

## Draft Minutes Vermont Downtown Board 10/28/2019

**Bethel Town Hall, 318 Main Street, Bethel, VT**

### **Members Present (9):**

- Josh Hanford (*Acting Chair*), designated by the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development
- Amy Bell, alternate designated by the Secretary of Transportation
- Peter Walke, designated by the Secretary of Natural Resources
- 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.
- 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
- Greg Boulbol, 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 (4):** Diane Judd, Town of Holland; Irene Nagle, NVDA; Brandon Canevari, Town of Townshend; Andrew Snelling, Town of Townshend.

Josh Hanford brought the meeting to order at 1:30 pm in the Bethel Town Hall, 318 Main Street, Bethel, VT

### **Additions or Deletions to Board Agenda**

There were no additions or deletions to the board agenda.

### **1. Approval of Minutes from September 23, 2019**

Chip Sawyer made a motion to approve the September 23, 2019 minutes, no edits noted, and Bruce Cheeseman seconded. The motion carried 7-0-2 with Peter Walke and Patricia Sears abstaining.

### **2. Public Comment Period**

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

### **3. Village Center Designation New – 2 – Richard Amore**

#### **Holland Village**

The proposed boundary runs along Valley Road and includes the Holland Community Church and Fellowship Hall, the Holland town garage and recycling center, and two 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.

Diane Judd, Holland Town Clerk, and Irene Nagle, with NVDA shared with board members that recent energy and momentum in the town has led to the development of an enhanced energy and hazard mitigation plans, updated regulations to allow for the sale of alcohol, and a feasibility study currently underway for the recently closed elementary school. Board members asked about the condition of the school building, and where the elementary children go to school now. Diane shared the town hopes to convert the vacant building into a potential daycare or community center, and currently the elementary children go to school in Derby Line.

Tasha Wallis made a motion to approve village center designation for Holland village and Trish Sears seconded. The motion carried 9-0.

### **Townshend Village**

The proposed boundary runs along Grafton Road (Route 35) and Route 30 and includes the library, post office, town hall, elementary school, high school, 2 churches, fire department, Grace Cottage Hospital, 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.

Brandon Canevari and Andrew Snelling, with the Townshend Planning Commission, said the town has had several new businesses come into the village, and gaining village center designation and the incentives that come with it, will be a benefit to these new businesses. They also shared future plans for traffic calming, sidewalk extensions, and the potential to apply for village center designation for another historic village in town. Board members inquired about the private wastewater systems that serve the hospital and school and asked if the town plans to develop a village wastewater solution. Brandon and Andrew said that the cost is too prohibitive at this time for the town to take on an infrastructure project of that size.

Trish Sears made a motion to approve village center designation for Townshend village and Chip Sawyer seconded. The motion carried 9-0.

## **4. Downtown Designation– 2 – Gary Holloway**

### **City of Montpelier – 4-Year Review**

Gary met with Bill Frazier with the City of Montpelier and Dan Groberg with Montpelier Alive, the downtown organization, on July 30, 2019 in Montpelier

Montpelier deserves to be commended on their comprehensive efforts to build a better place to live work, and visit. They've completed several planning projects to help guide future development which will be included in their Downtown Master Plan and Capital Budget Plan that will guide the city's investments for years to come. They've actively worked to bring additional housing to the city including the restored French Block, new Transit center, down payment assistance program for first-time home buyers, and adopted new zoning to include financial incentives for Accessory Dwelling Units. They've also expanded recreation in the city with expanded walking and biking trails, a bike/pedestrian bridge across the North Branch River, and approval of the design for Confluence River Park.

The city continues to meet all downtown designation program requirements. Staff will continue to check in with the city and offer technical assistance and resources to support Montpelier's ongoing efforts.

### **Town of Poultney – 4-Year Review**

Gary met with Paul Donaldson with the Town of Poultney and Lara Bitler with the Poultney Downtown Revitalization Committee (PDRC) on August 8, 2019 in Poultney.

The town continues to struggle as they cope with the closing of Green Mountain College, which has impacted the town and community with; loss of revenue from the water/sewer fees, declining grant list values, and business/job losses. There have been a few parties that have expressed interest in the property. Fortunately, the property has been well maintained which will help in marketing to future buyers. The Vermont Council on Rural Development, in coordination with ACCD, held a community visit last spring to help the community prioritize goals and identify next steps including; supporting existing businesses and attracting new businesses, development of co-working or incubator spaces for new startups, and expanding recreational opportunities in the town. The town has good pedestrian infrastructure due to the completion of several recent projects.

The PDRC, the downtown organization, currently does not have staff but has recently restructured the organization with new board members and volunteers adding to their capacity as an organization. In the past the town and PDRC have shared part time staff which worked well considering the size of the community. The town will be hiring a new economic development director and its possible to have similar shared services.

The town continues to meet all other downtown designation program requirements. Staff will continue to check in with the town and offer technical assistance and resources to support Poultney's ongoing efforts.

## **5. Old Business / New Business**

### **Clean Water Funding Update**

Gary Holloway discussed with board members the upcoming round of the Downtown Transportation Fund and Clean Water Funding grants. The department has clean water funds available from last year due to returned funds that were awarded from a prior awardee and would like to release the application earlier than normal to coincide with municipal budget planning. This will also provide extra time for municipalities to prepare applications ahead of the March deadline. Board members agreed with Gary's recommendation. The department will work to get the application materials out in November.

### **Overview of Legislative Proposal**

Chris Cochran briefed board members about the department's proposed 'Crowdfunding' program which aims to provide a nimble funding source to support 'placemaking' projects and activities within downtowns and villages. The proposal has enthusiastic support of many partners and we will need their help securing legislative approval.

We are also seeking an expansion of the Downtown and Village Center Tax Credit program. The late Paul Bruhn spent 20 years advocating to increase funding for this program (the program began in 1999 with \$300,000 in annual funding. Today its annual funding is \$2.6 M). Enhancing this program is one way we can ensure his legacy building stronger and more vital downtowns and villages.

Also announced was the appointment of Liz Gamache (former Mayor of St. Albans and Downtown Board Member) as the one-year interim Executive Director of the Preservation Trust of Vermont.

**November and December board meeting are canceled. The board will reconvene in January.**

### **Board meeting Efficiencies**

Chris Cochran asked board members how the department could structure meetings to improve efficiency. Ideas discussed were consent agendas, limiting the number of village center designations per meeting, removing the requirement for towns with uncontested boundaries to come to the meeting, and changing the agenda to include timeframes for each topic to keep on track. Staff will develop recommendations for discussion at a future board meeting.

**6. Adjourn**

Chip Sawyer made a motion to adjourn and Tasha Wallis seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The Downtown Board meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Jenni Lavoie