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Spring/Summer 2010 NEWSLETTER

ARTHUR GIBB Award FOR INDIVIDUAL LEADERSHIP

CELEBRATE ART GIBB'S LEGACY WITH US THIS FALL

Mark your calendars for Wednesday, September 15. We'll be celebrating our 2010 Arthur Gibb Award for Individual Leadership at the T.W. Wood Gallery in Montpelier on the Vermont College of the Arts campus.

There are also many opportunities for your business or organization to help support this great event through sponsorship.



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LEAVE A LEGACY logo with text: Make a Difference in the Lives That Follow

Want to make a lasting gift to Vermont's communities? You can by putting Smart Growth Vermont in your will.

LIKE THIS NEWSLETTER?

You'll love our e-newsletter. Each month, we send a free, easy to read, informative email and periodic legislative alerts during the session on key issues in Montpelier.

CAN WE PUT A VALUE ON OPEN SPACE?

Bright green shoots of new corn lined up across a spring field. Sap buckets in a snow-covered sugarbush. A cool forest glade. The sun dappling waves on the lake. A mountainside ablaze with fall colors.



Open land produces significant savings in municipal service costs over residential development. New residential development contributes less in taxes than it demands in services, and existing residents typically foot the bill.

> Continued...

MONTPELIER'S DISTRICT ENERGY SYSTEM LINKS LAND USE AND EFFICIENCY

By Scudder H. Parker, Managing Consultant Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC)

"Location, location, location" as the Real Estate Agent might say also applies to energy use. That lovely starter mansion built out in an old pasture with a new long driveway will be an energy hog whether it meets the highest level of Energy Star new construction efficiency standard or not.

Montpelier's state-of-the-art combined heat and power district energy system, fueled with locally-sourced renewable and sustainably-harvested wood chips, was developed through the Biomass Energy Resource Center and received funding from the U.S. Department of Energy.

To maximize usefulness of the system, it will also produce 1.8 megawatts of electrical power. Efficiency of the overall system will increase from the 20-25% typical of biomass fueled electric generating plants to an efficiency of 70-80%.



Photo: (Right) Linda Baird-White (Bitzy) Vermont Perspectives in Photography

From a land-use planning perspective this is exciting because the district energy system will provide a powerful incentive for better location decisions. Being able to get reliable, affordable heat (without having to install a furnace or boiler) much as we now get sewer and water service will be an incentive to homeowners and businesses to locate in the downtown.

Montpelier will be a model for other towns on how to replace fossil fuels with local, sustainably harvested biomass fuel. This will strengthen downtowns, making them more attractive and affordable building sites.

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I SUPPORT SMART GROWTH VERMONT BECAUSE



**Lauren Jarvi
& Len Gerardi,**
St. Johnsbury

“In challenging economic times, development pressures can be greater in some areas. We value Smart Growth Vermont’s continued measured approach to changes in the rural landscape.”



David Marvin, Owner
Butternut Mountain Farm
Morrisville

“I highly value my heritage and want my children and theirs to enjoy a Vermont like mine. Your work suggests a future built by honoring our most precious values.”



Elizabeth S. McLoughlin,
AICP
Brattleboro

“As a planning and environmental consultant, I find everyone responds to a project with smart growth principles at work, even if they can’t quite pin down the “why.” We in the smart growth community know why, and work for it every day. Smart Growth Vermont supports actions that allow cities and towns to flourish, while keeping the “roads less traveled by.”

HELP SAVE VERMONT



Oil prices remain high. So does the phosphorus level in Lake Champlain. We’re losing thousands of acres of wildlife habitat each year and the per capita cost of food-related illnesses in Vermont ranks 14th in the nation. The further we have to drive, the less time we can spend with our families and the higher the incidence of obesity in our children.

What do these all have in common? How we use our land. Maintaining our current status quo threatens our environment on many fronts. But there are ways to develop our land and build our economy while saving our landscape. It’s called “smart growth.” You can be part of the solution by becoming a Member of Smart Growth Vermont. Each dollar you contribute will directly support our efforts at both the local and state level to make sure our communities have the tools they need to make informed decisions. Become a sustaining member by contributing \$5 or more each month and save even more resources by making your renewable pledge online or through our office. However you choose to give, you will be doing your part for Vermont.

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HOW DO WE PUT A VALUE ON OPEN SPACE?

> *Continued from front...*

of commercial development (\$0.29 per dollar) and farm and forestland (\$0.35 per dollar)

- Farmland generates a fiscal surplus to help offset the shortfall created by residential demand for public services. This is true even when the land is assessed at its current, agricultural use.
- Continuous open space (farmland, forest or other natural resources) allows for greater benefits for the environment, i.e., habitat preservation for wildlife, and for local economies dependent on agriculture and/or tourism. This open space network can also join recreational trails.

Recognition of the significant economic benefits of open space and farmland is not new. When Central Park was created in New York City in the nineteenth century, it immediately showed a four-fold return on the City’s investment – property values for neighborhoods surrounding the Park increased significantly and tax revenues jumped. Study after study of parks and natural lands throughout the United States have echoed this finding. On average, property values for homes adjacent to open space increase by twenty percent.

Towns almost always see a higher return on investment for town forest versus developed land due to savings in municipal services and infrastructure reports, according to the U.S. Forest Service, which offers matching grants to towns through its Community Forest Program.

There are many real life examples of how open space, and particularly public open space, offers a significant return on investment:

- **Yarmouth, Maine** purchased land to avoid it being developed after learning that service and infrastructure costs would exceed tax revenues annually by \$140,000, while purchase would only cost \$67,000 annually for twenty years.
- **Glendale, Colorado**, conservatively estimates a ten-fold return on the \$4 million they invested in Infinity Park, which is fueling economic growth throughout the community.
- After investing \$500 million in public easements to conserve 1.41 million acres, **Colorado** estimates they receive a 6-to-1 return on their investment.
- **Goshen, Vermont’s** timber harvest from their forest returns more than \$1,000 per resident annually to cover the town’s budget and also provides wood for town projects.

One of the few case studies undertaken in Vermont found that in the long run, conserved land is at worst tax-neutral and at best tax-suppressing. Even though conserved land is no longer taxed at market rates, private conservation easements increase adjacent property values and avoid the municipal service and infrastructure costs incurred by development.

Study after study finds that open lands not only have the aesthetic value we feel instinctively, they consistently return significant yields on investment. In addition to the investment returns mentioned here, Vermont’s open landscape is critical to our food supply, preservation of our air and water quality, protecting our wildlife and the Vermont “brand” which itself returns billions of dollars in revenue from tourism. Bottom line – we can’t afford to build on our open land because the costs far outstrip short term returns.

WHAT’S NEW IN THE TOOLBOX

In each newsletter, we feature a land use issue, tool, and case study from our online Community Planning Toolbox to provide tools you can use today in your community. To learn more, visit www.smartgrowthvermont.org/toolbox.

Issue: *Wildlife Corridor Protection*

Vermont’s wildlife travel to meet their basic needs - food, water, shelter and mates – in order to thrive, survive and reproduce. As species move from one large tract of habitat to another they need some sort of connection - or corridors. These corridors can be a narrow swath of wetland along a stream, a large swath of forest, or a tunnel under an interstate highway. Without these corridors, wildlife struggle to maintain healthy, genetically diverse populations.

Tool: *Overlay Districts*

An overlay district is a common and flexible tool for towns to use in implementing various smart growth principles. Adopted as part of a zoning bylaw, overlay districts are superimposed over one or more underlying conventional zoning districts in order to address areas of community interest that warrant special consideration such as historic preservation, or protection of a wildlife corridor, riparian buffers or ridgelines.



Case Study: *Shrewsbury*

During public hearings on the management plans for the Plymbsbury Wildlife Management Area and the Green Mountain State Forest, Planning Commission members realized they needed to find ways to protect key wildlife corridors that were essential to ensuring the future health of wildlife populations so valued by residents. Thus, after their Town Plan update in 2008, the Planning Commission updated their bylaws and one of the new tools they put in place was a wildlife corridor overlay district. With help from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, they were able to define key corridors and provide maps that delineate important north-south corridors to be included in the overlay districts. Within these districts, development projects are required to be designed and implemented to be compatible with, and minimize impact to, these corridors. Within these areas, development projects are required to cluster units and/or buildings rather than developing in a linear manner.

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