

Draft Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 3/28/2022

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

Members Present (11):

- Josh Hanford (*Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Michele Boomhower, designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Billy Coster, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- Robert Sponable, alternate designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
- Jaime Lee, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont.
- David Allaire, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, left at 1:38pm
- Michael McDonough, appointed by the governor, representing local government
- Bruce Cheeseman, appointed by the Governor, representing local government
- Chip Sawyer, designated by the Vermont Planners Association
- Sabina Haskell, designated by the Chair of the Natural Resources Board
- Ed Bove, alternate designated by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Cathy Davis, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Association of Chamber Executives

Attending Community Planning and Revitalization (CP+R) Team Members (5): Chris Cochran, Richard Amore, Gary Holloway, Jacob Hemmerick, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (6): John McCullough, Town of Calais; Janice Ohlsson, Town of Calais; Rowan Jacobsen, Town of Calais; Alex Weinhagen, Town of Hinesburg; Cindy Reid, Cathedral Square; Tyler Labrie, Evernorth. Annie Mclean, NVDA.

Josh Hanford brought the meeting to order at 1:02pm via GoTo Meeting virtual conference call.

Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

There were no additions or deletions to the board agenda.

1. Public Comment Period

Josh Hanford opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments.

2. Consent Agenda Items:

- January 24, 2022 Draft Meeting Minutes
- East Burke Village Center Designation Renewal
- West Burke Village Center Designation Renewal
- Warren Village Center Designation Renewal

Dave Allaire made a motion to approve the consent agenda items, and Jaime Lee seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Chip Sawyer, Dave Allaire, Ed Bove, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Sabina Haskell, and Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

[Chris Cochran said he lived in the village North Calais seeking village center designation. He did not want there to be any appearance of a conflict and he signed off from the meeting.](#)

3. Village Center Designations – 2 – Town of Calais

North Calais Village Center

The proposed boundary runs along North Calais Road, Upper Road, and Gar Road, and includes many contributing historic resources, including Memorial Hall, the village beach, and a few single-family residences, including the former general store. The town worked with staff to define the boundary that meets statutory definition and submitted a map that meets the program's requirements.

Janice Ohlsson, with the Town of Calais, reported to board members that the Town has multiple projects in the works, including one in North Calais for Memorial Hall.

Rowan Jacobsen added that Memorial Hall was built for Veteran's and many people would come to the hall to celebrate weddings and for the lake access. A group of townspeople have been raising funding to bring the building up to code, and to fix structural repairs. This designation will be an incentive as they continue to apply for grant funds to bring the project over the finish line.

Board members commended the town for their work with Memorial Hall, and for moving all the villages in the town forward. The board questioned how much fundraising the group had left for Memorial Hall, and Rowan reported they have about 90% of the funds needed.

Michael McDonough made a motion to approve the village center designation for North Calais, and Laura Trieschmann seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Chip Sawyer, Dave Allaire, Ed Bove, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Sabina Haskell, and Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

Adamant Village Center

The town is requesting a boundary amendment to expand their designated boundary northwest to include the Adamant Community Club. The boundary request includes small portions of two parcels and includes the entire municipal owned parcel of the Adamant Community Club. The boundary amendments were developed by the town in coordination with staff. Staff finds the boundary amendments align with the statutory definition of a village center.

John McCullough, with the Town, shared that village residents use the Community Club building often and are excited for the potential opportunities that including this resource in the village designation boundary will bring. Janice Ohlsson added that there are many events held using the building, and that it is the cultural center of the village.

Board members expressed surprise that the building was not included originally within the boundary and understood the town's request to add it now.

Dave Allaire made a motion to approve the village center boundary amendment for Adamant village, and Chip Sawyer seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Chip Sawyer, Dave

Allaire, Ed Bove, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Sabina Haskell, and Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

4. Neighborhood Development Area – 1 – Hinesburg, Kelley’s Field

The application materials from the Town of Hinesburg submitted were complete. This is a project-specific Neighborhood Development Area application for the Kelley’s Field Property, submitted by Town in collaboration with the property owner/developer Cathedral Square and Evernorth. Staff finds that the proposed Neighborhood Development Area meets the requirements for designation.

Alex Weinhagen, with the Town of Hinesburg, informed board members that the senior housing expansion project was the impetus for this application. This area is near the village center, and designation will help this project in terms of cost savings.

Cindy Reid, with Cathedral Square, added that the amount of senior housing will double from the existing 24 units to 48 units, and residents will get to enjoy a new and larger community room in the development of this project.

Tyler Labrie, with Evernorth, added that this location will lease up quickly, as they currently have applicants interested.

Board members inquired about the amount of public interest in this project. Alex and Cindy added that this project has received widespread public support, and with the support of residents and the public; this is classified as a “dream project” due to the extensive support. An additional board comment was regarding the setback from a stream on the project site, Alex advised that there is a 75-foot setback to the stream, and Cindy added that the buildable area is outside of that setback.

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve Neighborhood Development Area designation for Kelley’s Field, and Michele Boomhower seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Chip Sawyer, Ed Bove, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Sabina Haskell, and Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

5. Proposal to Extend Village Center Renewal Grace Period

Act 92 (of 2020) automatically extended the life of any license, permit, program, or plan that expired during the declared State of Emergency for 90 days after the emergency. The Governor lifted his COVID-19 Emergency Order June 15, 2021. The automatic Act 92 extensions expired September 13, 2021. While the legal extensions have expired, the pandemic continues impact the operations of municipalities and many (especially the villages) have struggled to get back to regular business.

Existing board policy provides a 90-day grace period for municipalities to renew village center, downtown, and new town center designations. Applications that are not renewed within this time frame are automatically de-designated and new application for designation must be submitted.

Developing, submitting reviewing, and approving a new application is time consuming process for municipal staff/volunteers, DHCD staff, and Downtown Board members. Extending the grace period from 90 to 180 days will allow sufficient time for most municipalities to update their town plan and submit renewal applications. The proposed change would also allow DHCD spend less time on administrative processes and use that time to help communities implement their revitalization, economic development, and pandemic recovery projects.

Michael McDonough made a motion to approve the grace period renewal period, and Michele Boomhower seconded. Ayes: Billy Coster, Bob Sponable, Chip Sawyer, Ed Bove, Jaime Lee, Laura Trieschmann, Michael McDonough, Michele Boomhower, Sabina Haskell, and Josh Hanford. The motion carried.

6. Old Business / New Business

Downtown Transportation Fund -- Gary Holloway informed board members that he had received 15 applications requesting nearly \$2M. He will setup a training date with the board to review the application and the scoring criteria and process. At the April meeting, the application scores will be tallied, and the board will ratify a slate of projects for funding.

Downtown Conference, June 9, St. Johnsbury -- Gary Holloway advised the board that the downtown conference will be coming back as an in-person event in 2022. This will be a fully in-person event, with no virtual options. Each block of sessions will include an outside option for those who want to be extra cautious with COVID.

Better Places -- Richard Amore provided the board with an update on program. Better Places is a community matching grant program empowering Vermonters to create inclusive and vibrant public places serving Vermont's designated downtowns, village centers, new town centers, or neighborhood development areas. The program has over 60 project inquires so far.

Richard has one project actively fundraising their match. Another project will go live soon and 10 more projects are in the pipeline.

Legislative Updates -- Chris Cochran provided the board with updates including, Housing Bill S226, which just had a second reading in the Senate. Included in this bill are proposed changes to the NDA program to help small towns achieve the designation, an increase to the Downtown and Village Center Tax Credits, an expansion of the credits to be used in the neighborhood areas, a new flood mitigation credit, and a recommendation of a study for the designation programs. He also reported that thanks to Michele Boomhower's assistance, additional \$10M in funding for the Electric Vehicle Supply Equipment (EVSE) program was moved from the Transportation Bill to Budget Bill -- AKA "The Big Bill." The House also switched the funding source from federal ARPA funding, to state General Funds.

7. Adjourn

Billy Coster made a motion to adjourn, and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 2:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie