommended boundary.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to accept the community's motion for the original NDA, which Michael McDonough seconded. The ayes were Charlie Baker, Michelle Boomhower, 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 Randolph – Boundary Amendment

Amy Tomasso presented staff findings, and Julie Iffland and Diane Nelligan joined on behalf of the Randolph Area Community Development Corporation. Staff found the application complete, and the proposed boundaries fall within the Neighborhood Planning Area. The proposed expansion includes two key development parcels for the RACDC. Staff found that the zoning meets minimum density requirements; there are no natural resource constraints, steep slopes, or prime agricultural soils. The proposed area meets standards for the NDA program and is outside of flood hazard areas. Staff recommended approval of the boundary amendment.

Chip Sawyer motioned to approve the application for a boundary amendment to Randolph's NDA, and Charlie Baker seconded. All were in favor, with none opposed. The motion carried.

5. Old Business / New Business

The Homes for All Toolkit and Training project will launch on March 14th in Barre. Currently, 200 people are registered, and we had to change venues to the Barre Elks Lodge to meet the demand. The agenda is comprised of a half-day trainer summit that includes a panel discussion and a breakout session teaching people how develop and build infill and missing middle housing. Following the summit, we will take the project on the road for training sessions in communities. We will roll out a curriculum and training program and select the members of the training cohort in the fall.

Chris Cochran updated the board on the progress of the Designation 2050 project. We have received a draft of the Climate Adder focused on flood recovery, which is currently under review. One of its key recommendations is to expand flood mitigation tax credits to the entire designated area; it is currently limited to FEMA flood hazard areas (and many of properties flooded in 2023 were outside of those areas). The Governor's budget recommended \$2 million, increasing the tax credit cap to \$5 million. There was a discussion of Act 250 reform, RPC future land use maps, and the designation reform bill that the legislature was advancing.

Downtown Day at the State House will be March 19. The 24 Downtown Organizations will thank legislators for their support and advocate for the proposed \$2 million increase to the tax credit cap. Downtown Board Members are welcome to attend.

7. Adjourn

Alex Farrell adjourned the meeting at 2:31 p.m.

The next Downtown Board meeting will be on March 25, 2024.

Respectfully submitted, Alice Dodge and Jenni Lavoie