

Draft Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 4/22/2019

Calvin Coolidge Conference Room, 6th Floor, National Life Bldg., Montpelier

Members Present (11):

- Josh Hanford (*Acting chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Michele Boomhower, designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Peter Walke, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources (departed at 2:30pm)
- Michael Desrochers, designated by the Commissioner of Public Safety
- Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
- Patricia M. Sears, appointed by the Governor, representing the Vermont Natural Resources Council and the Preservation Trust of Vermont (via phone)
- David Allaire, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- Michael McDonough, appointed by the governor, representing local government
- Liz Gamache, appointed by the Governor, representing local government
- Chip Sawyer, designated by the Vermont Planners Association
- Donna Casey, designated by the Chair of the Natural Resources Board
- Tasha Wallis, designated by the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies
- Tom Torti, 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, Faith Ingulsrud, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (6): Bruce Olsson, Town of Elmore; Alexa Repko, LCPC; Meghan Rodier, LCPC; Joe Kasprzak, Town of St. Johnsbury; Melissa Manka, Town of Westford; Irene Nagle, NVDA.

Josh Hanford brought the meeting to order at 1:04 pm in the Calvin Coolidge Room, 6th floor of the National Life Building, Montpelier.

Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda

There were no additions or deletions to the board agenda.

1. Approval of Minutes from March 25, 2019

Michele Boomhower made a motion to approve the March 25, 2019 minutes, no edits noted, and Peter Walke seconded. The motion carried 10-0, with one abstention.

2. Public Comment Period

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

3. Village Center Designation New – 1 – Richard Amore

Elmore Village Center

Richard presented the complete application for the village center designation. The proposed boundary runs along Route 12 and includes the Methodist Church, town offices, town hall, elementary school, the Elmore Store, Jupiter Farm, and a couple multifamily 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.

Bruce Olsson, Elmore Planning Commissioner, shared with board members the revitalization efforts underway in Elmore including; a grant application in progress for an electric vehicle charging station, maintenance and upgrades to the Town Hall, and the need to improve bicycle/pedestrian safety along Route 12 to entice state park visitors to visit the village.

Michele Boomhower made a motion to approve village center designation for Elmore village and Liz Gamache seconded. The motion carried 10-0, with one abstention.

4. Downtown Designation Program Boundary Amendment – 1 – Gary Holloway Town of St. Johnsbury

The town recently updated their zoning bylaws and expanded the Design Control District (DCD) to include an area larger than the existing downtown district (local adoption of a DCD is one of the ways a community can demonstrate its statutorily required planning commitment). This change enables the town to request boundary amendments to its designated downtown district. The town worked with staff to define the amended boundary. The expanded boundary includes priority areas for redevelopment, and it makes other changes consistent with the statutory definition.

The proposed amendment includes twenty-three properties. The majority are located on the northern end of Bay Street between the current boundary and the river. This includes Allen Lumber, Ide building/old mill, St Johnsbury paper, JMH office/storage space, KC Rental building (new trailhead center for the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail) and some VTrans owned property along the railroad tracks. Additional properties include: a vacant parcel that will be joined with the adjacent Glove Factory parcel; properties on Frost and Maple; and a technical correction to the American Legion property on North Avenue.

Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager, informed board members of the planning underway to help revitalize the town including; a recent update to the Design Control District, several buildings that have received State Tax Credits, the current Downtown boundary amendment, and the TIF application currently in process. Joe also shared private revitalization efforts including renovations to buildings for additional housing, bed and breakfasts, and planning efforts to create connections between the Bay Street and downtown areas.

Board members congratulated the town on a successful effort to redefine their Design Control District and clarified that almost all the new properties added to the downtown boundary were either commercial, or multi-family buildings.

Tasha Wallis made a motion to approve the Downtown designation boundary amendment for St. Johnsbury and Tom Torti seconded. The motion carried 11-0.

5. Neighborhood Development Area – 1 – Faith Ingulsrud Town of Westford

Application materials for Westford's proposed Neighborhood Development Area are complete and they meet the requirements for designation. Westford's proposed NDA boundary is wholly within the designated village center on the northwest corner of the village common. The boundary excludes the river corridor and flood hazard areas and other significant natural resources and hazards are avoided. The town's Land Use and Development Regulations meet the NDA bylaw requirements for density and a walkable pattern of development in the area proposed for designation. The town received conceptual approval from ANR for a proposed community wastewater disposal system that will enable new development in the village, and that will in turn, help expedite the construction and financing of the new system.

Melissa Manka, Planning Coordinator, shared with board members recent revitalization efforts for the village including; a recent community survey which resulted in residents asking for

more amenities, stores, and housing in the village; the new wastewater proposal for the village; and with the help of the Neighborhood Development Area designation, additional housing development.

Board members commended the town for its efforts. They noted that rural towns wanting to ensure their future vitality must think creatively about ways to build more cost-effective wastewater solutions necessary to attract new development. One board member expressed a concern that the designation could change the character of the village character. Melissa explained that the designation was not the driver of local efforts to encourage compact development. She explained that residents recognized that limiting development opportunities was not a viable strategy to revitalize the village and enhance the quality of life in Westford.

Tom Torti made a motion to approve the Neighborhood Development Area for Westford and Peter Walke seconded. The motion carried 11-0.

6. Downtown Transportation Fund Grant – Gary Holloway

Michael McDonough recused himself from discussion and scoring Bennington's DTF application. He explained this was to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest. Chip Sawyer recused himself from discussion and scoring, due to an application he submitted for St. Albans. Liz Gamache recused herself from the Burlington and St. Alban's applications.

Board members reviewed and individually scored all Downtown Transportation Fund grant applications prior to the meeting. Gary Holloway presented the tallied and ranked scores of the 13 eligible applications requesting a total of \$944,591 for an available \$516,920 in funding. Based on tallied and averaged board scores full funding could be made available to applications from Middlebury, St. Albans, Springfield, Randolph, Newport, and Montpelier. The remaining \$9,570 could be offered to the next highest scoring application from Winooski.

Board members also reviewed and individually scored all Downtown Transportation Fund Clean Water Fund grant applications prior to the meeting. Gary Holloway presented the tallied and ranked scores of the 2 eligible applications requesting a total of \$121,000 for an available \$100,000 in funding. Based on tallied and averaged board scores full funding could be made available to the application from Randolph, the remaining \$79,000 could be offered to the next highest scoring application from Burlington.

Gary explained his plans to update the application to increase the consistency with the newly updated criteria and applications for the tax credit and sales tax reallocation programs. Board members then debriefed on the application and scoring process. Discussion ensued. Board members commented that the staff review from VTrans provided valuable perspective that informed their review. Others shared concerns about the inconsistency in application quality and the lack of specificity in the answers. Board members considered increasing the department's role in the review and the scoring of applications. However, concerns were raised about the potential for staff to unduly influence the results of the grant reviews. Ultimately, there was a recognition that the diversity and expertise of the board members uniquely qualifies the group to review and score applications.

Trish Sears made a motion to accept the ranking and to fully fund the Downtown Transportation Fund grants for Middlebury, St. Albans, Springfield, Randolph, Newport, and Montpelier, and to offer remaining funds to Winooski. Michele Boomhower seconded. The motion carried 9-0, with one abstention and Chip Sawyer recused.

Trish Sears made a motion to accept the ranking and to fully fund the Downtown Transportation Fund Clean Water Fund grant for Randolph and to offer remaining funds to

Burlington. Michele Boomhower seconded. The motion carried 9-0, with one abstention and Chip Sawyer recused.

7. Old Business / New Business / Announcements
May Board Meeting

Chris Cochran informed board members that May meeting will be canceled.

Gary Holloway reminded board members of the upcoming Downtown and Historic Preservation Conference on June 5 in Montpelier.

8. Adjourn

Tom Torti made a motion to adjourn and Tasha Wallis seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie