

Welcome to our April E-newsletter! This month, read about the City of Saint Albans, learn how Vermonters feel about our downtowns and village centers, and download a copy of our newly released Indicators of Downtown Health Manual. And, don't forget to get ready for Way To Go! week, coming up in May. See details in our Upcoming Events section. Enjoy!

Got ideas for our e-newsletter? [Let us know](#). Support this publication and help us meet our membership challenge. **Become a sustaining member.**

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**How to Measure Downtown Health**

What exactly is a "healthy" downtown? How will new programs – like the Growth Center and Vermont Neighborhood Programs – impact our downtowns? What data do we have available to justify and defend existing programs?

"Investors will take a look at the downtown, the business mix, and the economic mix of the downtown. The downtowns need to be healthy because they are going to create jobs and increase quality of life," said one of the Steering Committee members for our Indicators of Downtown Health research project. "If you can illustrate that the downtowns are getting better, that is a positive story and people gravitate towards success. More activities, better shopping, more dining, whatever it is that creates a positive buzz does an awful lot."



Smart Growth Vermont's Indicators of Downtown Health research project, conducted in partnership with the UVM Center for Rural Studies, The Vermont Downtown Program and Preservation Trust of Vermont, sought answers to these questions. The four pilot communities – Saint Albans, Montpelier, Burlington and Bristol – collected a wide variety of data that was compiled so that they can now track trends such as downtown vacancies, and make informed decisions about how to grow their community. The findings, and guidelines on how to collect indicators in other downtowns, have been published on our [website](#), along with relevant documents for download.

**Community Update: Bristol**

Work continues on two tracks in Bristol. The Planning Commission hopes to have a new draft of the town plan ready for public comment before summer incorporating changes based on public input after last year's no vote. Work on the associated zoning update continues at a slow but steady pace with the Planning Commission considering



Photo courtesy of Addison Independent

changes to the zoning districts in and around the village area. At town meeting, the Planning Commission conducted a poll to get feedback on where in town gravel extraction will be permitted in the new zoning and where it will be prohibited. The public supported both of the Planning Commission's proposals – one which specified the zoning districts in and around downtown where extraction would not be allowed, and the other which would continue to allow extraction within the town's conservation zone. The Planning Commission is reviewing the written comments from voters to see if further discussion is needed on where extraction will and will not be allowed. Resolution to this contentious issue may finally be at hand, which will allow both the revised town plan and zoning to successfully move forward.

**What Vermonters Think**

The 2010 Vermonter Poll, conducted by the University of Vermont's Center for Rural Studies in cooperation with Smart Growth Vermont, shows that Vermonters are shifting their focus from the problem of sprawl to the solution of focused development, with a strong preference for our downtowns and village centers. Vermonters also overwhelmingly prefer to shop in their own neighborhood or their local downtown, echoing the national "buy local" trend.

More and more, Vermonters want the same things other Americans do – a home and a job in the same zip code and a vibrant downtown where they can shop as well as play. According to a recent poll by Smart Growth America, the majority of Americans – regardless of political affiliation – report that being able to walk to stores or restaurants will have a very strong impact on their next decision about where to live, with lower transportation costs playing a significant role in their decision. For more a full report on the poll results, visit our [web page](#).

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

Get your bikes tuned and your walking shoes ready - it's time for the Way To Go! Commuter Challenge. This year's event, which Smart Growth Vermont is proud to sponsor, runs from May 16 - 20 and will feature awards and prizes for businesses, schools, and one Vermont community that encourages participation, saves energy and reduces greenhouse gas emissions to keep Vermont clean! For more information, or to sign up, visit, [waytogovt.org](#).

See our [calendar of events](#) for other upcoming events.

**Smart Growth in Action: Canal Street Veteran's Housing**

Transitional housing is an important feature for any community, especially if there is a large homeless population. The Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS) recently brought this crucial resource in line with several smart growth principles in a way that seeks to serve and honor Vermont's homeless veterans.

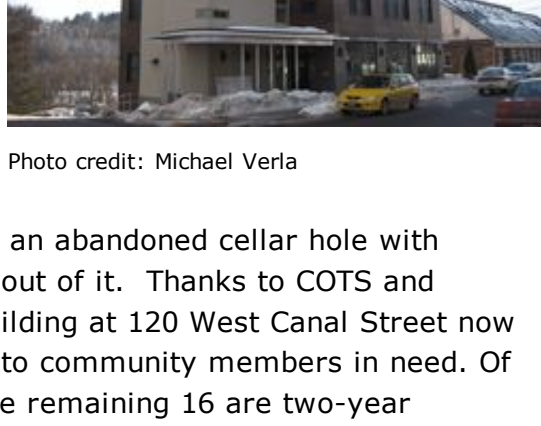


Photo credit: Michael Verla

The newly opened Canal Street Veterans Housing in Winooski was once an abandoned cellar hole with nothing more than a few trees growing out of it. Thanks to COTS and Duncan-Wisniewski Architecture, the building at 120 West Canal Street now provides 28 units of affordable housing to community members in need. Of these units, 12 are permanent, while the remaining 16 are two-year transitional units for struggling homeless veterans, who also receive services such as assistance in finding employment and a more permanent housing situation.

Aside from being a prime example of a Brownfield development, the Veterans Housing Center is ideally located in town. It provides easy access to public transportation, the Community College of Vermont, and various other services such as the Winooski VFW. The Center boasts energy efficient insulation and fiberglass windows to minimize environmental impact.

The Canal Street Veterans Housing was made possible by funding and loans from a variety of sources, including the Veterans Administration, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and the Vermont Community Development Program. If, in the future, there is less of a need for transitional housing for veterans, COTS will use the center to provide affordable housing.

**Community Spotlight: Saint Albans**

Known as the Maple Sugar Capital of the World, the City of Saint Albans is located at the juncture of routes 7 and 36 in north western Vermont. This year, the City will host its 45th annual Maple Festival from April 15th-17th. The event line up includes a pancake breakfast and sugar house tours, a fiddlers' variety show and the annual 8.5 mile Sap Run. A complete schedule of events is available on the [City's website](#).



Farmers market in Saint Albans

Saint Albans for the Future (SAFF) is an organization which focuses on both downtown revitalization and improvement to residents' overall quality of life. In 2006, SAFF completed a comprehensive municipal plan through 2011 that outlines the goals, objectives and policies Saint Albans will implement around land use, transportation, natural-scenic areas, historical sites, energy, housing and economic development. They are sustainable plans and goals that work towards future growth while maintaining the characteristics important to the local community.

The Downtown Master Plan calls for many renovations, developments and revitalizations of the City. Renovations to Taylor Park, which is located in the center of downtown Saint Albans, include tree pruning, removal and planting to allow for shade as well as high canopied trees that won't block residents' sightlines. There are also plans to establish a gathering area for the community's youth, outdoor dining areas, handicap accessible entrances and a memorial program.

Another Downtown Master Plan project underway is the redevelopment of Federal Street property, which connects Federal and Newton Streets. The City of Saint Albans issued a survey on the environmental, traffic and land use impacts of this new connector road along with the redesigning of Federal Street, which includes an upgrade of the road and renovations to the landscape.

Saint Albans considers sustainability and environmental impact in many of their projects. Community events such as the Maple Festival and weekly Farmers Market, which boasts a host of vendors, makes the City of Saint Albans a thriving community.

**VERMONT NEWS**

**Vermont to Turn on the Tap**

The state of Vermont celebrated World Water Day on March 22 by presenting a big change to government buildings throughout the state. Officials announced a new plan to completely eliminate the purchase of water bottles in many state buildings and to sharply reduce it in others, calling the use of taxpayer dollars going to bottled water a waste. Vermont joins other states, such as New York and Illinois, in the move to cut down on unnecessary purchases in this tight economy. The Statehouse cafeteria, which is run by a private vendor, will still sell bottled water, but most state buildings where there is clean, drinkable water available will no longer be carrying them. [Read more.](#)

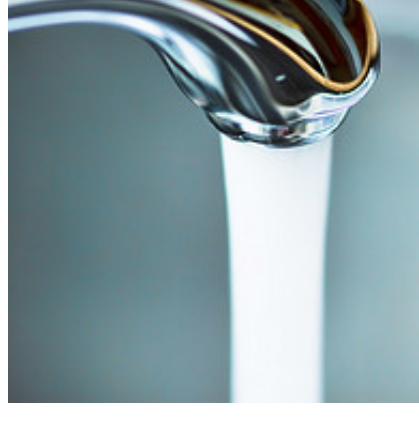


Photo credit: Diane Hammond

**Pete's Greens Helps Create Fund for Vermont Farmers**

In collaboration with the Center for an Agricultural Economy in Hardwick, Pete's Greens Farm of Craftsbury is establishing a non-profit fund to help Vermont farmers. The Vermont Farm Fund was started in response to the large monetary donations received by Pete's Greens to support the farm's efforts after a fire destroyed its barn in January. Owner Pete Johnson says he wants to give back to the community of Vermont farmers after all of the help his farm received. "It's a two-way street," says Johnson. Once the new building is constructed, Johnson plans on paying back the money used into the fund so that it can be available for other Vermont farmers in the event of a disaster or for other agricultural programs. [Read more.](#)



Greenhouse at Pete's Greens Farm. Photo credit: John Rife.

**Historic Preservation Funding Awarded to Vermont Communities**

Seven Vermont communities dedicated to local historic preservation and restoration efforts have been awarded a total of \$57,000 in federal funding. Through a program in the National Park Service, communities such as Montpelier, Norwich, Mad River Valley, Shelburne, and others will be receiving funding to help implement various projects on preserving and promoting local aspects of Vermont's rich history. [View](#) a full list of the communities and projects.

**NATIONAL NEWS**

**High Gas Prices Make Public Transit a Cheaper Alternative**

The recent rise in gasoline prices has also given way to an increase in savings for public transit users, according to the American Public Transportation Association. The transit group has released a statement detailing some of the comparative costs of automobile use versus public transportation use and saying that, on average, transit commuters would save \$825 more per month than those who commute in their cars. That's a savings of roughly \$9,900 per year, according to the release. Just one more reason to give public transit a try! [Read more.](#)



Photo courtesy of CCMPO

**Facebook Holds Design Charrette for Relocation**

Facebook, it turns out, is not just for social networking on the internet. In an effort to access community and professional input, Facebook hosted a one-day charrette to open up the dialogue on the company's proposed move from Palo Alto to the former Sun Microsystems campus in Menlo Park, CA. Over 150 volunteers participated in the activities, which included tours of the campus, discussions on new types of housing, and a forum on creating a sense of place for the area. [Read more.](#)