



Photo by Richardson Photography

## Introduction

The Capital City has served as a vibrant hub of Central Vermont's culture and economy for generations. The City is blessed with a walkable downtown, good restaurants, eclectic retail stores, a robust arts and cultural scene, great schools, extensive parks and recreational networks, and solid employment numbers. However, like many Vermont communities, Montpelier struggles with aging infrastructure, a tight housing market, and long-term demographic trends that threaten the City's future economic vitality.

## Strategic Planning

Keeping downtowns vibrant requires local leaders to be creative, take risks, build partnerships, and balance competing priorities to implement a shared vision. In 2015, Montpelier's City Council supported funding for an Economic Development Strategic Plan which helped to engage residents, get critical buy-in, and develop a list of prioritized place-based projects to grow the economy and enhance the quality of life for residents.

One of the recommendations of the plan was to create the Montpelier Development Corporation, with a full-time economic development director focused on strengthening existing businesses while attracting new business opportunities. The city was recently awarded a Municipal Planning Grant to build upon and roll up several related studies into a single strategic investment plan.

**“Our strategic plan sent a message to a lot of people that the city is willing to work with you; that you can get good things done in Montpelier.”**

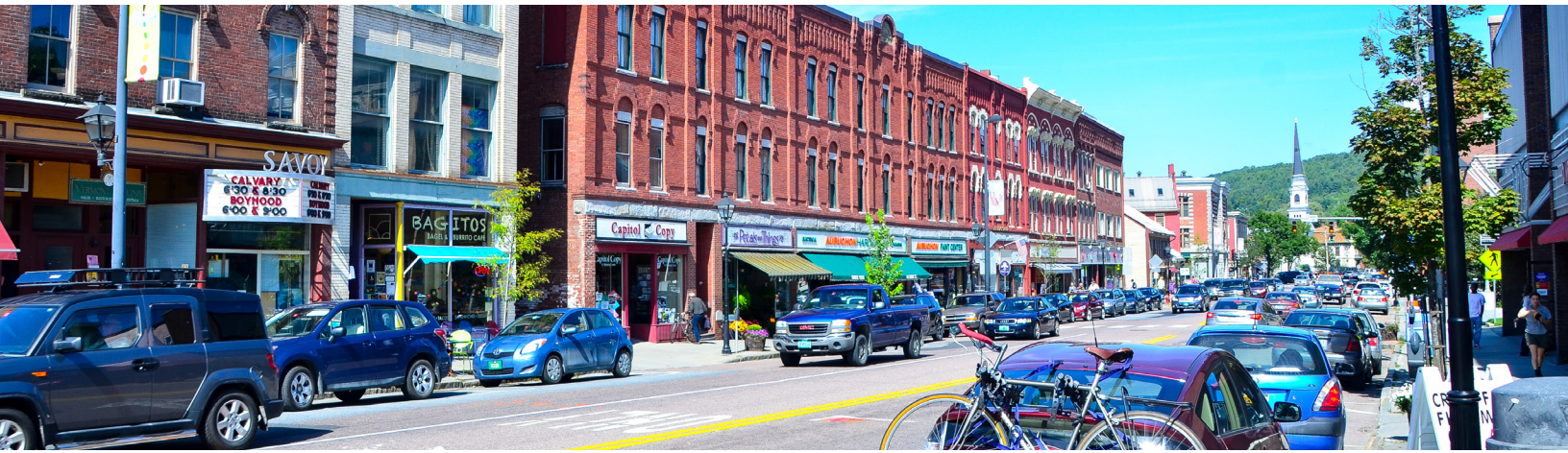
William Fraser, Montpelier City Manager

For more information, please contact:

Chris Cochran: [chris.cochran@vermont.gov](mailto:chris.cochran@vermont.gov) or 802.595-5410  
or visit: <http://accd.vermont.gov/community-development>



## Great Places Happen By Choice



### Strategic Investments

**Infrastructure** – Aging infrastructure and contaminated soils add costs to downtown development. State support for Montpelier’s tax increment financing (TIF) district will help reduce these barriers and has sparked a flurry of interest in properties that have long sat dormant.

**Housing** – The City and its partners secured state and federal housing grants to create 48 new downtown housing units - 18 of the apartments are located on the upper floors of a Main Street block, vacant since the 1940s. The other 30 housing units are under construction above a new public transit center that’s being built with help from grants from VTrans, ACCD, and ANR.

**Recreation** – Easy access to recreational opportunities underpins Montpelier’s sense of place and quality of life. The City is mid-way through a major project to extend its heavily-used recreation path, recently renamed the Siboinibi Path (river water). Upon completion of the path, walkers, runners, and bikers will be able to safely travel from one end of the city to the other.

**Placemaking** – The City’s embrace of ‘placemaking’ strategies was sparked by the excitement of residents who led efforts to install temporary parks and ‘parklets’ that converted empty parking spots into seasonal outdoor seating. The parklets at local restaurants expanded outdoor dining options and boosted the vibrancy of the downtown. Other notable projects include, the Montpelier Pocket Park in downtown, and the Guertin Park on the Siboinibi Path which created opportunities for the City and its residents to test ideas and consider more permanent improvements to city’s public spaces.

**Arts** – Langdon Street Alive, a public art project, set the stage for the Montpelier ArtSynergy Public Art Master Plan creating a plan to guide strategic investments in public art. Public art provides a creative expression to public spaces, celebrates the City’s history, and adds vibrancy to the downtown. The first project to be installed worked with students and poets on an interactive public art installation at the new transit center opening later this year.

### Results

It’s hard work to revitalize a downtown, but Montpelier’s efforts are paying off. Residents easily approved a \$10.5 million bond to build a downtown parking garage. The parking garage will enable the future plans for a hotel that will attract thousands of downtown visitors. While a permit appeal has slowed the progress, local officials are confident the project will break ground soon. The City’s efforts also landed a new \$10 million, 30,000-square-foot riverfront distillery for Caledonia Spirits, internationally famous for its Barr Hill gin. The recreation path extension travels by Caledonia Spirits, providing a great gathering space for residents and visitors on the banks of the Winooski River. The community looks forward to cutting the ribbon – and raising a glass in celebration of many accomplishments in June 2019.

“Great places don’t happen by chance; they happen by choice.”

Anne Watson, Mayor of Montpelier

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