



Communities Benefit from Growth Center Planning

As recently as ten years ago, vacant storefronts and underused buildings plagued Bennington’s downtown. In the past few years, however, the town has seen a flurry of redevelopment as historic buildings are being renovated for new and expanded retail space, offices and housing. Bennington is undergoing a renaissance as a result of downtown and growth center planning.

Downtown Bennington

Bennington’s place in the nation’s history was established at the Battle of Bennington, when American colonists successfully fought off a British general attempting to raid their arsenal of military stores and supplies. The downtown’s historic buildings and beautiful greenspaces evoke this rich history and community pride.

By the late 1980s, however, Bennington had seen better days, with the regional decline of manufacturing falling especially hard on local industries. Many communities would face such economic challenges by lowering community

and environmental standards in an effort to attract new business. Bennington, however, chose to build on the community’s strengths, and those efforts are paying off.

Central to Bennington’s development strategy is an ongoing growth center planning initiative that balances downtown revitalization, economic development, and the preservation of the surrounding rural landscape. Defined as an urban growth area in the Town Plan, the growth center surrounds the historic downtown—one of the first in Vermont to receive state

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SPOTLIGHT

Key Land Use Bill Signed Into Law

This spring, the Vermont Forum on Sprawl, the Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative and our partners achieved a major victory for Vermont communities who want to encourage growth in and around downtowns and village centers, and conserve our farm and forest lands.

The Downtowns and Growth Centers bill—one of the most significant land-use laws in thirty years—was signed into law in May. The Forum worked closely with key legislators since late last summer to achieve this important success for smart growth.

“The Forum has such an ethical, outstanding staff. We are fortunate to have had their support on this critical piece of legislation,” said Sen. Diane Snelling (R-Chittenden).

The law is important because Vermont’s future depends on new growth in villages and downtowns, as well as protection of our working farms and forests. Unfortunately, the Vermont we know is being lost each day—replaced by subdivided farm fields, super-sized houses on mountainsides, and big-box stores creeping along highway strips.

VERMONTERS CAN CHOOSE THE FUTURE WE WANT.

To ensure we have livable wage jobs, housing and strong local economies, we must help our communities thrive as places where people can work, meet for coffee, walk to schools and support their neighbors. We must also help communities conserve our farms and forests, which are key to maintaining what makes Vermont special. Unless we act today, the Vermont that we love will be lost forever.

We Can Help Your Community Plan for Growth

Are you ready to help your community revitalize its downtown or village center? Is your community planning for more housing in the near future? Does your current zoning enable the development of scattered homes in farm fields?

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GROWTH CENTERS *(continued from page 1)*

designation as a downtown development district.

"It's a balancing act that does more than encourage growth in and around our downtown," says Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator for the Town of Bennington. "The Town has also adopted comprehensive regulations that preserve the rural character of the countryside surrounding the Town's urban growth area by mandating the protection of scenic viewsheds, natural resources and agricultural lands."

The benefits of growth center planning are clear in Bennington. Several downtown buildings are in various stages of renovation, and new businesses have moved into town in recent years.

Hinesburg Builds Village Housing

Hinesburg, a town of more than 4,000 people located on the southern edge of rapidly growing Chittenden County, has also been engaged in growth center planning for over a decade. In the mid 1990's Hinesburg was one of a handful of growth center pilot projects sponsored by the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs. Through those efforts, the Town identified growth center boundaries that surround the historic village center.

Jean Isham, Chair of the Hinesburg Planning Commission, explained that one motivation of the Town's growth center plans is to provide housing opportunities to area residents without encouraging new housing on farm fields out in the countryside. Isham and her husband Rod recently sold their dairy farm, with conservation easements, to farmers Jennifer and Sean Lang with the help of the Vermont Land Trust.

"We have about 125 new residential units consisting of condominiums, single and multi family dwellings under construction or in the permit process right in our village. These units are on small, village-scale lots that use far less land than the type of development we're seeing in rural areas of Hinesburg," Isham explained.

SPOTLIGHT *(continued from page 1)*

For eight years, the Vermont Forum on Sprawl has helped communities like yours plan for future growth and development. We have a wide variety of tools and resources to help you determine if your local regulations discourage or promote sprawl, identify opportunities for encouraging smart growth, and recommend approaches for specific areas or parcels in your community.

Beginning this fall, the Forum will take the next step to provide Vermont communities with tools and direct assistance to plan for smart growth. Our new **COMMUNITY PLANNING TOOLBOX** will offer the best, most up-to-date planning tools to help you establish policies and practices that can help your community plan for the future.

Through our **COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERSHIP**, we will work with municipal decision makers, developers and active citizens in selected communities, supporting them as they implement specific measures to plan for growth and conservation. If your community needs assistance, call us at (802) 864-6310 or e-mail us at info@vtsprawl.org.

Bennington—Economic Development

Bennington officials worked with developer Jack Appelman to redevelop a vacant 40,000 square foot building originally used as a car dealership. By combining economic development and local regulations that encourage the re-use of historic structures and flexible parking, the Town helped to facilitate the rehabilitation of this important downtown property.

The building, which is across the street from the Town offices, now houses five businesses, including a call center for the Vermont Country Store, with over 200 employees.



Hinesburg—Housing

The Town of Hinesburg is actively working with developers to build nearly 125 units of new housing in the village. A key to encouraging this has been the Town's expansion of wastewater treatment capacity for this housing.



"The village location also means these new residents can walk to our local supermarket, hardware store, restaurants and other businesses as well as the Hinesburg Community School."

Waitsfield Encourages Development in Growth Center

By the early 1970's, Waitsfield residents recognized that Sugarbush Resort and Mad River Glen ski area, located in adjacent Mad River Valley Towns of Fayston and Warren, were attracting a growing number of people. "It was clear that

Waitsfield—Land Conservation

To balance growth center development, Waitsfield has aggressively pursued land conservation by working in partnership with the Vermont Land Trust to permanently protect several hundred acres of productive farmland and establish two town forests. Also, the town has enacted protective zoning regulations that preserve the town's scenic ridgelines and mountain sides.

Waitsfield Village, our town's historic center, couldn't accommodate the new housing and commercial space for the growing population," said Russ Bennett, local builder and town planning commission member.

"When we drafted the Town's first zoning bylaw, everyone debated whether to designate the Route 100 corridor as a commercial strip, or to create a new Irasville Village District next to Waitsfield Village," said Bennett, whose business is located in the District. The Town established the village district where new business and homes have been built, and local shops have second story apartments. The district features compact, mixed-use development that encourages walking and biking, and preserves Route 100's surrounding agricultural landscape.

Communities like Bennington, Hinesburg and Waitsfield will now benefit from a new growth centers program enacted by the Vermont Legislature this year. The program provides incentives for municipalities to plan for growth in and around downtowns and village centers, and conserve the surrounding working landscape (see Spotlight, page 1).

To learn how you can use designated growth centers to plan for your community's future, call us at (802) 864-6310. ■

McClure Matching Gift Doubles Your Donation

Please join the Forum or increase your donation to support our work and help us meet Lois McClure's generous matching gift! Between now and December 31st, she will match all new and increased donations to the Forum, dollar for dollar, up to \$50,000.

Visit www.vtspawl.org to make a donation today. Your donation will support our:

- Community Planning Toolbox with replicable smart growth plans, policies and practices
- Direct assistance to Vermont communities who want to integrate growth and conservation
- State policy initiative to ensure state investments, regulations and practices promote smart growth

GUEST VIEW



Vermont's Towns and Villages: Centers of Growth

The people who live in this beautiful state of green mountains and valleys share a passion for the land and our communities. Whether along the busy streets of Burlington or the winding roads of Belmont, Vermonters continue to create places of community and culture.

Understanding their importance, Vermonters have long led the way in not only preserving, but also enhancing, the vitality of our downtowns and village centers. For decades, community organizations have promoted the importance of these special places.

In Bennington, a five-year planning effort by the Better Bennington Corporation (BBC) has established a vision for the downtown. The Bennington Downtown *Land Use and Circulation Analysis* identifies the elemental quality of downtown Bennington and provides a blueprint to preserve, grow and enhance the historic center of the community. The analysis embraces Bennington's past and highlights real opportunity for future growth and investment.

The plan identifies specific development opportunities for streets, sites and buildings, and defines ways in which these opportunities can further the vision for downtown Bennington. Significant private investment, combined with state and local support, has spurred renovation and new construction projects that are fulfilling BBC's vision for the downtown.

This story is repeating itself all across our state. These grass root efforts have evolved into significant private and public sector partnerships of business and property owners, developers, local and state government, and citizens. These partnerships preserve our heritage, enhance our environment, and establish visions of a future Vermont.

Michael McDonough is a Bennington architect who is a past president of the Better Bennington Corporation, and currently serves on the Bennington Planning Commission and the Vermont Downtown Development Board.



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Contact Michael Buscher of the Vermont Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, (802) 658-3555 or mike@tjboyle.com.

NEW STAFF & INTERNS

We are pleased to announce that **TIFFANY MITZMAN** has joined the Forum as our new Program & Development Coordinator. Tiffany comes to the Vermont Forum on Sprawl with a background in historic preservation and sustainable development. Her work in preservation has led to the addition of several Vermont buildings to the National Register of Historic Places, opening the doors to funding for revitalization and adaptive use. A native of Montana, Tiffany received her undergraduate degree at Wake Forest University in North Carolina, and her graduate degree in Historic Preservation at the University of Vermont. She is excited to work with communities to protect the character of Vermont she has grown to love.



We also want to thank two interns who are working with us for the summer.

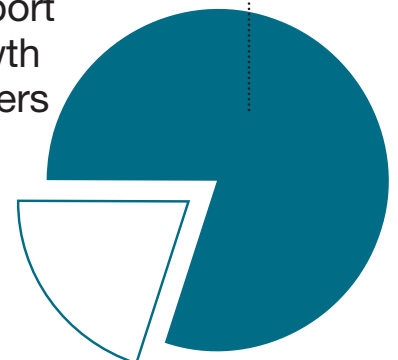
BEKAH MANDELL is conducting research for our Community Planning Toolbox. After graduating from Vassar College, she spent a year in Mexico City working with homeless children. Bekah grew up in Middlesex and will be attending her final year of law school at Boston College.



KATIE PARRISH is conducting research on big box retail development and Act 250. She is majoring in Environmental Studies at the University of Vermont, and will begin her senior year this fall. Katie hopes to pursue a career in environmental law with a focus on real estate. Are you interested in an internship or volunteer opportunity with the Vermont Forum on Sprawl? Call Tiffany at (802) 864-6310 to learn more.



81%
of Vermonters
support
growth
centers



Source: UVM Center for Rural Studies 2006 Vermonter Poll



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