

4. Historic Resources and the Built Environment

Montpelier's urban form reflects the historical, social, and political evolution of the city. The many eras of post-revolutionary history is very evident along the streets of Montpelier, and give the city the strong historic character witnessed today. Many of the areas, or neighborhoods, reflect either distinct periods or purposes of development.

4.1 The Evolution of Montpelier's Built Form

Downtown streets and property lines reflect the city's earliest gradual, informal, and increasingly dense settlement. Early streets--Elm, State and Main, for example--connected other post-revolutionary settlements and stayed close to the rivers or headed towards easy gaps in the surrounding hills. The earliest market was at the junction of Elm and State Streets. Early industry capitalized on the river's power and included grist mills, tanneries, and stone finishing shops. Only in this century has development turned away from the rivers.

Statehouse and Capitol Complex

Ever since the state capital has been Montpelier, state government has defined State Street. The Statehouse sits on a handsome green with Hubbard Park behind it. The State office buildings, several of which started life as insurance offices, have grown up in a formal fashion around the statehouse.

In 1966, a Master Plan was prepared to guide future development of State facilities in Montpelier within the Capitol Complex. The Capitol Complex is an important and unique historic district and the maintenance of the architectural and aesthetic integrity of this district is of the utmost importance to all of the people of the State. The boundaries of the Capitol Complex are the Winooski, Taylor Street, Bailey Street, and an imaginary line connecting the streets behind the Statehouse. This area corresponds to the Civic District in the City's zoning ordinance.

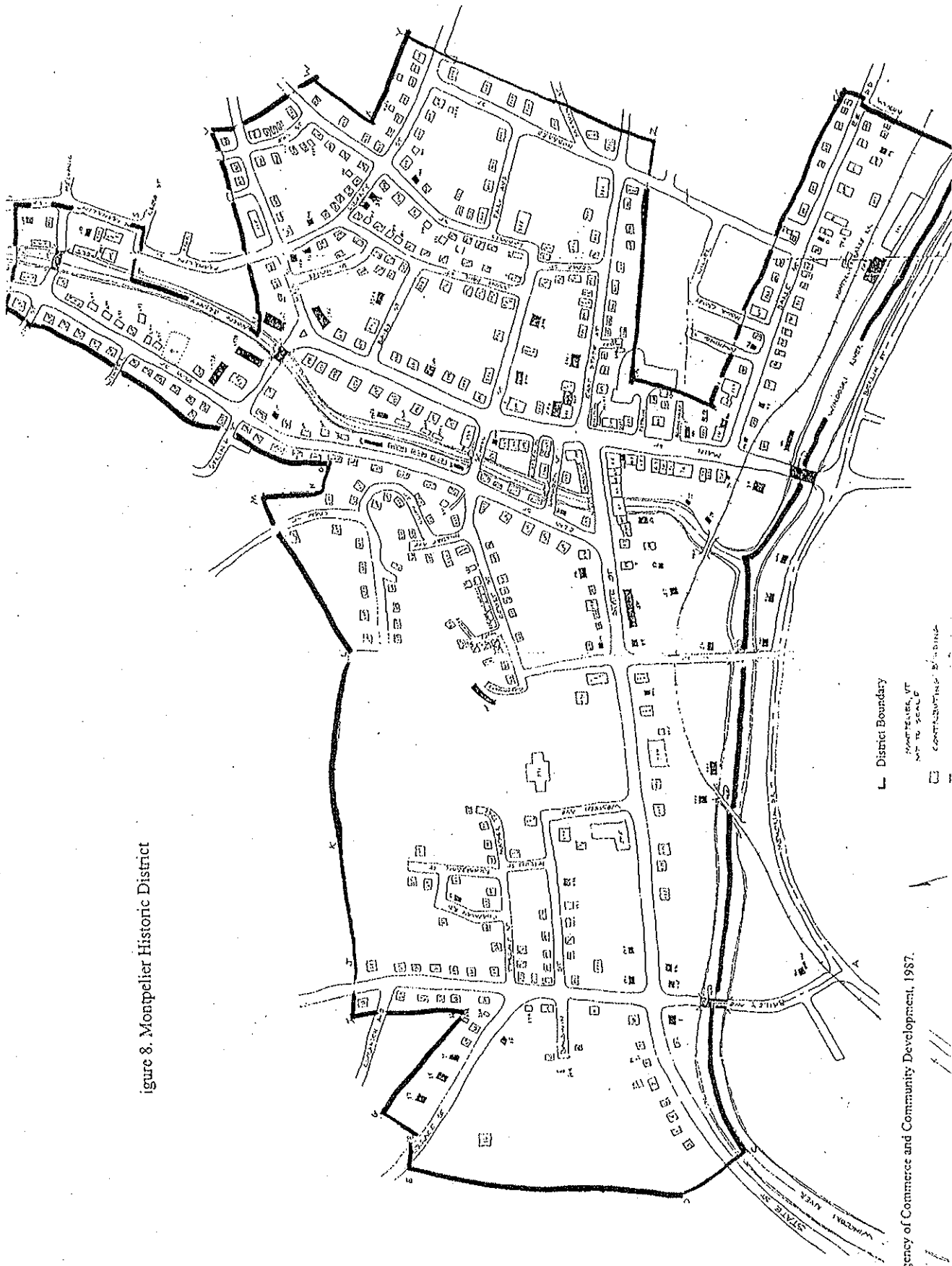
The Capitol Complex Commission was established along with Rules and Regulations (1977) to preserve those elements of its cultural, social, political, or architectural history and to promote the use and preservation of the Capitol Complex for the education, welfare, and pleasure of the residents of the State of Vermont. The regulations are further intended to complement the development plans and bylaws of the City of Montpelier as the capital city of Vermont and to facilitate the coordinated development of these areas adjacent to the Capitol Complex. (Title 29 VSA, Chapter 6, Section 181-185.)

The Capitol Complex Master Plan has yet to be updated and recent development pressures have brought to light the need to look back over the Plan to see what has changed and what may need to be updated. The activities within the Capitol Complex do affect and may have negative impacts on the city that can be measured in increased need for municipal services, increased traffic and congestion, and visual impacts on scenic vistas and views. Employment opportunities for Montpelier residents that the State provides are however, an important contributor of Montpelier's economy. Discussion between the City and the State needs to continue and an atmosphere of mutual consideration and open communication will be needed.

Capitol Area District

In 1996, the General Assembly enacted Title 29 VSA Chapter 8 Capitol Area Study Commission and created the City-State Commission to develop a land use and development master plan to encompass the downtown area of the city called the Capitol Area District. The goals were to be established in time for the legislation to be repealed on July 1, 1999. During its 1999 session, however, this date was extended

Figure 8. Montpelier Historic District



by the Legislature. The boundaries of the district include the Capitol Complex, state owned property outside the Capitol Complex, and other portions of the city designated by this Commission. The objective of the plan is to guide future decisions of City and State officials in formulating and adopting capital construction plans and projects, spaces needs of state agencies, municipal land use plans and zoning bylaws, and appropriation of public funds. This plan will be advisory only and tentative objectives include meeting the space requirements for State offices, developing a riverfront park and greenway along the Winooski River, developing a transit center, investigating a district energy system, and recommendations for the involvement of private development and the City of Montpelier in the implementation of these objectives.

4.2 Architectural History and Design

The city has a wealth of handsome, historic buildings representing every major nineteenth and twentieth century architectural fashion. This dense and high quality collection of historic structures creates one of the state's richest historic environments. These buildings are of tremendous value to residents and visitors alike. About two-thirds of the city's residents live in historic structures. Living and working in historic buildings is a way of life for residents, and protecting that historic environment has long been a community priority.

Over five hundred buildings in the center of Montpelier are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Montpelier Historic District (Figure 8); College Hill and Thomas Waterman Wood's Athenwood and Studio are also listed. The District is the largest in the state. Other areas, such the Meadow, the College Street neighborhood, and the Prospect Street neighborhood, are listed on the State Register of Historic Places and would qualify for the National Register. One building, the Vermont Statehouse, is a National Historic Landmark.

After the flood of 1992, many downtown buildings received electrical upgrades and structural foundation work. Also in the last five years, two major new landmarks, the Chittenden Bank Building and the Vermont State Employees Credit Union, have taken a prominent place in the Montpelier cityscape. Several vacant lots downtown offer the possibility of additional development in the near future, and the challenge of continuing the city's tradition of architectural quality.

Design Review

Montpelier established a Design Control District in the 1970s and produced two publications, *Cityscape* and *Cityscape II*, to explain objectives and criteria for development. A Design Review Committee was established to advise the Planning Commission regarding those criteria for any development within the Design Control District. The review standards for new construction or exterior alterations are:

- Preservation or construction of the appropriate historic style if the proposed project is in the historic district or involves an historic structure;
- Harmony of exterior design with other properties in the district;
- Compatibility of proposed exterior materials with other properties in the district;
- Compatibility of the landscaping with the district;
- Prevention of the use of incompatible designs, buildings, color schemes, or exterior materials;
- Location and appearance of all utilities;
- Recognition of and respect for view corridors and significant vistas including gateway views of the city and Statehouse.

Additional standards apply to signs and demolition. The language of the review standards are based upon the enabling provisions in Title 24 V.S.A. §4407. Efforts are under way to further refine these

standards to reflect better understanding of the issues involved and include more specific design criteria, lighting standards.

The quality of Montpelier's civic, commercial, and residential architecture from past centuries is distinguished contributing to a strong sense of place and character. In combination with the steep topography, the distinctive roof forms and the abundance of steeples, turrets, domes, and towers contribute to the visual quality of the city, and provide strong visual benchmarks from throughout the urban core, particularly when seen from high elevations.

4.3 Neighborhoods

A neighborhood is a collection of people, buildings, and spaces that is identifiable as a certain geographic area. A neighborhood may have a clear center and will usually have defining physical elements or characteristics, though its physical boundaries may be vague and overlapping. A neighborhood may be linked to land or some cultural/institutional center and have a mixture of private and public places.

Montpelier has an eclectic variety of neighborhoods, within a small, walkable distance. A sampling of neighborhoods is provided below.

Downtown encompasses City Hall and includes Main Street, State Street, Langdon Street, Elm Street, and adjacent areas. The neighborhood is primarily commercial but supports civic, institutional, and residential activity. **Downtown** is under pressure to develop its remaining open space.

The Statehouse neighborhood of Bailey Avenue, Court Street, and the Capitol Complex supports commercial, institutional, civic, governmental, and residential activity. This neighborhood, as well as parts of downtown, has recently been studied as the subject of the Capital Area District Master Plan.

College Hill supports Vermont College and many residences, as well as an increasing number of offices. Commercial activity is currently not permitted.

Barre Street has a vital mix of residential, institutional, commercial, and industrial uses. Increasingly, however, economic pressure is causing many houses to be converted to offices. This is eliminating affordable housing stock. The new development along Stone Cutters Way has the potential to tie into the existing neighborhood, perhaps creating green for a center, but "knitting" of infrastructure and uses will have to be carried out carefully.

The Meadow is a turn of the century residential neighborhood bordering Hubbard Park in what was once Montpelier's primary grazing area. It has a park, a range of housing types, offices, and some commercial use.

Lane Shops is a residential neighborhood across the North Branch River from the Meadow, extending up to North Street. It is largely defined by a renovated mill complex that is now a large elderly and family housing project with small a park, which helped revitalize this area.

National Life/Northfield Street/Mountain View Drive has the makings of a community; many of the residents work at National Life. The open fields belonging to National Life are a key element of this neighborhood's identity.

Upper Elm Street and Towne Hill Road are examples of suburban neighborhoods situated on a major arterial road. These neighborhoods are primarily residential and do not contain many of the elements of other city neighborhoods such as public buildings and mixed use activity.

Other neighborhoods include but not limited to:

- Liberty/Loomis/Elementary School Area
- Terrace Street
- Berlin Street/Prospect/Hill Street
- River Street
- Green Mount Cemetery /Lower State Street

4.4 City Gateways and Entrance Corridors

The significant entrances to the city should be given priority consideration for urban design. "Gateways" have been defined as those points on the major arterial roadways leading into the city where the first glimpse of the Statehouse and City Hall tower appear. Entrance corridors through these gateways lead the traveler to the urban core. Two such gateways and entrance corridors have been identified.

Western Entrance and Gateway

The western entrance corridor and gateway extends from the I-89 interchange along Memorial Drive as it proceeds into the city. The quality of this entrance corridor is composed of natural vegetation and steep rock embankments on the north and south sides, as far as Dog River Road, and continuing on the south side to National Life Drive. The "gateway" exists approximately at the intersection of Memorial Drive with National Life Drive, and the entrance corridor extends to Northfield Street.

Eastern Entrance and Gateway

The eastern entrance corridor and gateway extends along Berlin and River Streets from the Berlin line. The entrance corridor is composed of a variety of conditions including strip commercial development, housing, and natural areas. Portions of the Washington County Railroad closely follow this route. The eastern gateway to the urban core appears approximately at the intersection of Berlin and River Streets with views from both streets through the Granite Street bridge and beyond to the City Hall towers and Statehouse.

4.5 Historic Resources and the Built Environment Goals and Recommendations

- 1. Reinforce Montpelier's neighborhoods, both commercial and residential by encouraging diverse, compatible, and dense land uses that build upon the existing variety and character in these neighborhoods.**

Recommendations:

- a. Ensure that new development complements its surrounding neighborhoods where possible. Where development cannot tie into and reinforce existing neighborhoods, the scale and diversity of that development should follow Montpelier's existing patterns.
- b. Consider revisions to the Zoning Regulations, Zoning District Map and Design Review Guidelines to:
 - permit compatible mixed uses that reinforce neighborhoods;
 - allow for mixed uses within neighborhoods, particularly those uses that are mutually supportive and complement the fabric of the area in which they are located;

expand conditional and permitted uses in all of the zones, particularly in office parks and residential zones; and
increase density where appropriate to achieve compact, efficient, settlement patterns.

- c. Create incentives for development that:
 - may be less profitable but desirable such as housing and the arts; these might be tied to profitable development; and
 - reinforces or complements existing neighborhoods.
- d. Re-evaluate existing standards regarding parking, traffic flow, road design regulations, and street elements to ensure compatibility with neighborhoods and to reinforce neighborhood centers.
- e. In the downtown, actively pursue mixed use and increased uses of existing buildings, and solutions for traffic and parking congestion.
- f. In the Statehouse neighborhood, the City should work to encourage mixed use and dense land use, along with riverfront and traffic goals outlined in other chapters.
- g. Existing affordable housing and light industry along Barre Street should be protected. Additional housing and space for the arts might be incorporated into new development in the Barre Street neighborhood.
- h. Office Park zones should be examined in the context of Montpelier's neighborhoods. Development should reinforce existing neighborhoods by increasing diversity of use and by maintaining current densities. Where an entirely new neighborhood will be created, the existing characteristics of Montpelier neighborhoods may be used as a model, to the extent of providing housing and commercial uses.

Improve the process of city planning and project review to ensure that new development is compatible with the city's historic built environment and reflects the changing needs of the community.

Recommendations:

- a. Revise Design Review guidelines and criteria, to reflect and protect the unique characteristics of Montpelier's distinct neighborhoods and areas.
- b. Consider extending the Design Control District, or including design standards in site plan review criteria to protect visually and historically sensitive areas such as all of the Stone Cutters Way, parts of River Street, and the gateway areas, while including guidelines and criteria tailored for those areas.
- c. Provide a framework for neighborhood stakeholders to have a stronger voice in land use and development planning.
- d. Strengthen the City's demolition standards to prevent demolition of historic structures by neglect.
- e. Enforce minimal habitability standards to allow for full occupancy (BOCA codes and others).
- f. Establish criteria for lighting of both private establishments and public areas to foster an intimate scale, provide good color aesthetics, and prevent glare to adjoining properties and the public.

- g. Revise site plan and design review criteria to ensure that approved site and building designs include clear provisions for accessibility for people with disabilities.
- h. Continue to evaluate the permit application and review process to ensure it is as efficient, effective, and clear as possible to achieve its purpose of directing growth and development in accordance with this Plan.

Develop a comprehensive sign ordinance.
- j. Develop landscaping guidelines to encourage the maintenance of a balance between the natural and the built environments within the city.
- k. Consider establishing Montpelier as a Certified Local Government.

3. Develop further knowledge of Montpelier's past including its archeological heritage.

Recommendations:

- a. Develop a plan for identifying, preserving, and teaching about the city's archeological heritage.
- b. Include identification and recovery of archeological evidence in development review.
- c. Take advantage of federal and state regulatory tools to take an active role in locating and protecting the most important archaeological sites.
- d. Increase public education and outreach efforts to get citizens interested in archeology.

4. Continue working with the State to plan for the needs of the Capitol Complex including traffic, parking, public facilities and amenities as well as office expansion.

Recommendations:

- a. Maintain a high level of quality in the design and construction of public infrastructure and public works projects that affect the public environment in such a way that the public realm is enhanced and beautified by their presence. This may mean the lowest cost options are not necessarily the most appropriate options and that the inclusion of art and beauty in the city's infrastructure is a worthy public investment.
- b. Encourage improvements in the design and placement of utilities which affect the public environment, such as placing propane tanks underground or behind screening, concealing utility meters and dumpsters, and burying or relocating overhead power, phone, and cable lines to minimize or eliminate their visual intrusion from public ways.
- c. Ensure that public facilities, including buildings, infrastructure, and public spaces, follow universal design principles so as to be accessible to people of all ages and abilities.
- d. Provide more accessible public restroom facilities in the Capitol Complex.
- e. Civic structures shall comply with Design Review criteria and other zoning regulations applicable to all private structures.