**Municipal Planning Grant FY24 Application Guide**

This guide is designed to help you prepare a competitive application.

**Please use this guide to prepare your responses in Microsoft Word, and then copy and paste them into the actual application in our GEARS system.** Feel free to type into the text boxes – they will expand to accommodate your answers.

**Tip:** The GEARS system will time-out after 45 minutes on a single screen, even if you are actively working on it, so it’s easiest to copy and paste.

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# Summary & Narrative Form

## Section 1: Applicant Information

|  |
| --- |
| **1.1 Type of Application:** Is this an application from a single municipality or a group of municipalities (consortium)? |
| [ ]  Single municipality | [ ]  Group (consortium) |
|  |  |
| **Single Municipality Applicant:** *Select the name of your town from the menu, starting with “City of”, “Town of”, or “Village of”.* | **Consortium Lead Municipality:** *Select the name the lead municipality from the menu, starting with “City of”, “Town of”, or “Village of”. The lead municipality will serve as the fiscal agent and primary project manager.* |
| **Single Municipality Rural Town Status:** Is the municipality a rural town? [ ]  Yes [ ]  No*Rural towns are defined in statute as municipalities with populations below 2,500 as of the last census. If you’re not sure if your municipality qualifies, check the list here.* | **Consortium Partner Municipalities:** *Select the names of all partner municipalities from the menu.**All partner municipalities in a consortium must have an RPC-confirmed planning process and attach a resolution signed by each legislative body.* |
| **Single Municipality Agent Status:** Will the regional planning commission (RPC) serve as agent for this rural town project?[ ]  Yes [ ]  No* *RPCs may serve as agents to rural towns to assist with the application and project; however, the municipality, must serve as the financial/fiscal manager.*
* *If a rural town receives a grant and has not identified the RPC as agent, consultants must be selected competitively, unless a waiver is approved by DHCD.*
 | **Consortium Agent Status:** Will the regional planning commission (RPC) serve as the municipal agent for this consortium project?[ ]  Yes [ ]  No* *RPCs may serve as a “municipal agent” for a consortium to support inter-municipal and regional cooperation; however, the lead municipality must serve as the financial/fiscal manager.*
* *As Agent, the RPC is expected to prepare the application, support grant administration, and can be exempt from competitive selection if serving as a project consultant.*
* *If a consortium receives a grant and has not identified the RPC as agent, consultants must be selected competitively, unless a waiver is approved by DHCD.*
 |

## Section 2: Project Description & Location

**2.1 Project Type:** Please identify the project type:

*Select one of these options from dropdown menu:*

[ ]  Municipal Plan

[ ]  Zoning & Subdivision Bylaw

[ ]  Planning for Designated Area

[ ]  Infrastructure or Capital Improvement Planning

[ ]  Natural Resource Planning

[ ]  Flood Resilience Planning

[ ]  If other, specify:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *(character limit: 65)*

**2.2 Project Title:** Name the project as concisely as possible:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*T*he project title will be used in the grant agreement and program announcements if funded.

**2.3 Project Subtitle:** Provide a very brief statement of what the project will accomplish and produce: (character limit: 250)

This description will be used in MPG program marketing materials if this grant is funded.

**2.4 Project Description:** Provide an overall summary of the 1) issue, 2) approach to solving the problem, 3) project deliverables, and 4) intended long-term outcomes: (character limit: 2,500)

Consider writing this summary last, since it draws on more detailed responses below.

**2.5 Project Location:** Describe the geographic area(s) the project will address: (character limit: 250)

* Briefly describe the project’s area of focus, such as: entire town, watershed, planning area, zoning district(s), a specific site, etc.)

Evaluators will consider the project title and description, and whether the project location is clearly defined and documented, as part of the “application quality” score.

* For projects not defined by municipal or state designation boundaries, **ATTACH** any available images in the online Attachments Form to illustrate the project location, such as a map or photo that helps reviewers become familiar with the project’s location and conditions.

## Section 3: Planning Status Eligibility

|  |
| --- |
| Questions are different based on whether you chose “single municipality” or “consortium” application in Section 1. |
| **3.1 Single Municipality Plan Status:** Does the municipality have an adopted municipal plan?[ ]  Yes, it was adopted on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [mm/dd/yyyy][ ]  No | **3.4 Consortium Plan Status:** Do all municipalities in the consortium have an adopted municipal plan?[ ]  Yes (list adoption dates below)[ ]  NoPlan adoption dates:\_ [mm/dd/yyyy] |
|  |  |
| **3.2 Single Municipality Confirmation Status:** Does the municipality have a local planning process confirmed by the RPC?[ ]  Yes [ ]  No | **3.5 Consortium Confirmation Status:** Do all municipalities have a local planning process confirmed by the RPC(s)?[ ]  Yes [ ]  No |
| **3.3 Single Municipality Funding Status:** If the municipality has an unconfirmed plan, has the municipality voted an an annual or special meeting to provife local funds for municipal and regional planning purposes?[ ]  Yes [ ]  No* This question will only appear if the answer to 3.2 is “no”.
* Municipality must allocate local funds for planning purposes to be eligible for funding (this is a prerequisite to obtaining a confirmed planning process).
 |  |

* Unless applying to create a plan approvable by the RPC, a single municipality must have an adopted plan to be eligible for funding and an RPC-confirmed planning process by September 30, 2023. Applicants may optionally attach RPC confirmation letters at the end of the application.
* Consortium municipalities must have an RPC-confirmed planning process. They are not required to attach an RPC confirmation letter.

## Section 4: Project Readiness & Need

**4.1 Project Issue & Urgency:** What timely community issues, problems, challenges, or obstacles will the project address? (character limit: 2,500)

Be specific; competitive applications clearly and thoroughly explain the specific problems the community is working to solve.

**Evaluation Criteria: 5 points**

* Is the issue clearly explained?
* Has the issue been studied and documented?
* Is there an urgency to the issue?

**4.2 Funding Need:** What other funding sources, if any, were considered, and why is the MPG program the best source to fund this project?

(character limit: 2,000)

* MPG Funding is limited and if other funding is available for your project, explain why the MPG is the best choice for this work.
* In general, other funding is available for project design and construction, but MPG is one of the rare sources of grants for planning.
* If you’re unsure about other potential funding opportunities for your project, review [*this list*](https://www.vtrural.org/programs/community-visits) or check with [your *RPC*](https://www.canr.msu.edu/nci/).
* Could this project be funded or be a better fit with another grant program?
* Does the answer explain why an MPG is needed to do the project?
* Will this project fill funding gaps or open opportunities for subsequent implementation funding?

**Evaluation Criteria: 5 points**

**4.3 Answer either (a) or (b), depending on your project:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **4.3(a) Municipal Plan Project Readiness.** If the application is for a municipal plan adoption or amendment project, how will the project address the issues described earlier and any recommendations made by the RPC to bring the municipal plan into compliance with statutory requirements? | **4.3(b) Municipal Plan Implementation Project Readiness.** If the application is for a project that implements the municipal plan, how is the proposed project identified as an important implementation action in the adopted municipal plan? |
| [ ]  Municipal plan project[ ]  Municipal implementation project(character limit: 2,500) |
| * MPG funding is only available for plan projects that intend to comply with Vermont statute through RPC-confirmation
* Applicants may optionally attach the RPC’s plan consultation report online in the Attachments Form
* Plan updates that occur mainly because a plan is expiring, or for routine updates, will be less competitive than those that propose to address well-documented local concerns.
* Plan updates should incorporate any prior plans and studies to promote coordinated and comprehensive planning.
 | * Implementation proposals that are clearly prioritized in the municipal plan are more likely to be competitive.
* For longer responses, applicants may attach a compilation in the Attachments Form online, offering extra context for relevant municipal plan policies, actions, objectives, goals, etc. Do not upload the whole plan.
 |
| **Evaluation Criteria: 5 points** |
| * Does the response demonstrate a need that goes beyond the need to maintain a current plan or re-adopt an expired plan?
* Does the project help address a pressing need or important change in the community?
* Does the project address recommendations by the RPC to bring the plan into compliance with statutory requirements?
 | * Does the response include specific plan language with citations?
* Does the adopted municipal plan clearly identify and support the implementation project?
 |

**4.4 Other Background (Optional).** Are there any additional community efforts or activities leading up to this application that would provide extra context for this project?

(character limit: 2,000)

Sometimes a pressing need arises outside of the regular 8-year municipal planning cycle that spurs action; explain other applicable background here. Examples: a recent community forum, a new recreation master plan, [Safe Routes to School Walk Audit](https://accd.vermont.gov/housing/resources-rules/renters-landlords), or a community survey.

* Have additional and complimentary community efforts or activities helped inform this project?
* Evaluated and scored under plan or implementation scores with question 4.3

**4.5 Project Overlap:** If a municipality received an MPG last year – or if the project is part of a larger or phased project – explain how the projects are related, and address your capacity to complete the proposed project.

[ ]  Not Applicable (single project with no overlap)

OR (character limit: 1,500)

Certain projects, like a complete overhaul of bylaws, should expect to take more than one MPG cycle to first prepare proposed amendments and second undergo the adoption hearing process. If you are unsure if your project should be phased, contact program staff.

* If applicable, is the sequencing sensible, and does the applicant have the capacity to successfully complete the project within 22 months?
* Evaluators may adjust scoring for section 4 based on answer

**4.6 Project Management:** How will the project and consultant be managed and who will make decisions about the project and final products? Please identify 1 or 2 individuals in the community who will champion the project (may be a Planning Commission Chair)

(character limit: 1,500)

Collaborative planning projects often succeed or fail based on the ability of a person or group to lead the project and make effective decisions. A responsive project manager with an engaged and representative steering committee is a key success factor.

**Evaluation Criteria: 5 points**

* Has a person and/or group been identified to manage the consultant and champion the project?
* Is the project management structure adequate for the type of project proposed?
* Do decision-makers represent diverse stakeholders in the community?

## Section 5: Public Outreach & Project Partnership

**5.1 Public Outreach.** What public participation methods will the project use to engage the participation of the broader public, especially commonly underserved and under-represented populations in the community?

(character limit: 2,000)

* Planning projects are more successful when there is sustained public outreach throughout a project.
* Engagement needs and timing differ by project and appropriate levels of participation vary. DHCD offers engagement pointers [*here*](http://www.healthvermont.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2016/11/HPDP_PA%26N%20Complete_streets_guide_for_VT_communities.pdf).
* Indicate how many people you expect to engage in the project.
* Example Techniques: demonstration projects, [*charettes*](https://www.canr.msu.edu/nci/nci-charrette-system/), design workshops, engaging people at existing community events, project website, and social media
* Does the response identify any underserved, historically marginalized, or under-represented populations in the community and propose effective ways to meet the needs of harder-to-reach stakeholders?
* Are the outreach activities described here included in the workplan and sufficiently budgeted?
* Are the activities aligned with the community and project: relevant, well-timed, meaningful, and multi-venue?
* Does the response say how many people will be engaged?
* Does the project include any innovative methods or explain why the methods selected will be effective?

**Evaluation Criteria: 10 points**

**5.2 Project Partnership & Support:** In addition to the Selectboard and Planning Commission’s resolution of support, please explain and provide evidence of organizational partnership and community support for the project.

(character limit: 2,000)

Planning projects are more successful when they begin with community support and are done in partnership with organizations outside the municipality.

* Projects that involve regulatory oversight by State agencies (such as the Agency of Transportation) must identify those agencies as partners for coordination.
* Applicants may attach up to five pages as a single document in the online Attachments Form, including: letters of support, meeting minutes, or other documents showing community support for the project.
* Does the project have documented support and/or partnership from relevant stakeholders and partners ready to help it succeed, such as the conservation commission, business community, local schools, regional organizations, a local nonprofit, or other key community leaders?
* Are identified partners included in the work plan or invested in the local match?
* Is there evidence of coordination and partnership with state agencies likely to have regulatory oversight?

**Evaluation Criteria: 10 points**

## Section 6: Statewide Priorities

**6.1 Project Outcomes & Goals.** Beyond the project itself, what long-term outcomes would demonstrate the success of the project and further statewide planning goals?

(character limit: 2,000)

* You have explained the issues you are working to solve above, and you will explain what you are going to do below in the work plan. Explain the long-term value you hope the project will deliver here.
* Emphasize outcomes consistent with any relevant provision of the Regional Plan, Vermont’s planning goals *(*[*24 V.S.A. 4302*](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-Funding-Directory.pdf)*)*, smart growth principles *(*[*24 V.S.A 2791(13)*](https://www.pps.org/article/the-power-of-10)*)*, and other statute.
* Does the response communicate a clear policy direction long-term result?
* Will the outcomes resolve the community needs identified in a way that is consistent with the regional plan(s), Vermont planning goals, smart growth principles and other relevant law?

**Evaluation Criteria: 5 points**

**6.2 Priority Project Categories:** Which of the following statewide priorities does this project address? Select all that apply.

[ ]  Physical improvement plans for a designated area, which may include pre-engineering water/wastewater visioning

[ ]  Housing-related projects (not eligible for funding from the Bylaw Modernization Grant program)

[ ]  Pre-requisite planning to prepare for a new designation application (not including applications for Village Centers)

[ ]  Capital programs and plans, especially programs focused on climate resilience

[ ]  Projects related to resilience and recovery from the Vermont Flood of 2023

[ ]  Age-friendly plans for ‘age-strong’ community design focused on children and seniors

[ ]  Not Applicable (N/A) – *Project is a local priority*

Each year, the evaluators recognize projects that meet statewide priorities. Projects meeting more than one priority will score higher than projects meeting only one priority. Unsure if your project qualifies? Contact program staff.

**6.3 Priority Project Explanation:** Explain how the project furthers the selected statewide priorities.

(character limit: 2,000)

Projects must clearly and directly relate to the categories above to be eligible.

* Does the project clearly relate to one or more of the statewide priorities listed in this section?

**Evaluation Criteria: 10 points**

**Evaluation Criteria: 5 points**

**6.4 Designated Areas:** Please select all designations held by the municipality and explain how the project will relate to the designated area(s).

[ ]  Village Center

[ ]  Downtown

[ ]  New Town Center

[ ]  Neighborhood Development Area

[ ]  Growth Center

[ ]  Not Applicable (no designation)

* [*Learn more about state designations*](https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/designation-programs)
* Use the [*Planning Atlas*](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/Funding-and-Incentives/Municipal-Planning-Grant/2-MPGQuickTip_CitizenParticipation.pdf?viewer=PlanningAtlas) to see the locations of state designated areas.
* Find a list of state designated areas [on *Vermont's Municipal Planning Data Center*](https://accdmaps.vermont.gov/MunicipalPlanningDataCenter/DesignatedAreas)

**6.5 Designated Area Projects:** If the project relates to any of the designated area(s) selected above, please explain how.

[ ]  Not Applicable (no designation)

(character limit: 2,000)

Projects that relate to state designated areas receive priority in accordance with 24 V.S.A. Chapter 76A.

* Does the project have a clear connection to the designated area(s)?
* Reviewers will assign cumulative priority points to the highest scoring ‘core’ designation(s): 15 points to downtowns, 10 points to village centers, 5 points to New Town Centers, 5 points to growth centers, and 5 points to NDAs.

**Evaluation Criteria: 20 points**

## Section 7: Past Performance

**7.1 Project History and Performance:** Please list any planning projects or grants from the past 5 years, with key actions identified and implemented (will inform ongoing status of projects beyond grant closeout)

(character limit: 2,000)

## Section 8: Municipal Resolution & Grant Roles and Good Standing Certification

**8.1 Grant Roles:** Identify the officials who hold the grant roles that correspond to those identified in the Municipal Resolution Form.

Municipal/Authorizing Official: [Select from online menu]

Municipal/Authorizing Official Title: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Municipal/Authorizing Official: [Select from online menu]

Alternate Municipal/Authorizing Official Title: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Grant Administrator: [Select from online menu]

Grant Administrator Title:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* Print and complete the [Municipal Resolution Form](https://www.vapda.org/) offline.
* You can attach the completed resolution in the online application or email it to DHCD.
* More information about the responsibilities and permissions of the MPG Roles are available [here](https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/better-places).
* Note that Municipal/Authorizing Official (M/AO) role can only be attached to this application by DHCD staff member Jenni Lavoie (Jennifer.lavoie@vermont.gov).
* If this is a consortium application, remember that each participating municipality must complete a resolution designating the same Municipal/Authorizing Official and Grant Administrator, and upload consortium resolutions in the online Application Attachments Form.

8.2 Good Standing Certification:

New in FY2024, applicants must fill out and upload a form certifying that the municipality is in good standing (as provided in Section 13(a)(2) of Act 154) with the Agency of Natural Resources and the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, or otherwise explaining why they cannot so certify, and that they will comply with the requirements stated in the form.

* Print and complete the [Good Standing Certification Form](https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/24/117/04302) offline.
* You can attach the completed resolution in the online application or email it to DHCD.

# Work Plan & Budget Form

## Section 1: Work Plan & Budget

Outline the project approach by listing the major tasks and associated costs in the table below.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Task Name** | **Task Description** | **Paid Personnel Category: Consultant, RPC Staff, or Other** | **If other, specify** | **Hours** | **Hourly Rate** | **Personnel Cost***(will auto-calculate online)* | **Material Description** | **Material Cost** | **Total***(will auto-calculate online)* |
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Successful applications and projects invest time and focus on the work plan and budget.

* Include all tasks and costs that will be paid for by the Municipal Planning Grant and match funds.
* If your application is selected for funding, the following work plan and budget will become Attachment A to the Grant Agreement and will be the official description of the work you are expected to accomplish with project funding.
* Break out the project’s tasks into pieces that are not overly broad or too specific, showing the flow of the project’s major activities and associated costs.
* Projects that involve regulatory oversight by other State agencies (such as the Agency of Transportation) must be identified for coordination in the work plan.
* Is it a single project with a realistic scope for a 24-month timeline?
* Is the work plan effectively sequenced?
* Are the work plan tasks sufficiently detailed and appropriate to the project type, identified needs, and the community situation?
* Does the work plan reflect the public engagement identified above?
* Are State agencies likely to have oversight authority identified for coordination?

**Evaluation Criteria: 15 points**

**State Grant Funds:** Enter the amount of state grant funds you are requesting.

Total Project Cost: (will auto-calculate in online form)

State Grant Funds (Grant Amount Requested): $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Total Match Funds: (will auto-calculate in online form)

Minimum Required Cash Match Funds (10% of Total Project Cost): (will auto-calculate)

Optional Additional Match Funds: (will auto-calculate in online form)

## Section 2: Budget Documentation

**Source of Match:** Describe source(s) of match funds:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Contributions of staff or volunteer time **cannot** be offered as a match. Other contributions, while not required, may be documented here as well.

**Budget & Cost Estimates:** Explain how you developed a realistic budget.

(character limit: 2,000)

* DHCD maintains a list of potential project consultants [here](https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/24/076A/02791).
* Please provide a letter or other documentation from a consultant with a cost estimate for tasks, including hourly rate.
* You can attach the document in the online application or mail it to DHCD.
* Other ways to develop a realistic budget: discuss with a municipal official or regional planner who frequently procures planning services, coordinate with the RPC to develop the work plan and budget, undertake a pre-application bid, or research similar projects.
* Make sure the request is within the allowable min. $2,500 – max.$30,000 (single) / $45,000 (consortium), and that the budget does not include any in-kind contributions (which are ineligible).
* Does the budget align with work requested for each task?
* Is the overall funding realistic and adequate for the proposed work plan?
* Does the match reflect any organizational partnership or extra funding commitment that significantly exceeds the minimum required?
* Are the cost estimates and budget allocations documented and realistic?
* Is the project’s budget informed by input and guidance from planning professionals or a pre-application bid process?
* Did the applicant obtain more than one estimate/quote to determine a realistic budget?

**Evaluation Criteria: 20 points**

## Section 3: Accounting

**Accounting System:** What type of accounting system does your municipality use?

[ ]  Automated

[ ]  Manual

[ ]  Combination of both

**Accounting System:** Does your organization have an accounting system that will allow you to completely and accurately track the receipt and disbursements of funds related to the award?

[ ]  Yes [ ]  No

* Responses to the accounting questions are used for administrative risk assessment purposes only and will not impact the competitiveness of your application.
* State funds cannot be awarded to municipalities who are (a) suspended or debarred by the Federal Government; (b) delinquent in submitting their subrecipient annual reports; or (c) delinquent in submitting their Single Audit Reports (if required).

## Application Attachments Form

In the online application, this form is used for uploading any additional files up to 30MB in size, including supporting text, maps, photographs, etc.

* Enter a brief name for your document, click the ‘Choose File’ button to browse your computer and select the document you want to attach, then SAVE at the top of the page.
* If you cannot scan and upload an attachment, feel free to email it directly to Grant Administrator, Jenni Lavoie, [*Jennifer.lavoie@vermont.gov*](https://saferoutes.vermont.gov/)
* Only attach as much as is needed to avoid overwhelming reviewers.

**Attachments submitted in other forms:**

* Single municipality or Lead Municipality Resolution
* Budget & Cost estimates

**Optional Attachments:**

[ ]  Project Location Image(s) or maps

[ ]  RPC Municipal Plan Consultation Report (for municipal plan projects)

[ ]  Relevant Municipal Plan Excerpts

[ ]  Resolutions from Partner Municipalities in Consortium

[ ]  Letters of support from Project Partners

[ ]  Other attachments

* Is the application clear, internally consistent, on-topic, specific, and easily understood?
* DHCD may reduce scores for poor administrative performance for past grants.

**Evaluation Criteria: Overall Application Quality & Past Performance, 10 points**

## Total Score: 120 Points

*Applications scoring less than 60 points will not be funded.*

Once your draft application is complete, please copy and paste your narrative responses into the [online application in GEARS](http://maps.vermont.gov/ACCD/PlanningAtlas/index.html?APPTHEME=VTACCD). Save the online application frequently. To create or update a GEARS account, see instructions here: [https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant/applicant-guidance.](https://accd.vermont.gov/community-development/funding-incentives/municipal-planning-grant/applicant-guidance)

For questions about the competitive criteria or application questions, please contact [Jacob Hemmerick](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/Funding-and-Incentives/CPR-Grants-Good-Standing-Certification.pdf) at 802-828-5249. For questions regarding GEARS, the online Grants Management System, please contact [Jenni Lavoie](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/Funding-and-Incentives/Municipal-Planning-Grant/CPR-MPG-Directory-PlanningConsultants.xls) at 802-828-1948.

# Appendix: Sample Application Responses

*Here are sample responses for the narrative portions of the application – see the questions above. These are intended only as examples.*

**2.2 Project Title:** Revolving Loan Fund & Technical Assistance for Downtown Façade & Signage Improvements

**2.3 Project Subtitle:** The town will develop a village senior housing action plan, providing a framework to expand affordable choices for healthy and active aging in place.

**2.4 Project Description:** The past two years have impacted downtown and changed the mix of small retailers, personal service providers, overnight lodging, restaurants, and office space. 20% of main street businesses have changed business or remain vacant and in a quick situational survey, 25% of building owners are considering a sale or use changes. This project will organize community members and affected businesses to collectively identify high-impact and quickly implementable ideas for downtown economic adaptation including Main Street zoning updates. This project’s outreach will inform the production of a rapid, action-oriented strategy for stakeholder leaders to own and implement. Half of the grant budget will be committed to implementing one or more actions. The project’s strategic outcomes include supports and sustains local businesses, re-connects downtown social capital, renews local consumer spending and buy-local first values, and allowances and encouragement of more downtown housing through adaptive re-use.

**2.5 Project Location:** The bylaw amendment project will focus on changes to the M1, M2, and M3 Zoning Districts (see linked zoning map).

**4.1 Project Issue & Urgency:** Valley City’s Municipal Plan documents concerns about underinvestment and health/safety for the City’s oldest housing stock. The local realtors report a decrease in interested buyers for larger, older homes. A Grand List analysis from 2017 indicates that the City’s pre-war (1945) housing stock represents 43% of the city’s total and this pre-war stock shows negative assessment growth (-9%) over the past 10 years. The City does not have a building code and relies on State Dept. of Public Safety and [rental code](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/Funding-and-Incentives/Municipal-Planning-Grant/CPR-MPG-Roles.pdf) standards; 84% of the City’s health officer rental code enforcement calls originate from this older housing, a lot of which has substantial environmental and mechanical hazards. Further, landlords whose tenants pay the energy bills are not investing in efficiency improvements. Community leaders are concerned about domino disinvestment, where owners constrain how much money they are willing to put into a property they may not recoup, and potential buyers look elsewhere. If assessment trends continue, the City will be forced to make an estimated $1M in cuts to services and capital maintenance programs in three years. An MPG will help the City develop a strategy to reverse trends that threaten the long-term solvency and stability of these historic neighborhoods.

**4.2 Funding Needed:** The village is the heart of our rural town, but business growth and housing opportunities are stifled by the lack of a sewer system. For some years, we have explored State and Federal funding sources for funding to work towards a solution to this problem, but we have found that existing funding sources are primarily for hiring engineering services. Our town is not yet ready to launch into an engineering feasibility study. Before taking that step, we need to better understand the options for wastewater treatment and what specific wastewater problems our village property owners face and then engage and educate the community about wastewater solutions. We will need a multidisciplinary consultant or team to help us frame the issues before we seek funding for a feasibility study. Currently, the MPG is one of the few programs that helps pay for this type of pre-engineering planning.

**4.3a) Municipal Plan Project Readiness:** Since the last municipal plan adoption, the town has completed several planning initiatives, including: a stormwater master plan, a [Vermont Council on Rural Development community visit](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/Funding-and-Incentives/Municipal-Planning-Grant/CPR-MPG-Resolution-Form.pdf), four scoping studies for transportation improvements, a walk/bike audit, and a Main Street master plan. As described above, these plans and studies have advanced the 2012 plan, and provided the town with better data, but they have also created some inconsistency and confusion about the Town’s official policy – in some cases resulting in avoidable appeals and public projects spread too thin to be effectively rolled out. Each new free-standing plan has fragmented the limited bandwidth available for implementation.

The Town strives to provide a clear, consistent, and predictable policy environment as budgets and development projects are proposed and will use this project to integrate and re-prioritize recent work into a single, coordinated municipal plan. To achieve this, each free-standing plan’s implementation recommendations will be collated into a spreadsheet and grouped into similar categories (to be combined, when possible). Each goal, policy, and action will be analyzed for consistency: with each other, the existing municipal plan, and with state statute prior to being ranked according to priority. All prior planning documents will be referenced in the new municipal plan and highest-ranking priorities will be integrated into the implementation program with relevant data, tables, figures, and images from prior work. The project will also bring the plan into compliance with Title 117’s forest integrity statutory requirements and address the recommendations made by the RPC in the consultation report attached to the application.

**4.3b) Municipal Plan Implementation Project Readiness:** The Town’s Comprehensive Plan includes seven policy actions for the next [Unified Development Regulations](https://egrants.vermont.gov/Login2.aspx) amendment. Combined, these bylaw updates will help advance the town’s goal to improve housing opportunities in the village. The specific language of the policies and actions (with citations) are included in an attachment and summarized as follows: 1) address buffering issues that reduce privacy conflicts between adjacent high and low density districts, 2) expand administrative review of minor subdivision and boundary line adjustments to shorten review timeline, hearing costs, and total labor, 3) allow administrative review of up to four-unit residential buildings in the central zoning districts to expand incremental, small-scale, local housing development, 4) reduce dimensional standards that make a majority of the historic village’s principal structures non-conforming by recognizing the historic development pattern as a legal pattern, 5) implement dimensional or form-based alternatives to minimum lots size and density maximums in districts by municipal wastewater service, 6) reduce parking minimums and expand shared, on-street parking – adding streetscape standards that calm traffic and improve the safety and walkability of new developments, and 7) add highway access standards to the Unified Regulations to provide the customers a combined access/zoning permit – instead of two separate permits.

**4.4 Other Background:** In 2018 the Town participated in the [Town Forest Recreation Planning Initiative](https://vtcommunityforestry.org/places/town-forests/recreation-planning-initiative). This process identified ways to make stronger connections between the Town Forest and local commerce that the current municipal plan and capital improvement plan did not anticipate when adopted three years ago. Integrating these active transportation and economic development priorities into our planning & funding framework is an urgent need as local businesses and new entrepreneurs seek to capture growth in the recreation economy and the Town works to establish a multi-use pathway and right of way connection between the village center, town forest, and the regional rail trail.

**4.5 Project Overlap:** The Village received MPG funding last year for the first phase of a 2-phase project to update the subdivision regulations and public works specifications for context-specific [complete streets](https://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/cwi/solutions/municipal-stormwater) standards. These projects are co-managed by a joint committee of the planning commission and selectboard and led by the town administrator. Phase 1 is on target to be finished on time and budget, and funding for phase 2 funding will allow the Village to seamlessly complete the project and proceed to the ordinance adoption process.

**4.6 Project Management:** With limited staff, our small town relies heavily on volunteers and orderly meetings to complete projects on time and budget. This project will be led by a special, 5-member task force comprised of representatives of the planning commission and selectboard, and local stakeholders appointed by the selectboard, including a renter, a recent college graduate, a working parent. The task force will be chaired by an 11-year member of the planning commission and retired project manager. The chair will conduct weekly check-ins with the planning consultant and provide monthly updates to the selectboard chair and town clerk. The task force will meet twice a month. The chair will work with a local volunteer to maintain the project webpage and online shared drive – and ensure that consultant materials are made available, reviewed, and commented upon by task force members prior to each meeting to meet deadlines. The final product will be presented to the planning commission and selectboard for review and approval. Roland Underhill, one of our planning commission members, will oversee the project’s long term implementation once the Municipal Planning Grant is complete.

**5.1 Public Outreach:** This project will feature a rapid planning (charette) process to design gateway improvements and public art concepts for key village focal points and gateways. Charettes are an intensive way to educate and involve the public in the design process. Building up to the charette, partners will issue a press release, area residents will receive a mailer. The event will be supported by the Town, School District, historic society, and artists guild – and be run by a planner, landscape architect, and artist skilled at preparing quick visual renderings for use in a follow-up web survey that identifies the community’s [visual preferences](http://centralvtplanning.org/programs/forest-stewardship/).

The two-day charette will be held in tandem with the School’s annual art fair, attended by approximately 450 people. Past efforts have shown that involving youth at a complimentary event is an effective way to engage under-represented stakeholders in local community planning, including working parents. We expect this engagement will grow community support and publicity for a [Better Places Grant](https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/24/117/04419) to implement the most popular ideas, including an application to the [Vermont Arts Council Animating Infrastructure Grant Program](https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants-and-services/organizations/animating-infrastructure).

**5.2 Project Partnership & Support:** River Town’s community leaders have been impressed by nearby Lake City’s revitalization, spurred by capital investments envisioned through a downtown master plan. River City’s local chamber of commerce, rails-to-trails group, artist guild, and historic society approached the Town to partner on a preparing a streetscape improvement plan that integrates the Project for Public Spaces “[Power of 10](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visual_preference_survey)”, an approach we learned about at the recent Vermont Downtown Conference. River Town’s plan of action will promote civic pride, playful programming, and create a “destination” sense of place that attracts new economic development opportunities, including the Town’s first use of crowdsourced funding for a project. These four organizations enthusiastically endorse this project (see attached letters) and have each committed $250 to the local match. Their directors have also volunteered to serve on a project steering committee.

**6.1 Project Outcomes & Goals:** Long-term outcomes that would demonstrate the success of Pond Village’s “empowering small-scale makers project” include infill and redevelopment of a vacant brownfield site for multi-tenant and low-impact production, processing, and repair uses. These project outcomes are consistent with the regional plan and Vermont’s statewide emphasis on development and re-development in and around centers.

**6.3 Priority Project Explanation:** Mountain Town, Hill Town, and Valley Town consortium project furthers the statewide model projects priority. We are working together to address the lack of interest in appointment to the boards of listers and limited assessment choice by expanding our purchasing power for professional assessment services through an inter-municipal agreement. As far as we know, this would be the first initiative of its kind in Vermont and has the potential to improve the quality of each town’s grand list.

**6.4 Designated Areas:** The Town of River has a designated village center with a neighborhood development area designation, making it eligible for 15 priority points. The proposed capital improvement plan project will create a schedule for sidewalk investments in both designated areas.

**7.1 Project History and Performance:**

FY2022 Municipal Planning Grant – Community Parks Plan – plan completed and grant closed. Currently issuing RFQ for landscape designers as part of Phase I.

FY2020 Municipal Planning Grant – Stormwater Master Plan – scoping underway for green stormwater infrastructure improvements to Main Street, including new street trees and a pocket park.