

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR TOWN'S INFILL POTENTIAL

**A REPORT PREPARED FOR THE VERMONT FORUM ON
SPRAWL BY:**

**STUDENTS OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT**

I. INTRODUCING THE *HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR TOWN'S INFILL POTENTIAL* REPORT

Why a Report?

How to Determine Your Town's Infill Potential is the fourth in the “Way to Grow!” series of tools prepared for community use by the Vermont Forum on Sprawl (VFOS).

Our aim in producing this report is to provide communities, developers, nonprofit groups, and others interested in smart growth with a set of **eight steps to identify infill potential in downtowns**. Specific examples are included to illustrate that smart growth development is not just a possibility—it's happening here in Vermont and around the country.

Also presented is a summary outlining **methodology**—how infill opportunities were identified and solutions developed—to serve as a model for others interested in determining the potential of their downtown.

The majority of growth in Vermont over the last thirty years has been in new growth areas—formerly rural areas outside of traditional town centers. There is a perception that traditional downtowns and village centers are built out, meaning there is no space available for residential, commercial, or industrial growth. However, this is not always the case. Traditional town centers often have vacant or underutilized properties that for a variety of reasons have not been used to their greatest potential.

The benefits of locating a business or residence in a traditional downtown are numerous. Downtowns are pedestrian-friendly and integrate a variety of uses in a small area. By tightly clustering development, downtowns enable surrounding land to be left open for agriculture, open space, natural areas protection, and recreation. The historic buildings in Vermont's town centers are built with a quality of construction and artisanship that provide an attractive environment in which to live, work, and shop. In addition to the quality of life benefits of traditional downtowns, locating in downtowns can have cost benefits. Connecting to the existing infrastructure, such as water and sewer lines and other utility connections is much less expensive than extending those same services to the outskirts of town.

THE GOAL OF THIS REPORT

Concentrating growth in traditional downtowns is one solution to curbing sprawl, the low-density development that crop up outside compact urban and village centers along highways and in the rural countryside. This study was developed to determine the infill potential—what types of spaces are available to be reused or developed—in traditional town centers. To determine infill potential, vacant and underutilized properties in three historic towns of varying sizes and settlement patterns were examined. In each town, a number of potential areas for infill or reuse were identified. However, for each property with potential there are also constraints. Some of the common constraints and challenges to development or rehabilitation were analyzed and solutions were explored.

While looking for ways to maximize the potential development of vacant properties and reuse of historic properties, the historic integrity of the towns was also considered. In

some instances, open space is part of the fabric of the community and should not be developed. An obvious example is a park in the center of a downtown or city. While this might technically be considered vacant space, developing the lot would diminish the character of the town.

EIGHT EASY STEPS TO IDENTIFY INFILL POTENTIAL IN YOUR DOWNTOWN

These steps aid in the identification of commercial infill potential but are also applicable for determining residential infill opportunities. Please note that some of the resources listed in the eight steps may not be available for smaller towns and communities.

STEP 1: RESEARCH TOWN HISTORIES.

STEP 2: CONDUCT A SITE VISIT.

STEP 3: TOWN OR CITY HALL RESEARCH.

STEP 4: COLLECT GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS DATA.

STEP 5: IDENTIFY SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES.

STEP 6: CONDUCT INTERVIEWS.

STEP 7: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL INFILL SITES.

STEP 8: DETERMINING FACTORS FOR UNDERUTILIZED OR VACANT SITES.

SELECTION OF THREE CASE STUDY TOWNS

Three towns were chosen to represent a cross-section of Vermont town size and demographics: Middlebury, Vergennes, and Ferrisburgh. All of the towns are located along the Route 7 corridor in Addison County. Middlebury is characterized as a regional center, while Vergennes and Ferrisburgh are smaller, community-based centers. Middlebury represents the large towns in Vermont. With Route 7 passing directly through the town, along the eastern side of the commercial district, it is greatly affected by changes along the route. Downtown Middlebury encompasses a larger area than Vergennes, but is similar in its structure. Historic multi-level buildings form street walls around a portion of Main Street, with commercial development fanning out from its ends. Middlebury also has the distinction of having developed new areas of commercial space along the edges of the downtown in an effort to keep businesses in the downtown area and to prevent sprawling development along Route 7. Even with this planned development in the town, Middlebury is still experiencing strip development along US Route 7 south of the village.

The city of Vergennes represents the medium-sized towns in Vermont. The central area of Vergennes is a historically compact, intensely used area along Route 22A, with residential areas clustered around the commercial district. While US Route 7 does not pass directly through the center of Vergennes, it does pass through the city a short distance from the downtown. This causes traffic bound for Route 7 on Route 22A to pass directly through the downtown core on its way to or from New York.

Ferrisburgh was chosen to represent the more agricultural towns in Vermont. It has a linear town center arrangement along US Route 7 and a wide disbursement of its population. Ferrisburgh is also greatly affected by the presence of US Route 7 and by any

changes that are made to it, as the majority of commercial space in the town exists alongside the route. Its rural character firmly sets Ferrisburgh apart as one of the least commercially developed towns in Vermont, although the town has been facing more development pressures in recent years.

APPROACH

To determine infill potential, study area boundaries were selected to focus on the core downtown areas. While the study area for each town contains residential properties, the greatest potential for infill was found in the commercial and mixed use areas. Because of this, the study focuses primarily on commercial infill, rather than residential. A similar methodology, however, could be used to identify areas with more residential potential. Current zoning regulations were used to set the limits to infill potential. Both vacant and underutilized buildings and land were identified as potential infill sites. For the purposes of this study, vacant buildings are defined as those that are entirely empty. Vacant lots are parcels of land that are free of buildings or not used for other purposes. Underutilized buildings are those that are only partially occupied, such as buildings that are occupied on the first floor but have upper floor vacancies. Underutilized lots are those that do not maximize their lot—for example, a one-story building where a two-story building would be allowed under current zoning.

Infill potential was determined by calculating the square feet of potential space. For vacant properties, the square footage represents the size of the vacant building, or in the case of vacant lots, the allowable size of a new building on the lot. For underutilized buildings, infill potential represents the square footage that could be added through filling the unused space. For underutilized lots, the infill potential is the amount of square feet that could be added to an existing building.

STEP 1: RESEARCH TOWN HISTORIES. Research materials can be located at libraries, local historical societies, university archives, or town archives. Along with reference materials, many downtowns have been surveyed by planning or historical commissions that have compiled an inventory of structures. These can be very helpful in identifying building resources in a given area. Sanborn Insurance Maps, Beers Atlas, and other historic maps are a good tool in identifying older structures and their footprint on the parcel of land. There is also a good chance that specific sections of a town center comprised of historic structures are listed on either the State or National Register of Historic Places.

Middlebury was first chartered in 1761 as part of the New Hampshire Grants, and was so named because it was positioned between two other towns - Salisbury and New Haven - also chartered that year. The first permanent settlement occurred along the Middlebury River in the southwest part of town in 1773, but soon the area around the Otter Creek Falls became the town center. Waterpower was the source of much of Middlebury's early prosperity, powering grist, woolen, and marble mills on this site. Raising sheep would also become a principal occupation here during the first half of the nineteenth

century; profits from this trade built many of the fine Greek Revival farmhouses that can still be seen today.

Today, Middlebury College is the largest employer in the area, with much of the remaining economic base provided by light industry and small retail and service-related businesses, including tourism. Middlebury has grown into a town with a population of 8500, but still retains the quintessential look of a small New England village with its steepled churches, leafy village green and picket fences.

The historic downtown area of Middlebury retains its village center feel, while a newer commercial center has grown along the Route 7 corridor through the town. These two commercial areas have the greatest potential for change in the town, but also retain the largest concentration of historic structures and sites.

Vergennes was chartered in 1788, and has a unique history as the first community in Vermont to be incorporated as a city. Settlement first began near the falls of the Otter Creek, with workers clustering near the factories which provided their employment. Over time, as the population grew, settlement expanded in an easterly direction toward the main north-south road that would become Route 7.

The city was formed by taking a portion of the three townships of Ferrisburgh, Panton, and New Haven which converged at the falls of the Otter Creek. Within a few years several sawmills, a brewery, a gristmill, a forge, and potash making operations were established in this location. Vergennes today retains some light industry as a legacy of its mill town beginnings, but primarily has a retail and service-based economy. With a current population of about 2700, it also functions as a bedroom community for residents who commute to the nearby employment centers of Burlington and Middlebury.

Vergennes is a small city situated on 1200 acres, with its primary commercial center located on Main Street in a traditional downtown core. This area is part of the Vergennes Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Densely settled residential neighborhoods surround the commercial district, with agricultural lands further out. From its earliest beginnings well into the twentieth century, Vergennes had an industrial focus based on the hydropower provided by the Otter Creek Falls. Over time this industrial base has gradually eroded, and today the economy is centered more on retail and service-based businesses.

Settlers established the first farms in Ferrisburgh in the 1760's along Lake Champlain, which would become an important transportation corridor. After the Revolutionary War, the main road from Vergennes and Burlington (now U.S. Route 7) would spur continued growth.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the lakeshore rose in popularity as a summer resort area, yet the town retains many stone and brick farmhouses and 19th century barns from its rich agricultural past. Ferrisburgh is now home to a number of small businesses,

especially along the Route 7 corridor. However, the town is largely a bedroom community whose inhabitants commute to work in the nearby job centers of Burlington and Middlebury. In addition, nearly 22% of the residences are vacation homes.

The landscape of Ferrisburgh, both the corridor along Route 7 and the cluster of uses known as Center Ferrisburgh, has long been defined by its agricultural heritage. While much of the land visible from the road is no longer used directly for agriculture (although there are two conserved farms just north of Center Ferrisburgh), travelers can still see silos, barns, livestock and open fields. In some places along the road grand vistas of the Adirondack Mountains and fields stretching to Lake Champlain are readily visible.

STEP 2: CONDUCT A SITE VISIT. When conducting a site visit, try to determine the boundaries of the town center and walk that boundary. Along with a thorough familiarization of the area, attention should be directed towards the commercial nature of the town and densities. Note where uses have changed and densities are lowered. Pay attention to existing uses in the town, vacant spaces and buildings, types of businesses, pedestrian traffic and volume, vehicular issues, parking and residential issues. These are usually very obvious and can be identified rather quickly.

Middlebury Project Area: The area of study in Middlebury is the Downtown Improvement District, as defined in the town plan. The town is focusing its economic development and revitalization efforts in this area, and by establishing the district, the town was able to become a designated downtown and qualify for incentives for improvement under Vermont's Downtown Development Act of 1998. This district includes all of the land in the town that is zoned for commercial uses. In addition, some of the district is zoned for mixed use residential and office. The district was selected for this study because of the variety of uses, its location directly on US Route 7. It represents the core of Middlebury's downtown.

Current Uses: The project area currently contains medium and high density residential, village residential/commercial, office/apartment, central business, general commercial, and industrial uses within its boundaries. It also contains a large portion of the Middlebury Village Historic District, a National Register of Historic Places district.

Is the project area built out? No, the Downtown Improvement District is not built to its maximum potential density. There are sites within the boundaries that are prime candidates for more intensive uses. These sites include non-historic open spaces without buildings, parcels with buildings that are not used to their most intensive state, and parcels with buildings that are not built to take full advantage of the site. These sites are few, and are located throughout the project area. There is no one area that is less built out than the others in the Downtown Improvement District.

Vergennes Project Area: The project area is the Vergennes Historic District, which fronts on Main Street and is the historic center of the city, containing the municipal offices, the green, and the central business district. Surrounding this district are historic residential neighborhoods with some limited commercial uses.

Current Use: The structures and sites here are used for a combination of commercial, residential, office, and civic purposes.

Is the project area built out? No. While the project area is relatively built out, there are several vacant and underutilized properties located here which have been targeted for examination to determine their redevelopment potential.

Ferrisburgh Project Area: The entire Route 7 Corridor through Ferrisburgh was inventoried and analyzed for potential areas of commercial infill with an additional focus on Center Ferrisburgh, which is the traditional town center and contains the town offices and green. The parcels along Route 7 were chosen because of the need to preserve the use of mixed residential and commercial lots which have traditionally defined the character of the area while also maintaining the critical areas of open space.

Current Use: The project area currently contains residential, commercial, agricultural, natural resource protection areas, mixed use and non-profit uses within its boundaries.

Is the project area built out? No. There is vacant commercial land in Center Ferrisburgh and also opportunities for new businesses in the traditionally mixed-use zones along the Route 7 corridor.

STEP 3: TOWN OR CITY HALL RESEARCH. Tax Parcel Maps, which are very informative, can be found at the Lister’s Office. The maps delineate parcels and supply a parcel number that corresponds to a Lister’s card that contains information about the specific parcel. Information includes square footage, ownership, use, cost, zoning, lot size and percentage occupied. Attached is a **Sample Inventory Form** to aid in the collection of data from the Lister’s Office. A trip to the Clerk’s Office, Municipal Manager and Planner all should be considered when in the town. Viewing the zoning maps during the visit to the Municipal Office will need to be done. These can be found at the Planning Office and will delineate properties as well as identify areas of potential interest.

SAMPLE INVENTORY FORM

Parcel ID	Address	Owner	Acres	Buildings	Bldg. sq. ft	Floors	Use	Comm sq. Ft	Status
00-000	1 Elm	J. Doe	.39	Store	1,250	1	Comm	1,250	Occupied
00-001	2 Elm	L. Smit	.89	Retail	2,800	2	Comm	2,800	1,400 Vacant
Totals:			1.28		4,050			4,050	

Middlebury Inventory Summary. The project area that was studied in Middlebury contains 213 properties. Of these, the only open areas devoid of buildings are contained

within parking lots or three historic open spaces or parks. The surveyed area encompasses the historic downtown commercial district and a historically residential neighborhood located along US Route 7 that has in the recent past been transformed to mixed residential and commercial uses. The possibility for reuse and redevelopment exists in parcels throughout the both areas of the district.

The current use of the district is divided among residential and commercial, municipal, and religious uses. Combined commercial and residential properties make up 89.18 acres, with 11.6 acres municipal, and 2.6 religious acres.

Among the 89.18 acres of commercial and residential space in Middlebury, there are 729,670 square feet of measured building floor space. (Data for some of the buildings was not available during the preparation of this report.) The breakdown of this space is shown in the chart at right.

There are a total of 475,563 square feet of commercial and mixed-use space in downtown Middlebury. Buildings that are currently underutilized account for 40,212 square feet of space. In addition, there are 8.67 acres of underutilized space in commercial or mixed-use parcels.

Vergennes Inventory Summary. The project area for this study contains 113 properties. All of the parcels contain a building or structure, with the exception of one vacant lot. The commercial district is surrounded on all sides by densely settled residential areas. While part of the study area contains residential properties, the greatest potential for infill development and the adaptive reuse of underutilized buildings is in the commercial/mixed use zoned central business district. Because of this, the central business district is the focus of this analysis.

The current use of the downtown properties that were surveyed is summarized as follows:

- 49% of the properties are residential. Most of these are exclusively residential, while a small number include a limited commercial use.
- 40% of the properties have a commercial use. Some also include residential uses on upper stories or additions.
- 6% are used for other purposes, including government, recreation, religion, and non-profit organizations.
- 5% are vacant properties in the central business district and industrial zoned areas.

There are approximately 172,000 total square feet of commercial and mixed-use space in the downtown area. At the present time, about 154,000 square feet are in use. Over 18,000 square feet, or 11% of the study area, are in buildings that are entirely vacant. This is a relatively high vacancy rate. In addition, 3,160 square feet of space exists in buildings that are occupied but underutilized. An additional 30,600 square feet of potential new commercial space could be developed in the district. This includes 15,600 square feet that could be added to existing buildings, and 15,000 square feet that could be

built on a 1.75 acre vacant lot. The addition of this potential new space would increase the total commercial capacity to 205,600 square feet.

Ferrisburgh Inventory Summary. The areas of higher density residential and commercial uses are generally concentrated into three regions; the very northern end of the corridor neighboring Charlotte, the middle of the corridor in Central Ferrisburgh and at the southern end of the corridor near Vergennes. Only the northern and central areas have been traditionally commercial zones, with the southern area only recently being developed. The southern district is the only one without any municipal services, such as a post office, and it is the only one to have a “strip mall” development set back from the road. Along this corridor, businesses, such as antique stores, shops that sell the goods made from local light industrial/artistic manufacturing, and farm stands combine with dwellings, sometimes outside of the centralized commercial/residential areas, to define the unique qualities of this.

However, even with all of the commercial activity, the majority of the parcels along the corridor are devoted to residential use. Tax rolls demonstrate that many of the large parcels that were once agricultural are now taxed as residential. Additionally, the current zoning regulations in a large number of these parcels allow for five-acre lots. Even if the threat is not currently visible, the factors for residential sprawl do exist. On the positive side, three of the large agricultural parcels have already reduced their development potential by selling conservation easements.

There are also lots located in the corridor that have public or non-profit uses. These lots include the town office, two post offices, a museum, and several church-related parcels. These spaces not only provide useful services to the town residences, but also they give the residents important community space. These lots also contain most of the historical landmarks in the corridor.

Finally there were also areas of vacant land found throughout the corridor. While a majority of these areas are either located in conservation zones (streambeds and flood zones) or have geographical obstacles to development (steep banks or hills), there are three parcels located near the southern commercial zone that are developable. These medium sized parcels contain flat, open land and are located in an area that is already experiencing rapid development.

STEP 4: COLLECT GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS DATA. GIS data is available through your Regional Planning Commission. Data is not available for all towns in Vermont. The GIS data will provide satellite images and maps of the area of interest. The views and maps will provide information that, when combined with other research material, produces a comprehensive visual aid. After viewing various GIS maps and data, the next step is to collect information from various resources available in the town or city.

STEP 5: IDENTIFY SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES. There is no formula to follow to identify other resources; generally the initial research will uncover information that leads to other helpful resources. Most mid- to large- size towns will have a Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Business Association, or a Main Street Program. Their information will be unique in many cases, providing personal insight to the current situation of the town or city, defining needs and concerns of the town or city that would have not been attainable through data research. A guided walking tour of the business district is very helpful.

Vergennes has a dedicated downtown revitalization organization, the Vergennes Partnership, which is actively working to redevelop the downtown.

STEP 6: CONDUCT INTERVIEWS. Conduct personal interviews with business owners, property owners, downtown workers, and the general public. The interviewer should prepare a standard set of questions (see next page for a sample questionnaire). This information can potentially bring to light the interests and needs of the community.

STEP 7: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL INFILL SITES. An analysis of information collected in the previous six steps should help you identify sites that appear to be vacant or underutilized. The sites will then need to be individually assessed for specific infill potential. Each site will be different and present certain challenges. The possibilities for infill include building an addition that goes upwards, construction where there is no structure at all, or additions to the rear, sides, or front of the structure. In many cases, existing interior space could be converted to higher density use, providing more square footage of usable space in the downtown. The planning department will provide zoning maps that determine various uses applicable to each site. The identification of infill potential will then lead to the final step which determines why the identified sites are vacant or underutilized, providing potential for infill. The case studies are an important tool in identifying possibilities and constraints for infill. Attached is a **Sample Case Study** that can be used in conducting research for specific infill potential candidates.

The inventory of the downtown **Middlebury** area indicates that there are a number of vacant or underutilized properties.

Vacant Lands The project area contains a total of 5 vacant lots. This includes two historic open spaces; the town green and tiny Cannon Park at the south end of Main Street. Also vacant is a parcel at the southern end of the bridge across the Otter Creek from Mill Street to the Marbleworks. While not designated as a park, it serves such a function as a viewing point for the Otter Creek Falls, and as part of the downtown pedestrian link. These spaces should not be considered as potential sites for infill because of their historic and pedestrian value. Some sites, however, do lend themselves to redevelopment potential. Among these is a privately held parcel on Stewart Lane, consisting of 0.4 acres currently used as a parking lot. This parcel is in a residential

neighborhood, and is held by the owner of an abutting property. Its best potential reuse is as a residential property.

Vacant Buildings The residential and commercial real estate markets in Middlebury are very strong. These factors combine to provide that there are no completely vacant properties in the surveyed district.

Underutilized Properties Although Middlebury has a relatively low vacancy rate, there are some commercial spaces within buildings are vacant. These vacancies occur primarily along Main Street, in the levels of buildings that are above or below grade. The total area of this vacant space in Middlebury, including short-term vacancies, is approximately 29,000 square feet. In addition to these commercial vacancies, the project area contains six properties that have been designated as underutilized. Together, these properties include some of the largest potential redevelopment sites in the downtown area. The following is a complete list of the properties identified as underutilized for the purposes of this study.

Summary of Infill Potential

Vacant Lots	0 square feet
Vacant Buildings	0 square feet
Underutilized Lots	70,263 square feet
<u>Underutilized Space in Existing Buildings</u>	<u>25,724 square feet</u>
TOTAL INFILL POTENTIAL	95,987 square feet

The inventory of the project area in **Vergennes** uncovered a number of properties that are either vacant or underutilized. Overall, the city is very densely settled with small lot sizes. All of the vacant lots, buildings, and underutilized properties with the most potential for reuse and redevelopment were identified. There are possibly additional underutilized properties in the study area, but these could only be identified by conducting a site by site analysis, looking at each building's location on its lot and the surrounding topography, to determine whether a lot could be further built out. Because the study area is a historic district listed on the State Register of Historic Places, this process should also involve careful consideration of the historic character that defines each building and the district as a whole. Additions or alterations to buildings or lot sizes could diminish the historic integrity of both the building and the district.

Summary of Infill Potential

1 Vacant Lot	1.75 acres
3 Vacant Buildings	18,152 square feet
Underutilized Space in Existing Buildings	3,160 square feet
<u>Potential New Infill Space (New Construction)</u>	<u>30,620 square feet</u>
TOTAL INFILL POTENTIAL	51,932 square feet, plus 1.75 acres

STEP 8: DETERMINING FACTORS FOR UNDERUTILIZED OR VACANT SITES. Each site will have constraints that pose obstacles for redevelopment or utilization. One of the most common hindrances will be the stance of the owner of the property. Configuration of the site may not allow access, or be odd shaped and difficult to build on. Cost will always be a factor, especially in the rehabilitation of structures, the clean up of a site, purchase of the site, building permits, infrastructure, and, most importantly, parking. The infill potential for historic properties also presents numerous challenges. The historic integrity of a building or space should be respected when considering a redevelopment project. One must determine whether infill development or redevelopment will compromise the integrity and character-defining features of a site. Another constraint might be public sentiment. Many will oppose any new use or infill construction and others will welcome it. Zoning plays a key role; height limitations for construction on top of an existing building are an issue. Multiple use zoning in urban areas, lot coverage of the building in relationship to the lot size, setbacks, and design standards are only some of the issues that could surface. The town manager or planner can answer many of the questions about certain properties found to have infill potential. Seeking information from local contractors and real estate brokers will also prove beneficial.

Rogers Block, Main Street, Middlebury

The Rogers Block is a four story brick building situated on a small parcel of land partially submerged under the waters of the Otter Creek, just above the Otter Creek Falls. The building was constructed in 1931, and has been occupied by businesses and apartments since that time. Currently, the third floor storefronts on Main Street are occupied, while the fourth floor, and two subgrade levels are vacant. There are a host of constraints on the redevelopment of this property. The primary constraint is the condition of the building. The foundation of the building is in need of structural repairs that must be conducted before any other major work can be done on the building. Other constraints include parking and handicapped accessibility. The redevelopment of this building will likely be extremely costly, however, a redevelopment feasibility plan is underway. Redeveloping the property will reopen almost 8,000 square feet of commercial and residential space to the Main Street and Frog Hollow areas.

Middlebury Commercial Vacancies

2. Subgrade Space on Main Street

There are three properties on Main Street that currently have vacant space below the street level. (Main Street actually crosses in front of some buildings between the second and third story levels. The back sides of the buildings are completely above grade.) The Rogers Block is one of these buildings, with two floors vacant below Main Street. The other two buildings are the Battell Block, where the basement and subbasement are vacant, and a property across the Creek, with only one vacant level below grade. These properties are greatly affected by their locations and access. While all have rear facade access, it is difficult to get directly to these entrances, thus causing a problem for tenants, particularly retailers. The redevelopment of these spaces would add over 10,000 square feet of commercial use to the district.

3. Upper Level Vacancies, Main Street

Four properties in the downtown Middlebury district have upper-level vacancies. Of these vacancies, three are short term vacancies, while the other is a long-term vacant space. Vacancies in the Middlebury downtown are normally filled very rapidly because of the strong demand for office space in the town. The long-term space is an upper floor on the east side of Main Street. The space is currently used by the building owner for storage, but could provide almost 1000 square feet of office or residential space if redeveloped.

Underutilized Occupied Properties

4. 25 Stewart Lane

The property at 25 Stewart Lane is a residential lot owned by the owners of the Swift House Inn. The property is currently used as a parking lot for the Inn. The greatest potential for the development of the parcel is as a residential property. This could involve an income producing apartment building, or a single family dwelling. The main obstacle to the redevelopment of the property is its current use as parking for the Inn, in an area where other parking facilities are limited, at best. If the lot was redeveloped as a residential property and the maximum allowable building were constructed, it would be possible under current zoning regulations to construct a building of over 7000 square feet.

5. Knights of Columbus Hall, Merchant's Row

Located in the former City Hall building is the Knights of Columbus Hall. The building is used periodically by the Knights as its meeting space, and is also rented out for private functions. A planned change of use is pending for this building. Historically a theatre as well as the town hall, the building will be redeveloped to serve as the town theatre once again. Plans are to begin the project in the spring of 2000.

6. Rear facades, Main Street

The rear facades of two buildings on Main Street are underutilized, and have great potential for redevelopment. The buildings at 34 and 38 Main Street are accessible from the rear by an alley from Main Street and the Marbleworks. Due to their location between the Marbleworks and Main Street, these spaces have excellent potential for retail redevelopment. Constraints on this redevelopment are parking and access from Main Street. While there is access from Main Street, it is via an alley that is used by vehicles and pedestrians alike. If an alternative means of access can be developed, these properties will offer approximately 2000 square feet of new retail space to the district.

7. Steele's Mobil Station, Main Street

Located at the corner of Main Street and Bakery Lane is a Mobil service station. This is an excellent parcel for redevelopment of many types of commercial concerns. The lot size, at 0.4 acres, is ample for a relatively large building. The town of Middlebury, in searching for a space to construct a new municipal building, has considered this parcel. If the parcel is, indeed, redeveloped, the building will benefit greatly from its location. Within current zoning configurations, a building of four stories consisting of 13,263

square feet could be built. There is parking located in a municipal lot behind the parcel, and access via Main Street is excellent.

8. The Marbleworks

The Middlebury Marbleworks property is a large parcel of land, over fourteen acres in total. Much of this property is occupied by buildings and parking lots, but some exists as open space. Among this space is a portion slightly over an acre in size, that is ripe for redevelopment. Studies conducted by the town and developers indicate that a building of approximately 30,000 square feet could be constructed on the lot. While the owners of the Marbleworks would like to see the land developed, the citizens of Middlebury are split on the issue. One sentiment in the town is to preserve the land as open space and create a park.

9. Central Vermont Public Service Substation at the Marbleworks

A second portion of the Marbleworks property that has redevelopment potential is parcel owned by Central Vermont Public Service. The 2 acre parcel is occupied only by a large electrical substation southern part of the land. This substation would be prohibitively difficult to relocate, causing developers a significant development cost. Development ideas for the parcel have included a hotel, which may yet be constructed. A joint study by the town and developers indicates a building of approximately 20,000 square feet could be constructed on the site. It is possible that this parcel may be combined with the above parcel to create one large development location.

10. Central Vermont Public Service property, Seminary Street

Central Vermont Public Service owns a large parcel located on Seminary Street, that it uses for office space and equipment storage. This parcel has a relatively small frontage area on Seminary Street, but extends deep into the block and spreads laterally within the block. The town and the utility are working toward an agreement that will see CVPS vacate this property in favor of another in the town. This will open the 1.4 acre property to a number of potential redevelopment options. The CVPS building could be reused as another office building, or could be razed in favor of subdivision of the property into residential parcels. Due to the residential nature of the neighborhood, it would be best to see this residential redevelopment occur.

11. US Route 7 Corridor

The Route 7 corridor passes directly through the town of Middlebury. After it passes through the center of town, it enters a historically residential area that has recently been converted to a mixed residential and commercial area. This area has seen the addition of at least two structures in the recent past, including a small shopping plaza and a large building containing a video store. These structures do not efficiently use the spaces allotted to them and, since not historically significant, have the potential to be redeveloped to better serve the community. The video store currently contains 2262 square feet of floor space. By maximizing the building under current zoning regulations, a second story could be added, creating over 4500 total square feet. Many residences in this area have also been converted into small commercial spaces. The majority of these spaces retain their original structures and arrangements. With good

planning and design, some of these buildings could receive additions that would enhance the commercial viability without significantly detracting from the historical integrity of the area. Each of these must be addressed individually, however, rather than through district wide zoning enforcement.

Successful Reuse Projects

Middlebury has also seen its fair share of successful adaptive reuse projects. These projects have added valuable commercial and residential space in the town.

12. Old Stone Mill, Mill Street

The Old Stone Mill is one of the most successful redevelopment projects that has taken place in Middlebury to date. Built just downstream from the Otter Creek Falls circa 1849, the Old Stone Mill first served as a textile mill, and later as the first power producing facility in the area. In the late 1970s it was redeveloped and has since served to house a number of commercial ventures, including restaurants, a bakery, offices, retail spaces, and an apartment. The project overcame constraints of parking problems, access, and an off Main Street location to successfully provide close to 7,400 square feet of commercial and residential space for the community.

To follow is a summary of the properties with the greatest infill potential that were identified in the City of Vergennes.

Vacant Lots

Private Lot, Route 22A

Property: Private Lot (Leonard Duffy Lot)

Status: Vacant

Size: 1.75 acres

Potential: approx. 15,000 sq. ft. commercial building could be developed on site

One vacant lot in the study area has the potential to be developed into a commercial site. It is a 1.75 acre private lot along Rt. 22A on the bank of the Otter Creek, on the western edge of the central business district. The lot was once the site of a furniture manufacturing plant that burned in the 1940s. It is presently zoned for industrial or commercial use. This lot has the potential to be developed or to serve the parking needs of two neighboring buildings that are presently vacant. If developed, the lot could potentially accommodate a 2-story structure of up to 15,000 square feet, while leaving considerable space for parking. Over ten years ago, a hotel project received Act 250 approval for development on the site, but the project was never undertaken and the permits have expired.

Some of the constraints to development of this site include access and costs. The location of the lot at the west end of the bridge over the Otter Creek could make vehicular access a challenge. In addition, the lot contains a high priority archaeology site that must be examined before any type of excavation can proceed. This would add to the costs of developing the site.

Vacant Buildings

There are three vacant buildings in the project area that have potential to be redeveloped. Two historic industrial buildings, owned by Green Mountain Power and used for storage, are located on the Otter Creek Falls, across the street from the vacant lot. The two buildings could add greatly to the available space in Vergennes, but adaptive reuse of these buildings poses significant challenges.

2. Norton Grist Mill, Route 22A

The first property, the Norton Grist Mill, is a 2-1/2 story brick building situated on a small promontory above the Otter Creek Falls. The gristmill was constructed in 1877 and operated as a mill until the 1940s. The constraints to developing a new use for this building include its very limited parking, difficult public access, and lack of sewer and water connections. The best use of the property would involve low traffic use, such as office or artist space. Any reuse of the site will require a significant investment, however, the building is a key landmark representing the industrial history of Vergennes. Adaptive reuse of this building could add up to 6,800 square feet to the commercial district.

Property: Norton Grist Mill

Status: Vacant

Size: 6,800 square feet

Potential: Adaptive Reuse

3. Vermont Shade Roller Building, Route 22A

The second property, known as the Vermont Shade Roller Building, is a four-story wood frame structure that sits on the west bank of the Otter Creek, just two hundred yards from the Norton Grist Mill. The building was built in 1888 as a factory for the Vermont Shade Roller Company that manufactured rollers and slats at the location until the 1930s. Since then, the property has been used as office space and storage. The main building is attached via a second story enclosed bridge to a one-story building. Town records indicate that the two buildings comprise 4,800 square feet of usable space. Adaptive reuse of these two structures could add up to 4,800 square feet to the downtown district. Potential uses might include office, retail, and studio apartments. The lack of parking and difficult access are two of the primary constraints to the reuse of these buildings.

Property: Vermont Shade Roller Building

Status: Vacant

Size: 4,800 square feet

Potential: Adaptive Reuse

4. Hannah's Market, Green Street

The city's best opportunity for infill development is located near the center of the project area. The vacant Hannah's Market is located on Green Street, just one block from Main Street. Built in 1960, the former grocery store is a one story brick building on a 0.59 acre lot and has ample parking. The property has been vacant and for sale since 1991. The current one-story structure is 6532 square feet, but the development potential is much greater. The site has the potential to house a large office building, retail or commercial space. The City of Vergennes is also considering redeveloping the site to serve as a new municipal building and community center. Current zoning would allow a building of 2

stories in this area, which could double the square footage to 14,000 while maintaining parking.

The greatest constraint to developing this vacant property, or reusing the existing structure, is ownership. The property is owned by a large out-of-state firm that is unmotivated to sell. Possible solutions might include enacting fines on abandoned buildings in downtown districts, or developing regulations to force the hand of unmotivated sellers.

Property: Hannah's Market

Status: Vacant

Size: 6,530 square feet

Potential: Could be developed to 14,000 sq. ft.

Underutilized building

5. Stevens House, Main and Green Streets

Located at corner of Main and Green Streets, the Steven's House is the city's oldest and most prominent building. It is currently underutilized, with just one and one-half of its three floors in use. 3,160 of the building's 6,321 square feet have been vacant for a number of years.

Absentee ownership probably accounts for the signs of neglect the building currently suffers. The property is owned by an estate whose heirs live out-of-state, and is currently for sale with an asking price of \$300,000. The most recent city tax assessment, done in 1992, values the property at \$160,000. The absence of on-site parking makes residential use of the upper floors more difficult. Sale of the building to a local entity would likely spur a more aggressive effort to fill the available vacant space. A reuse project on this property could qualify for available federal tax credits for the rehabilitation of certified historic structures.

Property: Stevens House

Status: Underutilized

Size: 6,321 square feet

Potential: 3,160 sq. ft. are vacant

Could qualify for RITC

6. 187/193 Main Street

Another potential area for infill can be found along one of Main Street's primary commercial blocks. Here, at 187/193 Main Street a one-story building that currently houses a restaurant and a pharmacy, is situated between two two-story commercial buildings. The one-story building was constructed in 1960 to replace a two-story building that burned. This location would be a prime area to construct a second floor to provide more office or commercial space on Main Street. Because the building is not historic, altering the property in such a way would not diminish its historic integrity. Care should be taken, however, to develop a design that is compatible with the neighboring historic buildings. Returning a two-story building to this location would in a way restore the association and feeling of the entire block, while also adding more useful space. The

current one-story building is 4,990 square feet. Adding a second floor could approximately double the square footage to 9,980.

The primary constraints to this project might include the structural capacity of the building and whether a second story could be added, or whether the building would need to be demolished and rebuilt entirely. The costs of undertaking such a project could be prohibitive. Adding additional office or commercial space would also increase the demand for downtown parking options. Also, the building is not currently for sale.

Property: 187/193 Main Street

Status: Underutilized

Size: 4,990

Potential: Add second floor to increase square footage to 9,980 sq. ft.

Successful rehabilitation projects:

Adapting older buildings to serve new uses is one solution to reclaiming space in a downtown. Vergennes has two examples of successful rehabilitation projects that have helped to reinvigorate the downtown.

The first example, the Vergennes Opera House, is a textbook example of a successful community rehabilitation project. Located on the second floor of the 1897 structure which houses City Hall, the Opera House once hosted public meetings, banquets, graduations and entertainments of all sorts, until it was closed in 1973 after decades of neglect and deferred maintenance. It sat dark and unused until 1993, when a group of volunteers formed the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House, a non-profit group which began the slow task of restoration. Over \$400,000 has been invested to date in necessary structural improvements to the building, as well as new electrical, plumbing, and heating systems. This money was raised through local fund raising and money received from state, federal, and foundation grants, along with many hours of donated volunteer labor.

Restoration efforts are continuing, with the completed cost of this ambitious project estimated at over a million dollars. The Opera House provides seating for 350 people in front of a large proscenium Stage, with a recently completed wooden ramp providing ADA access to this second floor auditorium. Even in its unfinished state this public space has hosted over seventy performances and events in the past two years; for every \$1 spent on an arts event, it is estimated that visitor spends another \$3 in the community. Since this restoration began, community pride has increased to help generate a downtown revitalization effort, filling many formerly empty storefronts in the process and demonstrating the profound affect a small group of organized, dedicated individuals can have on a community.

Another example of a successful rehabilitation project in Vergennes is the Basin Block. This two-story, 7,064 square foot commercial building, constructed in 1855, occupies a 0.13 acre block on Main Street. Historically used for both commercial and residential uses, the block was condemned by the state in December 1997 after years of neglect. In 1998 it was purchased by the Otter Creek Investment Fund, a for-profit consortium of 28

local investors dedicated to reinvesting in their community. Some of the challenges to rehabilitating the building included limited parking and meeting ADA accessibility.

Because residential uses would require parking, the project was limited to office and retail use. ADA compliance was achieved by using the entire front of the block as a whole. An attractive access ramp was integrated into the front facade. The success of this approach required the support and cooperation of adjoining landowners. Full interior ADA access was achieved by installing a lift to the second floor. Although ADA requirements did not require second floor access, the redeveloper felt that full accessibility would be a valuable marketing component, broadening the potential market of office users.

Project area boundaries indicated in red

Population:

2,317

Total Size:

84 square miles

Project Area:

3168.32 acres

90.4 acres in Center Ferrisburgh

Type of Town:

Outlying Town/ Community Center

Characteristics

Ferrisburgh is a large, rural town with three main commercial centers along the Route 7 Corridor, one of which, Center Ferrisburgh, is the traditional town center. A majority of the land has remained open and is used for agricultural purposes. It has a strong tradition of mixed residential and commercial use both inside and outside of these commercial centers. The corridor also has many historic buildings, including the Rokeby Museum, which is a designated National Historical Landmark. The main impediment for development of any kind in the study area is the heavy clay soils that limit the land's septic capabilities.

Constraints to Infill in Ferrisburgh and Areas of Potential Infill

As important as preserving the traditional commercial uses are to the character of the corridor it can be argued that the rural setting and scenic vistas are even more important. Since they are the most significant resources in the corridor, both for the local residents who have made a commitment to agriculture and to the people using the Route 7 Corridor, it is doubly as concerning that they are the most endangered. Recent growth of large lot residential developments (development with five or more acres per house lot) and sprawl type commercial growth—such as the proposed Stewarts gas station at the junction of Routes 7 and 22A—has begun to dot the landscape and change the traditional character of the land from agricultural to suburban. One of the best ways to prevent this

from happening is the reduction of development rights through conservation easements. These easements can be either donated or sold to a qualified non-profit corporation or state agency. The process has already started along the corridor and currently two farms have sold their development rights and a group is currently looking into purchasing the development rights to a third parcel. Conservation easements are also recognized and encouraged in the 1994 town plan as a tool to preserve the town rural character along with leasing and the transfer of development rights (TDR) from one parcel to another.

The town has also attempted to encourage the preservation of open space and the concentration of commercial and residential areas into village-like settings through zoning. Parcels of land in the three commercial areas have been zoned as Highway Commercial, Rural Residential, Village or Industrial. The two areas that allow for commercial sprawl type development are the Industrial and the Highway Commercial areas. As can be seen by the Aubuchon Hardware shopping center, the only one of its kind in Ferrisburgh, businesses have already taken advantage of opportunities in the Industrial zones. Fortunately the development has followed the zoning regulations by being built deeper into the lot instead of spreading out along the roadside and using only one main entrance to serve the entire center. While the shopping center does supply the town with basic services, such as a grocery and a hardware store, it still is newly located in an area recently converted to commercial uses. Another concern is that the center also impacts the efforts of neighboring Vergennes to revitalize their downtown. A better solution would have been to locate these businesses in Center Ferrisburgh where there was a tradition of commercial activity and which is closer to a majority of the town residents.

A positive point for this zone, which also allows heavier industrial uses, is that all businesses that locate within the area are subject to town review to protect the residential/agricultural character of Ferrisburgh. The highway commercial zone also permits new commercial development, but even this zone, which appears to welcome sprawl type development, only allows commercial uses as a conditional use. In fact, the only use that is not conditional is one or two family residential development, making it only slightly different than the rural residential zoning. A major problem with both of these zones is that the procedure for approving new growth rests on a case-by-case review process. While the review process can be a tool that allows flexibility in the zoning code, it still is a very weak way to protect the town's unique character. Stronger guidelines and well developed regulations would give both town leaders and business owners a clearer understanding of what is appropriate and desirable development for the corridor.

A comprehensive survey of Center Ferrisburgh was also undertaken to show that there is both room for new commercial/residential expansion and opportunities to reuse existing building in the village area. For the purpose of the study, an area from the Congregational Church at the northern end and the Little Otter Creek at the southern end was chosen.

This area not only includes a highway commercial zone but also parts of the Rural Residential, Conservation and Rural Agricultural zones. Six lots of public/non-profit, 7

mixed lots, 3 commercial lots and 14 residential parcels are included in the study area. The public/non-profit areas consist of a town office, a post office, a town hall (which includes the traditional town green), a municipal garage and storage area, a church and what is now the Grange building. Together these lots make up a majority of the public spaces on the Route 7 Corridor.

Center Ferrisburgh has changed little in the past decades. A map from 1857 shows a blacksmith and wheelwright shop where a tractor dealership is today and the A. Collins Hotel and Boarding House just south of the industrial center near where currently a hotel is still sited. The combination of commercial activities aimed at the residents of the town and those aimed at providing services for people traveling along one of the state's main routes continues to today. Also shown on the 1857 map is that the growth in Center Ferrisburgh was primarily linear along Route 7, a pattern that remains today. Residential parcels on the 1857 map continue to be used as residences today.

The commercial activity that is found in Center Ferrisburgh includes a plant nursery, a 13-unit motel, a restaurant, a farm machinery dealership, a woodshop, a garage and a convenience store. As is traditionally found throughout the Ferrisburgh area, most of these business lots hold a dwelling as well as the commercial buildings. While many of these buildings, there is a parcel of undeveloped land in the village that is zoned Highway Commercial. The strip is on the eastern side of the road and stretches from the restaurant almost all the way to Lewis Creek. Even with the minimum two-acre lot size this land could hold two new business sites (which would result in an 86% increase in the purely commercial space available in Center Ferrisburgh).

Another option for Center Ferrisburgh is to expand perpendicularly to Route 7. This could be accomplished by developing along Little Chicago Road and building streets that create blocks adjacent to Route 7. One of the main problems with this type of growth is the lack of adequate soil drainage for the increased sewage demands that the development would bring. A solution to the sewage problems would include using alternative waste treatment systems. The problem with these systems is that they would allow for much denser linear development to occur along the entire corridor than is currently possible. If the alternative waste systems are used then regulations need to be developed to ensure that they are primarily used in the pre-existing village areas. Another drawback to developing perpendicularly to the road is that such growth is not traditionally found in Ferrisburgh. Since the new pattern would be different from what was historically there, public involvement and support should be this solution's two driving forces.

Residential use in Center Ferrisburgh also reflects a higher density "village" setting than the rest of the corridor. The accumulations of smaller parcels and the inclusion of both two and a five unit apartment buildings allows Center Ferrisburgh to concentrate a relatively large amount of Ferrisburgh's population into a central location. And since much of the commercial activity also contains dwellings Center Ferrisburgh still retains its residential village feel.

A Sample of Vacant Lots and Buildings

Two possible, 2-acre commercial lots are located on Route 7 in Center Ferrisburgh. These lots are currently part of a larger 25-acre lot that is on the southern end of Center Ferrisburgh. While more of the 25-acre lot is zoned highway commercial, the remaining land lies over part of the Little Otter Creek's buffer zone and should not be developed. Constraints involved with these parcels center around ownership problems, acquisition costs and zoning regulations.

A Sample of Underutilized Properties

Ferrisburgh Grange #539, Route 7, Center Ferrisburgh

The Ferrisburgh Grange, is a two story wooden, Italianate style structure built for the Congressional Church in 1867. The constraints to adapting this building in Center Ferrisburgh include the question of ownership, limited parking, ADA accessibility to the main floor, sewage and rehabilitation costs. The Grange currently is the building's only occupant and their use is limited to the basement. A reuse of the site could incorporate the existing grange but allow for commercial expansion on the first floor. This would require a significant investment, but as it is a highly visible historic building in the town center with plenty of parking, the benefits are obvious.

Aubuchon's Hardware Complex, Route 7

Although this complex, the only of its type in Ferrisburgh, shows the effects of sprawl along the corridor, it is fortunate it was built further into the lot and with only one access area. At present, the shopping center is underutilized as existing space is for lease.

A Sample of Successful Reuse and Conservation Projects

Ferrisburgh Artisans Guild, Route 7

The Ferrisburgh Artisans Guild is a successful reuse project involving an historic farm complex that was rehabilitated in May 1999. The Guild stands as a prime example of Ferrisburgh's traditional roadside attraction growth pattern. Constraints to development included sewage issues. Substantial private funding has been used in the project, which is envisioned as a five-year rehabilitation process.

Rokeby Museum, Route 7

Rokeby Museum stands as a National Historic Landmark. The museum chronicles the history of the abolitionist movement in Vermont. The museum is an example of an historic building that has been rehabilitated and now helps to define the character of the Route 7 corridor.

Vandeweert Farm, Route 7

The use of conservation easements is encouraged in the 1994 town plan as a tool to preserve the town's rural character along with leasing, purchasing development rights (PDR) and the transfer of development rights (TDR) from one parcel to another. Such preservation methods are important factors to thwart sprawl.

Property: Lisa's Deli

Status: Vacant/For Sale

Size: 0.5 Acres

Potential: Reuse

Lisa's Deli, Route 7 South, North Ferrisburgh

At present, the deli building is vacant and for lease. Similarly to Jimmo's Motel, the building is situated in a high traffic volume location. Additionally, the parking is shared with the North Ferrisburgh Post Office. The site is a good example of a building that represents infill potential.

Property: Jimmo's Motel

Status: Vacant/For Sale

Size: 2 acres

Potential: Reuse

Jimmo's Motel, Route 7 North, North Ferrisburgh

This 13-unit motel is one of the vacant businesses located in Ferrisburgh. It is located in a prime location along the Route 7 corridor, which caters to automobile traffic. A reuse of the building in its original capacity as a motel would best suit the site.

Locations of Ferrisburgh Case Studies

Infill Potential in Center Ferrisburgh

Round Barn at Ram's Horn Merino Farm, Rt. 7 North Ferrisburgh

The Round Barn, built circa 1910, is one of the few round barns remaining in Vermont. Historic preservation and conservation easements are held for the farm, which includes the barn. The structure is now vacant, but has the potential to be used in accordance with the easements. Overall the condition is poor, but many of the structural elements are salvageable. Wastewater, rehabilitation costs and ownership issues would also be a factor in any reuse of the barn.

Property: Round Barn at Ram's Horn Merino Farm

Status: Vacant

Size: 3,850 sq ft of floor space, 40,000 cubic feet of hayloft storage

Potential: Reuse

CONSTRAINTS AND SOLUTIONS

The following describes some constraints and solutions associated with infill development.

Zoning Restrictions: Infill may require a change of use of a building which may conflict with the established zoning. In addition, building expansion on a lot and the development of vacant lots may be hindered from historic development patterns by the current zoning, encouraging low-density sprawl. The infill use may not meet the density, setback, height or parking requirements.

Solutions include:

- Strive for mixed-use rehabilitation projects.
- Consult with towns to discuss possible zoning changes to maximize infill potential.

Land Costs: Acquisition costs of properties in downtown areas are often higher than costs for properties in open suburban areas.

Solutions include:

- Tax credit options on both the federal and state levels. An example is the 20% federal RITC for historic buildings.
- Marketing of accessibility and investment by the town.

Building Condition: Deteriorated building conditions may raise the cost of development.

Solutions include:

- Tax credits on both the federal and state levels may be available.
- Funds from sources such as HUD, CDBG and VHCB may be available for residential rehabilitation projects. Incentives are also available for some mixed-use and commercial projects, including the 1998 Vermont Downtown Bill.

Construction Costs: The combination of purchase costs, building rehabilitation, code compliance, permit acquisition and historic preservation guideline adherence may make downtown properties appear undesirable.

Solutions include:

- Tax credits and grant and loan programs on the Federal and State levels often balance such cost impediments.

Parking: Downtown building locations may have limited parking. Residential and mixed-use infill projects are particularly threatened.

Solutions include:

- Strive to have appropriate businesses fit an infill site.
- Towns may be willing to invest in new municipal parking facilities and consider zoning changes that require less on-site parking.
- Investigate shared parking opportunities with adjoining properties.

Size Constraints and Lot Configuration: Downtown lots can be small and are often oddly shaped.

Solutions include:

- Employ architects that offer creative design solutions.
- Explore height and lot expansion possibilities.
- Consider smaller scale projects.
- Adapt use to be compatible with site.
- Assemble larger parcels with adjoining lots.

Absentee Ownership: Properties are often vacant or underutilized due to owners that choose to retain ownership, often from out-of-town locations.

Solutions include:

- Create ordinances that sanction or fine owners of neglected properties.
- Be sure that the legislation establishes a clear procedure that advocates the building's survival, particularly when economic hardship is a factor.

Historic Preservation Guidelines: Many towns have adopted guidelines to insure that the integrity of their historic townscapes is retained.

Solutions include:

- Consult with town officials, historic preservation organizations and the SHPO during the project's planning phase to insure that preservation guidelines are understood and complied with throughout the project.
- Employ architects to create designs compatible with the towns.
- Take advantage of historic character of town when marketing project.
- Coordinate project with town objectives during preliminary planning.
- Consult the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Site Preparation and Environmental Hazards: The re-use of an existing building may require the abatement of environmentally hazardous materials such as asbestos or lead paint. Some projects may also require demolition. Archeological surveys may also be necessary.

Solutions include:

- Research government funding sources for hazardous materials abatement.
- Anticipate site preparation costs and incorporate into planning process.

Septic: Towns with poor soils and no sewer systems can be plagued with the inability to meet state wastewater regulations. Large lot sizes are the result, which often perpetuate sprawl. In Vermont, a loophole exists in Act 249, the state law for septic, which allows lots of over 10 acres to escape review. The state is in the process of possibly amending the law to allow flexibility and the encouragement of alternate systems while closing the ten-acre loophole.

Solutions include:

- Use alternative septic systems.
- Develop municipal on-site wastewater management districts.

Other Infrastructure: Older buildings often have antiquated systems that must be updated, including electrical, plumbing and other mechanical systems. Fire and safety codes must also be met.

Solutions include:

- Tax credits will help to alleviate the costs of such alterations.
- Anticipate the costs and plan for such improvements.

Public Sentiment: Citizens may be against the idea that changes may occur in their town. In addition, the retention of open space is important.

Solutions include:

- Designs should be sensitive so that character of historic town centers is retained.
- Obtain easements for open land in appropriate locations.
- Invite public participation throughout process.
- Reusing vacant or underutilized properties can revitalize communities and contribute to their sustainability while protecting nearby open space.

Construction restrictions: Downtown projects face issues of scheduling due to noise, traffic, neighbor relations and equipment and staging needs that may create delays.

Solutions include:

- Coordinate with town during project planning.

ADA Compliance: The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 established that access to public properties is a civil right. Many older or historic buildings were not designed to meet the ADA standards resulting in an often-expensive upgrade.

Solutions include:

- Develop creative designs that sensitively incorporate accessibility features into the overall plan, including elevator towers and ramps.
- Reference architects and historic preservation guidelines, such as the National Park Service Preservation Brief #32, entitled Making Historic Properties Accessible during the planning phases of a project.
- Complete accessibility can be a valuable marketing component for prospective tenants.
- Share solutions among properties to lower costs.

Acquiring Permits: Downtown building permits are sometimes more time consuming as more issues and interested parties are usually involved.

Solutions include:

- Consult with town officials and interested parties during the preliminary planning process.

Main Road Frontage: Some towns choose to maximize frontage of high traffic areas, creating a limited number of available sites.

Solutions include:

- Create adjacent roads to establish blocks where development can grow.
- Establish a maximum frontage through zoning.

Traffic: Infill, particularly large-scale projects, has the potential of greatly increasing traffic volume in a downtown.

Solutions include:

- Consultation between towns and developers should occur at the planning stage of a project to establish alternatives to anticipated problems.
- Exploration of opportunities for pedestrian and bicycle access.
- Shared parking with adjoining properties.
- Traffic calming in nearby residential neighborhoods.

Title Problems: Downtown sites may present unforeseen difficulties in establishing clear titles.

Solutions include:

- Anticipate, allow ample time and fold into cost of development.

Signage: Some towns have established successful infill projects on land adjoining the traditional downtown. The downtown extensions may be unknown to visitors.

Solutions include:

- Signage and marketing can successfully incorporate non-traditional areas into the downtown.
- Design pedestrian friendly access routes.

VACANT OR UNDERUTILIZED PROPERTY CASE STUDY FORM

Town: Vergennes

Building: Norton Grist Mill

Sq. Ft: 6820

Status: Vacant. Fair Condition.

Owner: Green Mountain Power

Description: 2-1/2 story brick building situated on the Otter Creek Falls. The main block is 3x4 bays, and is intersected on the west by a 2x3 bay ell. The front elevation faces Main Street and has a small-unpaved driveway that leads to the structure. The rear elevation faces north toward the Otter Creek and drops down forty feet to meet the base of the Otter Creek Falls.

History: The Grist mill was constructed in 1877-78 by N.G. Norton after another gristmill on the site burned down. Norton processed and sold grain, flour, feed, plaster, lumber, slate, and shingles. The business remained in the family until the 1940s. Green Mountain Power currently owns the building and uses it for storage. The company purchased the property in order to run power lines from their generating plant over the property.

Constraints to Use:

- No sewer connection
- Very limited parking
- Public access dangerous due to location and traffic

Potential Solutions:

- Establish sewer connections
- Develop low traffic use

Redevelopment Potential: • Good, if challenges can be overcome

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWING BUILDING OWNERS

Building Owner Questionnaire

Building:

Date of Construction:

Name of Owner:
Town of Residence:
Contact Information:
Date of Contact:

Acquisition Date:
Acquisition Method:

Condition When Purchased: Vacant Poor Fair Good Excellent
Current Condition: Vacant Poor Fair Good Excellent

How is the building used?

If the building is underutilized, what are the constraints to use?

Potential constraints might include:

Cost	Access
Ownership	Building Condition
Public Sentiment	Traffic
Zoning	Parking
Act 250	Signage
Lot Configuration	ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance)

What are your future plans for the property?

GLOSSARY OF INFILL DEVELOPMENT TERMS

The following describes some common terms associated with infill development.

Act 250 – Vermont legislation that provides guidelines and a review process for land use and controls development

Adaptive Re-use – finding new and economically viable uses for a structure when retaining its original function is not feasible

Brownfields - properties in town centers or older industrial sites that have been contaminated by hazardous materials

Built Out – when there is no space available in a downtown for residential, commercial, or industrial growth

Conservation easements - Voluntary restrictions on the use of land negotiated by the landowner and a state agency or non-profit organization chosen by the landowner to hold the easement. The purpose is to protect an aspect of the land that has a significant conservation value. Donated easements are considered charitable contributions for tax purposes. Easements may also be purchased from landowners.

Downtown – The traditional central business district of a community, characterized by a core of compact, mixed-use buildings

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) - a computer system capable of assembling, storing, manipulating, and displaying geographically referenced information, i.e. data identified according to their locations

Historic - a building or structure that is over 50 years old and retains most of its integrity and significance. In regards to the National Register, specific criteria must be met in order to be considered eligible

Historic Districts – a designated concentration or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development

Infill - to concentrate residential, commercial, or industrial growth in available vacant or underutilized spaces within a downtown or village center

Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) - a program restricted to serving families whose income is no greater than 60% of the area median income. These families can rent affordable housing units because the rent is set at a rate tied to an amount assumed to be affordable for such families.

National Register (of Historic Places) – the federal list of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture

Non-Historic - a building or structure that is not over 50 years old, or has lost its integrity and significance

Open Space - areas that traditionally or intentionally have been void of any buildings or structures

Outlying Town – Generally some distance away from the regional centers, have lower population growth rates, and are without significant resort development

Preservation easements - Voluntary or purchased legal agreements between the state, or a private charitable organization, and the property owner binding the owner to respect the historic features of the property. The preservation easement is a charitable contribution, and lowers the assessed value of the real estate

Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) – when the state buys conservation easements

Reinvestment Tax Credit (RITC) – a federal tax credit of 20% of the project cost for the substantial rehabilitation of certified historic buildings

Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation – used primarily to determine whether the historic character of a building is preserved in the process of rehabilitation

Setback - when the building contained on a given lot is located away from the roadway, allowing for space for lawns, parking lots, etc

SHPO – State Historic Preservation Office

Spaghetti Lots - subdivisions intended to take advantage of a loophole in state subdivision regulations by subdividing lots into sizes of 10 acres or more. Subdivisions of this type cram as many lots as possible on road frontage which results in long, narrow lots. By doing this developers can avoid state rules governing on-site septic systems

Sprawl – dispersed low density development outside of compact urban and village centers along highways and in rural countryside

State Register (of Historic Places) – Similar to the NR, the state register is an inventory of archeological sites, historic buildings, structures, and landscapes significant to state history

Traditional Centers – cities, regional centers, town centers, and some villages that are home to concentrations of residential population and offer services to surrounding communities

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) - a zoning tool used to control land usage. It allows you to transfer particular rights to another property holder that you would not be able to utilize on your own property

Underutilized - when the spatial potential of a structure or site has not been maximized

Zoning – municipal controls on land uses and dimensions of development