

Minutes
Vermont Downtown Board
4/22/2024
Calvin Coolidge Conference Room
1 National Life Drive, Davis Building, 6th Floor
Montpelier, VT 05602

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
- Michelle Boomhower (*Vice-Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Transportation, arrived at 1:25pm
- 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 (virtual)
- 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 (virtual)
- 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 (5): Richard Amore, Chris Cochran, Gary Holloway, Natalie Elvidge, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (7): Gary Briggs, Town of Lunenburg; Tina Breault, Town of Lunenburg; Sarah McShane, Town of Stowe; Abby Bourgeois, Stowe Vibrancy; and Elise McKenna, Stowe Vibrancy.

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:

- March 25, 2024, Draft Minutes
- Village Center Designation Renewals (2):
 - Town of Bethel – Bethel Village Center
 - Town of Jamaica – Jamaica Village Center
 - Town of Mount Holly – Belmont Village Center

Charlie Baker motioned to approve the consent agenda items, and Sabina Haskell seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

3. Village Center Designation – New Application – 2

Town of Lunenburg – Lunenburg Village Center

The proposed boundary runs along US Route 2 (Main Street) and South Lunenburg Road and includes the elementary school, 3 churches, old town hall, town common, library, town offices, post offices, general store, local businesses, 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.

Gary Briggs, Selectboard Chair, shared with board members the origin story of the town's first municipal plan, and path towards village center designation. The town expressed interest in obtaining a grant through the Better Places program to fabricate and install welcome signs at each end of town on Route 2. Through that consultation, the town was notified they needed a municipal plan, and village center designation to apply to the program. With that guidance in mind, they embarked on their first ever town plan. The town plan process received record public participation allowing the plan to get adopted in less than a year. Once that milestone was reached, the town began preparing a village center application. Next steps are seeking grant funds to get the welcome signs project underway and finally realized.

Michael McDonough motioned to approve village center designation for Lunenburg village center, and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

Town of Lunenburg – Gilman Village Center

The proposed boundary runs along River Road, Beech Street, and Riverside Avenue and includes the riverfront park, pedestrian bridge, hydro complex (former mill), gazebo park, 2 churches, post office, senior center, middle school, senior housing, and multi- 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.

Gary Briggs shared that the Village of Gilman is economically challenged with crumbling infrastructure. Once a booming mill town with a school, restaurants, and convenience stores,

the village has been struggling since the mill closed in the early 90's. The company that owns the dam, and associated mill buildings, once at odds with the town – has recently started to engage in conversations with both the town and NVDA about possible reuse of the mill buildings for manufacturing.

Chip Sawyer motioned to approve village center designation for Gilman village center, and Michael Desrochers seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

4. Downtown Designation Renewal – 1

Town of Stowe

The Town of Stowe received Downtown Designation in 2016. 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.

Sarah McShane, Planning and Zoning Director, shared success stories of the downtown with board members. The downtown completed a huge project to bury all overhead wires, and related infrastructure – which allows and provides for unobstructed views of the picturesque and highly photographed downtown. Sarah shared photos of downtown business who have utilized the Tax Credit program to improve the façade of buildings, and a new mixed-use development with commercial and residential space. A highlight was hearing that the downtown had zero vacancies.

Abby Bourgeois, and Elise McKenna, provided information on each of the five signature events that Stowe Vibrancy puts on throughout the year, and the feedback they receive from both residents and visitors alike. Additionally, they shared that support and resources provided to the downtown organizations such as the monthly group meetings, annual retreats, and the new annual grant program are invaluable to their success.

Sabina Haskell motioned to approve downtown designation renewal for the Town of Stowe, and Chip Sawyer seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

5. Downtown Transportation Fund Application Review

The Downtown Transportation Fund (DTF) supports transportation-related capital improvement projects such as new sidewalks, lighting and other pedestrian and streetscape improvements in designated downtowns and eligible designated village centers. Eligible projects must be within or serving the downtown district or village center and support economic development.

We have received 11 eligible Downtown Transportation Fund (DTF) Grant applications for the FY24 round. Requests totaled \$1,715,585.00 for the approximate \$3,000,000 available in funding. The applications were reviewed and checked for completeness and accuracy by DHCD staff.

Board members commented that they were impressed with scope and variety of projects happening throughout the state.

Charlie Baker made a motion to award all 11 Downtown Transportation Fund applications, and Michael McDonough seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The motion carried.

6. Old Business / New Business

None

7. Adjourn

Alex Farrell adjourned the meeting at 2:07 p.m.

The next Downtown Board meeting will be on May 20, 2024.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie