

Brattleboro, VT Conceptual Vision for Our Community

Brattleboro is one of the larger communities in Vermont with a population of 12,500. The community is a “gateway” to Vermont from Massachusetts and a crossroads connecting New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont. Downtown Brattleboro is a vibrant community. Although not a city, Brattleboro feels more “urban” than most other Vermont communities with three and four story buildings, bustling street traffic, and an abundance of shops and restaurants, cultural amenities, and civic institutions.

Often cited as a livable community and resembling a college town, Brattleboro is home to several significant downtown attractions including one of the largest Co-op markets in the state, the Latchis Theatre and Hotel, The Robert H Gibson River Garden and the Brattleboro Museum and Art Center.

While the community is located along the Connecticut River, downtown has only a few direct connections to the water. Whetstone Brook passes through downtown Brattleboro and is a scenic yet underutilized asset.

Recovery

To date, much has happened in Brattleboro to recover. The Brooks House will become home to the Community College of Vermont, which will bring students into the heart of downtown. The Latchis Hotel and Theater has reopened and has unveiled renovations to its art deco main theatre. A new restaurant has opened along the Connecticut River, and the Co-op has significantly expanded. Plans are underway for a significant creative economy space in downtown. The Town has also deployed wayfinding signs directing visitors from the Interstate into downtown.

Catastrophic Events

Brattleboro has suffered from a number of events over the past several years that have negatively impacted the community. Spring floods in 2011 flooded West Brattleboro and a large fire gutted the Brooks House in 2012, a prominent mixed-use building on the 100% corner of downtown. The fire took out numerous residential units and retail locations in a prime location. Tropical Storm Irene flooded many businesses along Flat Street and caused major damage to the Latchis in 2011.

Recovery

The Vermont Downtown Action Team (V-DAT) was selected by the State of Vermont, Department of Housing and Community Development, Vermont Downtown Program in May 2013 to conduct a community planning and economic development charrette in Brattleboro. The V-DAT was comprised of experts in architecture, planning, landscape architecture, historic preservation, economic development, organizational structure, landscape architecture, engineering and community branding.

The V-DAT planning charrette operates on three key tenants: utilizing an asset based approach, addressing the community in a holistic manner, and conducting the exercise in a public forum.



Building Rehabilitation

Downtown Brattleboro has excellent building stock and wonderful architecture. Many of the buildings in downtown have been renovated and the Brooks House renovation will bring one of the most important structures in downtown back to its former glory. While in Brattleboro, the V-DAT Team was able to meet with property owners interested in rehabilitating or renovating their own buildings. The illustrations above show before and after renderings of the Market Block and the Brattleboro Bicycle Shop. These renderings are designed to provide guidance to property owners as they make improvements or seek financing for more comprehensive rehabilitation.



Project Funding and Support

This project was supported by funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery. The plan was prepared as a cooperative effort of the State of Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development, the Division of Community Planning and Revitalization and the Town of Brattleboro. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of HUD or the State of Vermont. For more information on the Vermont Downtown Action Team (V-DAT) program and links to the detailed presentation and report for Brattleboro please visit http://accd.vermont.gov/strong_communities/opportunities/revitalization/vdat or call (802) 828-5229.



Whetstone Brook

The Whetstone Brook is a tremendous but underutilized asset through the heart of downtown. Rock outcrops, rapids and building foundations combine to create memorable views throughout the brook corridor, particularly between the pedestrian bridge and the outfall at the Connecticut River. There are several opportunities to celebrate the Whetstone and provide more opportunities for residents and visitors to experience it as a destination or while conducting daily business around it. These areas include the edges west of the Main Street Bridge, the area along Bridge Street south of the Main Street Bridge and along the railroad right-of-way and future trail connection. With simple improvements such as clearing vegetation, removing utilitarian fences, lighting, and art this space can emerge as a focal point in downtown.



River Overlook

Brattleboro benefits from dramatic views to the Connecticut River. However, in many instances like this one, significant undergrowth prevents clear views to the river and the spaces that could accommodate viewing areas have not been designed to enhance that viewing experience.

Waterfront Area

Downtown Brattleboro is located at a wide point in the Connecticut River, affording dramatic views of the river valley to the north and south. Currently, however, the waterfront area does not capitalize on river, with the exception of the Whetstone Station Restaurant and Brewery. Once the bridge at Bridge Street is converted to a pedestrian and bicycle bridge, this area could be enhanced as a significant open space amenity and gateway to downtown. Additionally, the waterfront could offer a memorable gateway for visitors arriving by train.

