

Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 7/23/2018

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

Members Present (9):

- Katie Buckley (*chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Michele Boomhower, (*vice-chair*), designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Peter Walke, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- Joseph Bernard, 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
- Gabrielle Ciuffreda, 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, Caitlin Corkins, and Jenni Lavoie.

Guests (9): Rachel Hale, Hale Resources; Jon Hale, Hale Resources; Gary Fox, Rockingham; Jill Michaels, Bradford; Monique Priestley, 174 Main Street, Bradford; Steve Shaw, Outer Limits Brewery; Karen Geraghty, Interim Chair, Newport City Downtown Development Organization; Kevin Cassey, Montpelier; Kristen Fountain, Albany.

Katie Buckley brought the meeting to order at 1:01 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 25, 2018

Tom Torti made a motion to approve the June 25, 2018 minutes, no edits noted, and Laura Trieschmann seconded. The motion carried 7-0, with two abstentions.

2. Public Comment Period

Katie Buckley opened the meeting to public comment: there were no comments.

3. Downtown Designation Update – 1 – Gary Holloway

City of Newport

The City of Newport's downtown designation renewal was approved by the downtown board at the February 26, 2018 meeting with the following conditions:

- Collect and submit Newport's 2017 Downtown Reinvestment Statistics by March 5, 2018
- Develop and submit a 5-year strategic plan and an updated annual budget for Newport City Renaissance Corporation by July 2, 2018
- Submit an approved Memorandum of Understanding or Agreement between the City and Newport City Renaissance Corporation that outlines the reporting structure of the new Executive Director and Economic Development Director position and details how the funding and reporting will occur between the two organizations by July 2, 2018
- Provide an update to the 501(c)(6) membership question, and detailed information on the organizational structure of the downtown organization, including its current bylaws.
- Report progress on the strategic plan and staff sharing agreement to the Downtown Board at its July 23, 2018 meeting.

Karen Geraghty, Interim Chair of Newport City Downtown Development Organization (formerly Newport City Renaissance Corporation), provided board members with updates to the conditions and informed the board that the Memorandum of Understanding between the City and the downtown organization is no longer needed. Karen reported that they did not pursue the joint Executive Director and Economic Development Director proposed during the downtown designation renewal in February. Instead, the downtown organization is looking to hire a full-time Executive Director. Additionally, Karen provided board members with a history of the city, demonstrating the changing economics in the region and why the city's-built environment is oriented away from the lake; as well as a detailed strategic plan emphasizing short-term activities and long-term investments that will support the promotion of a four-season outdoor recreation economy.

Board members complemented the city on the tremendous progress it's made in the last six months and commented that the review of the city's history helped board members better understand the orientation of buildings and layout of the city.

Tom Torti made a motion to accept and approve the City of Newport's interim report and direct staff to have Newport return to the board if needed, Peter Walke seconded. Motion carried 9-0.

4. Downtown Transportation Fund Amendment – 1 – Gary Holloway

Town of Middlebury

The Town of Middlebury is requesting a second amendment to the Main Street and Merchants Row Railroad Overpass Bridge Project. On 4/28/14 the town was awarded a \$100,000 grant for landscaping and pedestrian improvements which are the final items to be completed at the end of the project. Initially the project was scheduled to commence on 10/28/15 and be completed by 10/28/16. Due to the complexity of engineering and design of the project the town requested the first amendment on 7/25/16 and was granted an extension to complete the project by 8/31/18. The town is now requesting a second amendment to extend the completion date to July 2021 due to continued delays. Downtown Transportation Fund grants allow 18 months to commence construction and 30 months for projects to be completed. This request is for an additional 36 months or a total of 87 months from award date with commencement happening only months prior to the completion date.

While staff recognizes the complexities of this type of project involving complicated engineering and collaboration with the railroad, the proposed schedule of construction exceeds what is considered a reasonable timeframe within the DTF grant program. Staff is supportive of the project overall and believes DTF funds will support beautification and pedestrian enhancements at the end of this multimillion dollar project. At this time however, staff recommends rescinding the grant and reapplying at a later date when the project is nearer to completion. Furthermore, instead of tying up the \$100,000 for three years, we can

reallocate the money towards a project that can be implemented sooner. Staff encourages the town to reapply for a DTF grant in 2020 or 2021 and can work with them to develop a competitive application.

Michele Boomhower commented that the Town of Middlebury find themselves in this position due to no fault of their own. The project has been delayed by a variety of public and private input as well as delays with logistics with the two train companies involved.

Tom Torti made a motion to approve the staff recommendation and rescind the \$100,000 grant, Gabrielle Ciuffreda seconded. The motion carried 9-0.

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 and Sales Tax Reallocation (STR) applications. Applications were ranked from highest to lowest based on the average score. Caitlin noted that based on the ranked scores, the combined requests of two Springfield projects exceeded the statutory community cap of \$720,000 (no more than 30% of the credits available annually may be allocated to any community). To comply with this statutory requirement, Caitlin reduced the award for the lower ranking of the two Springfield projects.

Board Chair, Katie Buckley, expressed concerns that the preliminary ranking would limit the incentives to five large projects. She reminded the Board that they may adjust the award amounts and fund projects at their discretion. Conversation ensued on options to fund additional projects. Buckley suggested capping the Sales Tax Reallocation to \$600,000, or 25% of the total statutory funds available. This would enable the board to fund six additional projects.

Gabrielle Ciuffreda made a motion to cap the Sales Tax Reallocation awards at \$600,000, pro-rating the funding among the three high-scoring sales tax reallocation projects, funding the additional 12 top scoring projects, and offering a partial award to the next highest scoring project, Laura Trieschmann seconded. Motion carried 9-0.

The Board then discussed naming the next five top scoring applications to be funded if recaptured funds become available.

Tom Torti made a motion to make allocations to the next five highest scoring applications should recaptured funds become available, Michele Boomhower seconded. Motion carried 9-0.

Board members discussed growth of the STR program and possible legislation to separate the Sales Tax Reallocation and Tax Credit programs. Additionally, board members noted some challenges scoring cost effectiveness on new construction versus rehabilitation; code and ADA improvements versus projects that create new housing.

Based on board feedback, staff will develop possible program modifications to address these and other concerns at the September meeting.

6. Old Business / New Business Announcements

Chris Cochran advised that the awards will be publicly announced by the Governor at a ceremony in the coming months.

August Board Meeting: Staff recommends canceling the August Board meeting due to the limited agenda and difficulty in securing a quorum. Tasha Wallis made a motion to cancel the August meeting and Tom Torti seconded. Motion carried 9-0.

7. Adjourn

Tasha Wallis made a motion to adjourn and Laura Trieschmann seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 2:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie