

Draft Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 8/6/2019

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

Members Present (12):

- 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 (arrived at 3:12pm)
- Robert Sponable, alternate, 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.
- David Allaire, designated by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns
- 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
- 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, Caitlin Corkins, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (6): Christa Driscoll, Christa Alexandra Designs; Bob Schermer, Community Center in Jericho; Amanda Carlson, Town of Coventry; David Gallup, Town of Coventry; Jackie Cassino, VTrans; Ron Millard, Corner School in Granville.

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 June 24, 2019

David Allaire made a motion to approve the June 24, 2019 minutes, no edits noted, and Tom Torti seconded. The motion carried 8-0, with three abstentions.

2. Public Comment Period

Josh Hanford opened the meeting to public comment: Ron Millard, with the Corner School in Granville, shared his concerns that state does not fund projects from small towns.

3. Village Center Designation New – 1 – Richard Amore

Coventry Village

The proposed boundary runs along Route 5, Main Street, and Covered Bridge Road and includes the Coventry Community Center, Post Office, senior housing, Coventry Church,

village common, riverfront park, town garage, Coventry Village School, small businesses, 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.

Amanda Carlson, Town Administrator, shared with board members that the town is working on a village revitalization plan that is exploring the best uses for the vacant church on the common. Amanda shared also the town is actively looking for ways to improve the aesthetics and future development in the village.

Board members inquired about the inclusion of the school within the boundary, questioning the incentives that could be gained. Richard mentioned that there are several state grant programs available for the school, including VTrans Bicycle and Pedestrian grants to help connect the school better to the village center. Richard also shared that town would receive priority consideration for various state grants due to their village center designation.

Tom Torti made a motion to approve village center designation for Coventry village and Laura Trieschmann seconded. The motion carried 12-0.

4. Downtown Designation 4-Year Check-In – 1 – Gary Holloway

Town of Springfield

Act 147 extended the length of Downtown Designation from four to eight years, with an interim review at four years to evaluate downtown program performance, get updates on current initiatives and to provide technical assistance and resources as necessary. The 4-year review procedure explains the process for the interim review and is shared with communities ahead the meeting.

Gary met with Tom Yennerell the Town Manager of Springfield and Jessica Martin, Executive Director of Springfield on the Move (SOM) on May 16th, 2019 in Springfield. The 4-year review provides an overview of Springfield's efforts since the last renewal. The town continues to meet all downtown designation program requirements. Staff will continue check in with the town and offer technical assistance and resources to support Springfield's ongoing efforts.

Gary advised board members he found the new review process and the opportunity to meet with both the town and downtown organization together was beneficial for all involved.

Board members suggested in future 4-year reviews, staff request from the town and downtown organization, a brief list of accomplishments in the four years since last renewal, list of projects underway, projects which would not have happened without downtown designation benefits and any recommendations to improve the downtown program. This information would be help inform downtown program development.

5. Downtown and Village Center Tax Incentives – Caitlin Corkins

Caitlin Corkins presented the Board with the tallied and ranked scores for the Downtown and Village Center Tax Credit applications. Board members reviewed applications and submitted scores in advance of the meeting. Applications were ranked from highest to lowest based on the average score.

Available funds allow full funding for the top 24 applications, identifying 4 alternates, with roughly \$1,000 in funding remaining. Caitlin noted that based on the ranked scores, the combined requests of four St. Johnsbury's projects exceeded the statutory community cap (no more than 30% of the credits available annually may be allocated to any community). In advance of the meeting, the largest of the St. Johnsbury projects with multiple sources of funding, preemptively contacted Caitlin and advised they would be willing to accept a reduced award if needed. Caitlin accepted their offer and reduced the award to comply with

statutory requirement. The two top scoring alternate applications are tied, and the Board discussed how the remaining funds might be distributed. Caitlin advised that the current remaining funding would be retained to be expended with future recapture. As recapture becomes available the first two alternates, would be awarded based on funds available and after consideration of St. Johnsbury's community cap.

Tasha Wallis made a motion to award the tax credits and alternates as presented by staff, and Laura Trieschmann seconded. Motion carried 12-0.

Caitlin engaged board members on the new application and scoring process, with Caitlin observing confusion among applicants on the project budget and funding gap questions. Board members deliberated on the length of applicant responses, and if capping the word limits would provide them with enough information, ultimately deciding to add guidance that eliminates applicants from using "see attached" to each question.

Board members commented on the strength and improved quality of the applications and thanked staff for their work.

Christa Driscoll, with Christa Alexandra Designs, recommended posting good example applications to be used as a guide for future applicants. Bob Schermer, with the Community Center in Jericho, remarked how grateful he was for Caitlin's guidance throughout the application process, and that after listening to the robust board discussion and deliberation, it reminds him why he's so grateful to be a Vermonter.

6. Old Business / New Business

Zoning for Great Neighborhoods

Chris Cochran briefed board members on the kickoff meeting, for the department's partnership with VHCB, Realtor's Association, AARP, and the Regional Planning Commissions to help communities make incremental zoning updates to support housing in and around downtowns and villages. This work is supported by CNU and will apply their expertise learned through their code reform work in other jurisdictions. The tools and resources to help cities and towns modernize their regulations will be available by the spring of 2020.

October 28 Meeting, Bethel Town Hall

Chris Cochran said that that staff are preparing to hold the October board meeting in Bethel at the Town Hall.

7. Adjourn

Tom Torti made a motion to adjourn and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie