

II. Goals

Goals of the Capital District Master Plan

The Capital District Master Plan has four general areas of focus:

- linkages from the Capital District proper to the downtown;
- increased state office space;
- a greenway along the Winooski River;
- a Transit Center located at the intersection of the Winooski River and the Taylor Street Bridge.

While each area of concentration contains its own programmatic demands the central intent of the Capital District Master Plan is to make a cohesive and unified plan of urban development that transcends the division between state and city municipal properties.

The general program for each design zone is summarized below:

A. Strengthen linkage from the Capital District to the Downtown and Winooski River

There are many positive relationships between the State Capital District and the downtown business district that can be enhanced through integrated planning and urban design. As both a State Capital and a regional business district, the Montpelier's Capital District and the downtown business district have a commensal relationship. Some important aspects that can be developed are:

1. Leveraging of the economic benefits received from state employees, legislators, and Capital District visitors to local businesses and local property values.
2. The Downtown and the Capital District are connected as a whole but made up of distinct parts.
3. Integrated planning for transportation access into the city and public parking.
4. Coordinated public transportation.
5. Bring together various access points to the Winooski River and enhancement of the river ecology and aesthetics.

On Court Street, a new state facility has been planned for parking and additional state and commercial offices. Currently, the area between Court street and buildings facing State Street is entirely programmed as on-grade parking. The primary linkage from the Court Street Parking Complex will be Langdon Street. Langdon Street affords a direct physical and visual connection to and from the Montpelier downtown business district. The future design of the Court Street Parking Complex should include a below-grade parking garage, for 450 cars, placed into the side of the hill, with both state and commercial office space set on top with on-grade access to Court Street. Pedestrian access points will, at minimum, be located at each corner of the new structure for access to the CBD, State Street, the Capitol building, and the Winooski Greenway via Governor Aiken Blvd/Taylor Street and Elm Street. New and existing pedestrian paths will emphasize easy access and safety.

Pedestrian linkages connecting the CBD and Capital District will be integrated with a new Taylor Street Transit Center. The transit center will act as the transportation hub for tourist buses, state employee off-site parking shuttles, and the local Wheels bus loop.

B. Capitol Complex Growth Needs:

There are two types of state office space reorganization that are needed to allow the efficient flow of State operations. The first is the incremental expansion of existing buildings and departments in the Capital District to accommodate additional staff and support space demands.

- Approximately 35,000 SF has been identified by various departments within the Capitol Complex as anticipated future expansion needs in the next 15 years.

The second response to Capitol Complex growth is to relocate a number of state departments that are currently occupying isolated rental spaces outside the Capital District but within the City of Montpelier. Currently, there are no plans to relocate state departments from Waterbury to Montpelier.

- Currently, the State leases or rents 103,000 SF of office space.

The State of Vermont, dedicated to the concept of concentrated growth rather than sprawl, would prefer to grow within the existing downtown. As a policy, the State intends to remain within the existing Capital Complex and not expand outside of these boundaries into other areas currently under private ownership.

Where possible, the retention of existing historic structures will be included in the CDMP for new State offices, particularly along State Street. New Buildings that face the Winooski River should have a "front" face to the south. Such development should be visually and programmatically "connected" to the riverfront area with public access along that corridor and Memorial Drive. While a range of building scales is possible, floorplates of new buildings should be capable of adapting to a range of different department needs, sizes, and configurations (10,000 SF - 35,000 SF on 2-4 stories).

Connections between state offices and the State House should be improved. Better pedestrian access, parking and transit are all part of that solution. With the relocation of many state employees to the National Life office spaces, the historic demand for Capital District state employee parking has decreased. Therefore the present parking policy should be revised, reversing reliance upon one central parking location. The long standing desire to promote state employee public transit along popular commuting corridors (Rt. 2, Rte. 302, I-89), via public bus, AMTRAK, cars, and van pools, can finally be implemented via the CDMP's transit center. This plan places parking on the outside of the city with public transit being the mode of entry and distribution. Location of parking and transit should support the major state office centers of employment and be within 5 minutes walking distance.

C. Winooski River Greenway

The Winooski River, and its companion, the North Branch, are a subtle but significant controller of Montpelier's physical size and shape. Historically, the river's path would occasionally touch the feet of the surrounding hills as it meandered in its floodplain. Impatient with the serendipity of the river, the river was gradually channelized. At its peak period of use, industrial warehouses, storage sheds and granite manufacturers bordered the Winooski River, forming a secondary path of circulation behind Main Street and State Street. Today, most of these buildings are gone, replaced by a sea of parking spaces that serve state employees and downtown businesses. The result is a residual sliver of land that is predominantly isolated from the river and the city. This plan attempts to remedy this condition by reconnecting the Winooski River and North Branch with the downtown and Capital District. The programmatic changes include a combination of "soft" and "hard" spaces along the river for recreation, as well as a viable pedestrian connection between the Capital District and the downtown. Some of the proposals included are:

1. Continuation of the planned bikepath east end west along the Winooski River.
2. Reconnection of the river with the Capital Lawn.
3. Reestablishment of natural buffers of vegetation along the riverbank in selective locations; creation of vest-pocket parks, overlooks and interpretive and recreation nodes along the greenway; access to the water's edge.
4. Creation of a "public front door" between new riverfront buildings and the greenway.
5. Relocation of roads and parking that fall too close to the riverbanks to improve water quality and habitats.

D. Transit Center

To its benefit, the physical pattern of Montpelier's downtown buildings was implemented before the age of the automobile. Unlike many American cities today, the automobile has not dictated the design of Montpelier's streets and sidewalks. One can still imagine a tangle of horse drawn carriages from surrounding farms entering town for their weekly business ventures. As a result, Montpelier's streetscape remains at the scale of the pedestrian. The downtown street dimensions are narrower than contemporary street design standards. Traffic is slower, perhaps to a pace that is appropriate for enjoying the historical architecture.

However, Montpelier is not an anachronism. It is a modern city with modern city concerns and the site of the State Capitol building. As such, Montpelier must address our culture's use of the car. State employee

commuters, tourists, and local residents all share and compete for road space and parking spaces. The introduction of a new Transit Center can address this vehicular confluence. By locating a Transit Center at Taylor Street, interstate bus lines, tourist buses, and local commuter buses shuttling to and from satellite parking lots can be brought to a central location that is within walking distance of downtown and the Capital Complex. The following is a summary of the possible Transit Center functions:

- Inter - city, intra - city and tourism busses should have access to the local system. Transit facility is centrally located within the city on the east side of Taylor Street.
- Service hub will serve VT Transit, Wheels, local taxi's, shuttle to AMTRAK, touring busses (with links to off-site parking), rental cars, and van pool services.
- Center will provide a full service and sheltered bus station, and a "drop-off" drive-through.
- Satellite or structured parking depending upon the high value of land in the downtown and Capital District. Parking should be relocated as garage structures or as satellite parking sites for long term parking. All parking sites will be integrated into the topography or downtown building fabric.
- A pedestrian friendly loop between the Capital District and the Downtown between Main Street and State Street.
- Use by the Washington County RR line for potential commuter line from Barre to Berlin.
- A city/state visitors center.
- Potential site for a 30,000 to 50,000 SF Vermont Historical Society Museum.

E. Private Development:

While Montpelier is essentially approaching build-out in its downtown core, the city has strongly supported appropriate new development to further the economic vitality of the downtown. City Master Plans, planning studies and other efforts have identified areas where future development could occur either as site-specific infill projects or larger redevelopment zones. In the past 5 years, the city has taken a leadership role to prompt new development or acted in a supporting role to address needed policy changes. The recent plans for the Winooski East redevelopment, where the city has created a commission to oversee development planning and review of larger scale mixed-use development is a good example of city-state-private developer cooperation.

The city recognizes that additional development in the downtown can be part of a positive future for the downtown economy, and if properly guided, can be a positive asset from the perspective of public interests, public space, economic well being, and environmental health. This position has a positive application to the City-State Master Plan. There is a considerable area of riverfront and other private property that has long been deemed appropriate for new development, but a vision for how it might be accomplished has not fully been shaped until recently.

Review of the plan by city officials has indicated support for new commercial and office uses. It is predicted that this development will add economic growth and a greater tax base to the downtown. There was general agreement that additional public infrastructure would be required to accommodate new development and that the provision of that infrastructure would be a city–state effort with private developer contributions.

New commercial development should be complementary to the existing scale and mix of retail uses: smaller scale shops, attractive office space, taking advantage of public parking and the walkable character of the downtown. The plan outlines the parcels of new private development opportunity. All private development projects are subject to city approvals, and in some cases may require zoning and other policy refinements or clarifications.