

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2007

***Mission:** To serve the community by facilitating the creation and preservation of a healthy, safe, sustainable, and high quality living environment through the management of an effective, on-going planning and implementation process.*

This broad mission is carried out through several areas of responsibility:

- To protect and enhance Montpelier's natural and built environment;
- To strengthen the local economy and tax base;
- To meet housing needs of low and moderate income residents;
- To engage the community in planning for growth and change;
- To provide information and service to the public; and
- To be accountable to our citizens.

These goals are addressed by Montpelier's planning, zoning, and community development programs. Most of our housing, loan, and economic development activities are carried out through what is known as the Community Development Agency (CDA), which is staffed by the planning department.

2007 marked yet another year of change for the department, this time with the departure of long-time Community Development Specialist George Seiffert in July. George served the city in several different capacities for almost 20 years, and departed after a long leave of absence. We wish him the best. We have hired new staff in all but one of the positions in the department this year: Clancy DeSmet was hired in July as Planning and Zoning Administrator, Audra Brown was hired in April as the Planning and Zoning Assistant, Nina Thompson was hired in December as the new Community Development specialist, and we have two VISTA volunteers – Jacqueline LeBlanc and Ashley Pelletier working on the enVision Montpelier project, and a new Americorps volunteer – Joanna Dillon, working on the Onion River Exchange.

Despite the changes and challenges, focus was maintained on existing, high-priority projects, such as the Montpelier Multi-Modal Transit and Welcome Center; the enVision Montpelier project, a new proposal for the Riverside Center on Stonecutter's Way – formerly known as the Pyralisk project, continuing to prepare a District Energy project, streamlining the permit process for the city, maintaining and upgrading the web site, administration of the Housing Preservation Grant Program the One More Home campaign. Below are highlights of the year's activities.

This department could not do all that it does without the thoughtful and hard work by its staff and the individuals who volunteer on commissions and committees, the support from local officials, and the participation of citizens and other people and departments within and outside of City Hall. Montpelier is especially fortunate to have so many highly motivated, skilled, and interested citizens willing to give of themselves, their time, and their energies to make so many things happen.

PLANNING

Planning Commission: We welcomed three new members to the Planning Commission in 2007: Claire Benedict, Mark Kaufmann, and Christopher Paterson were appointed to fill the seats vacated by Carolyn Grodinsky, Craig Graham, and Cristy Witters. The Planning Commission has been very busy in 2007, leading the enVision Montpelier project which is described in more detail below, and conducting an informal survey of citizens about parking. The Planning Commission was also instrumental in convening two All Board Meetings for the city's development review boards and city council this year. We are hoping that these meetings will become a semi-annual tradition, to improve communication and coordination among the boards.

Natural Resource Inventory: The Planning Commission has also taken over responsibility for the Open Space Advisory committee in the development of a natural resources inventory for the City. Brett Engstrom, a naturalist from Marshfield, has been retained by the city to prepare the inventory. We had received a \$15,000 Municipal Planning Grant in 2005 to do this work. The work was completed and delivered to the City in 2007.

Municipal Master Plan: The Planning Commission worked with the City Council to initiate the enVision Montpelier project, a long-term sustainability plan for the city that is looking out over the next 30-100 years. We have convened a multi-stakeholder group to lead the process, and to date over 200 people have signed up and attended the monthly stakeholder meetings. The stakeholder group is divided up into six committees – social systems, human development, governance, economics and livelihoods, built environment and infrastructure, and natural environment. In 2007, we held over 40 enVision meetings, received \$100,000 from the Mazer Foundation to provide implementation grants for the recommendations that the planning process develops, and provided grants to create an energy materials coop, the Onion River Exchange, and to support the Community Justice Center. All citizens are welcome to participate; more information about it can be found on the web site:

www.montpelier-vt.org/planning/envision/index.cfm.

We are actively seeking residents' input on the future of the city. Everyone has been mailed a survey form with an invitation to participate. People can complete the survey on line at the web site listed above. We are asking people to answer five basic questions:

1. What part of the city do you care about that you want future generations who live in Montpelier to enjoy?
2. What do you want to change?
3. What ideas do you have for the future?
4. What is it like for you to live/work/play in Montpelier?
5. What are you willing to do to help?

Geographical Information Systems: During 2007, Eric worked with The Public Works Department to create up-to-date GIS line, polygon and point data representing the City's Water & Sewer infrastructure, coordinated the licensing, acquisition, and installation of 3 new copies of ESRI Arcmap software for the City's Planning & Public Works Departments, trained various City staff members in the use of the new ESRI Arcmap software, and continues to be available on an as-need basis to help with technical issues and questions, updated nearly all of the lot line information for the City's tax maps, and managed to join nearly all of the existing grand list data to the digital tax maps, with the exception of condominiums and some non-taxed properties which have yet to be entered into the grand list.

To update and maintain our GIS library, Eric established a new repository of all of the City's most current and relevant GIS data on the City's common drive, continues to coordinate with VT Agency of Transportation, FEMA, and other agencies to obtain the most current GIS data layers and orthophotos for the City's data library.

Eric worked with the City Parks Department's Americorps interns to map invasive species and tree plantings along the Winooski & North Branch Rivers, as well as to refine trails data in the City Parks.

The city also provides landowners with data they need to pursue their projects, including geographic information on floodplain analysis, zoning boundary determinations, and road frontage. Eric provided local schools and colleges with city shapefile data to conduct classes using the City of Montpelier as a planning model, and local land trusts and non-profits with data for conservation purposes.

Floodplain Management/Community Rating System (CRS): The Planning & Zoning Administrator is the CRS Coordinator, which requires that we carry out a number of activities each year and then submission to FEMA by the end of the year. Activities include: maintaining records of development in the floodplain and other information necessary to preserve our CRS flood hazard mitigation certification; a mailing to each property owner in the floodplain, to lenders, and to realtors. We are currently planning on mailing to these parties prior to the end of the calendar year.

The CVRPC reviewed the zoning regulations and proposed amendments, which have been submitted to the Planning Commission. We expect to amend the regulations in concert with the Planning Commission and the City Council in the spring of 2008. These changes will bring us in compliance with FEMA requirements.

We do not have a hard deadline for map adoption. FEMA is working on the map adoption process, and once they address several issues from the July 2007 meeting then the formal 90-day appeal period will begin. FEMA will then issue a letter of final determination and declare a 6 month period for map adoption before the new maps become effective. According to CVRPC, that effective date might be somewhere between 10-15 months. Our regulations should be adopted by August 2008.

Montpelier is one of 3 communities in Vermont that participates in the CRS. Our CRS rating is currently a Class 9. Class 9 gives Montpelier a premium discount of 5%. It is likely that we will maintain our rating of Class 9. However, this fall, we met with the Certified Flood Manager from Insurance Services Office and may be able to increase our rating to Class 8, which would give us a discount of 10%. The flood-that-never-happened in 2007 was the impetus for this possible increase in rating. Planning & Community Development carried out a wide range of on-going flood hazard mitigation activities to reduce or eliminate losses to life and property due to flooding.

Certified Local Government (CLG)/Montpelier Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC): The City of Montpelier was recently awarded a \$3,225 (\$5,359 with match) Certified Local Government (CLG) grant to complete the National Register update in a Phase 1.5 project examining 26 properties, revising Phase 1 documentation to meet the National Park Service standards, descriptions of each building, digital photographs, and a revision to the draft district map. We hired Lyssa Papazian, historic preservation consultant, to complete Phase 1.5. We will likely be applying for Phase 2 in the coming months.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

During 2007 162 zoning permits were issued. Of these 162, 62 required Development Review Board (DRB) approval and 100 were administratively approved. Of the 62 approved by the DRB, 41 required Design Review approvals, 13 of these were signs within the Design Control District. 11 sign permits were issued outside of the Design Control District. Three subdivisions were permitted in 2007 and one administrative decision was appealed to the DRB.

There were three decisions appealed to the Environmental Court. One decision is pending, the other was ruled in favor of the appellant, and the other has been resolved through court-ordered mediation.

Development Review Board (DRB): Ylian Snyder term expired and she was not reappointed. Jeremy Hoff (term expires 8/8/10) was reappointed from an alternate to a full-time member. Daniel Richardson, who was an alternate on the DRC, was appointed to a full-time position (term expires 8/8/10). Ken Matzner (term expires 8/8/10) was reappointed as an alternate member. There is one vacant alternate position that we are currently trying to fill. (See <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/drb/index.cfm>).

Design Review Committee (DRC): Margot George continues her service as chair, and Steve Everett continues to serve as vice-chair. There is also one vacant alternate position that we are currently trying to fill. (See <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/drc/index.cfm>).

Staff Support: The Technical Review Committee (TRC) is an advisory staff committee comprised of representatives from the Planning & Community Development, Public Works, Police, Fire, Buildings, and Parks departments, and a representative from the Conservation Commission. They have continued to meet, although periodically, to

jointly review applications, evaluate site plans, and provide comments and recommendations to the applicants and the DRB. Staff reports are prepared for the DRB, applicants, and others before hearings to correlate the relevant details and issues of an application with the appropriate review criteria.

Public Outreach: DRB hearings and Planning Commission meetings continue to be broadcast on channel 17.

To help inform neighbors and the public of development activities that might affect or interest them, we continue to:

- Publish full DRB agendas on the Thursday 2 weeks prior to the hearings;
- Require that the big red Z-poster card be posted on-site prior to the DRB hearing;
- Require that the blue Zoning Permit placard be posted on-site during the 15-day appeal period;
- Provide notice to abutters by mail of applications requiring DRB review; and
- Post meeting and hearing information on the Web site. (See <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/planning/index.cfm>)

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Downtown Revitalization. We continue to work closely with the Montpelier Downtown Community Association on a number of downtown initiatives, including its Design and Economic Restructuring committees, parking issues, implementation of the Capital District Master Plan, downtown designation tax credits, and other initiatives.

Turntable Park /Brownfield Remediation: The Planning Department has documented \$29,669 in sales tax reallocation funds to date, and is working with the Tax Department to accept certified plans (which is the current practice) to document the remaining value of the new developments at Stonecutter's Way so that we can maximize the funds available to build the park. As reported last year, the department secured a \$194,336 grant from through the Vermont Community Development Program to clean up contaminants found on the Turntable Park and Pyralisk sites for redevelopment into a park and community center, respectively. A number of conditions need to be met, however, before work can get underway, which will be a focus for the year ahead.

Multi-Modal Transit and Welcome Center: Progress was stalled on the transit center as the city and the landowner waited to receive approval from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the characterization plan that is needed to determine what the cleanup requirements will be. In the meantime, we applied to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a Brownfields cleanup grant for \$200,000, with the help of our Project Manager at Dubois and King. We have not received word as this goes to print about whether the grant will be awarded. More information about this project can be found on the Works in Progress page at: <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/wip/carrlot>.

City Website: During the February-March 2007 Freeze-up Ice Jam Situation, Eric created a web page on the City's website that provided regular updates on the situation as it

progressed, including meetings and developments, evacuation maps, floodplain information, links to emergency information, brochures for sandbagging information, and more. In cooperation with the Manager's office, we established an online link to real-time Winooski River monitoring stations, so people could watch the levels rise and fall and have up to date information on the river's current condition.

New initiatives also take work on our web site, so we have new pages for the energy team and enVision Montpelier, where people can get regular updates, with meeting agendas, schedules, etc. He also created a "What's New" page to highlight current issues.

Perhaps most important, we've issues a RFP for consultants who want to help us redesign the website. Twelve proposals have been received, and are currently being reviewed. We expect to hire consultant mid-late January 2008.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

One More Home Program. In July of 2006, we were awarded a \$106,700 grant from the Vermont Community Development Program to help implement a new incentive program to encourage the development of accessory apartments within single family homes.

The One More Home Program provides technical and financial assistance to homeowners interested in assessing the feasibility of creating, or creating accessory apartments. Grants of up to \$1,500 are available just to help homeowners assess the feasibility of creating an accessory apartment. An additional \$2,500 grant is available if an apartment is developed. Loan funds of up to \$1,000 are also available to help cover the cost of installing sprinkler systems within the new apartments. This is a no interest loan that doesn't need to be repaid until the property is sold.

In 2007, we closed two loans for \$9,884. Two apartments were constructed, four new accessory apartments are underway, and three applicants have not started the process yet. This is a pilot program for the State of Vermont, so we don't have benchmarks from other cities to indicate whether this is low, average, or high use of the program. We mailed every homeowner in the city information about it in late December, so we are hoping that the increase publicity will bring more applicants to our door.

Housing Preservation Grant Program (HPG). The HPG loan program provides renovations loans to low and moderate income homeowners to help address: code, health and safety issues; accessibility needs; weatherization needs; and overcrowding. Loans are typically without interest with repayment deferred until the proper is sold. While this grant was not funded in 2006 we are happy to announce that it was again in 2007. This current funding cycle is from 10/07 through 10/09. There is \$50,000 for very low income single-family homeowners to be supported in qualifying home renovation projects. Additionally, the city has matched those funds with \$125,000 actual and in-kind dollars. \$92,000 of these funds may serve moderate to low income homeowners.

To date the program has assisted 105 homeowners and loaned over \$910,000. During this past year we supported important renovations in 4 homes, for a total loan amount of \$42,300. We are working with 1 other homeowner to get a loan at this time. As with the One More Home program, we have just completed a mailing that makes all the property owners in Montpelier aware of the program, so we are hoping that we will get more inquiries and applicants. For more information, see <http://www.montpelier-vt.org/cda/hpg.cfm>)

Bianchi and Stonewall Farms Apartments: In 2006, we successfully obtained a \$409,000 grant from the Vermont Community Development Program to assist the Central Vermont Community Land Trust in the purchase and renovation of the Bianchi Building at 208 Barre Street and Stonewall Farms Apartments at 21 Hebert Road. The Bianchi Building will be renovated as 8 new apartment units, 7 of which will be affordable to households at 60% of the median income for Washington County. The current business will be relocated to a different location in Montpelier. Ten affordable housing units will be preserved at Stonewall Farms. The City will loan an additional \$75,000 to the project from the Community Development Revolving Loan Fund and provide \$52,000 from the Housing Trust Fund to support construction of the project. This past year, the Fisher Auto Parts store in the Bianchi building was successfully relocated to 79 Barre St.

Riverside Center: In years past, this project has been called the Pyralisk project. It involves the demolition of the salt shed on Stonecutter's Way, the remediation of the contamination that is on site, and the construction of a multi-purpose complex that will include senior housing, market rate condominiums, office space, and performance space. The Pyralisk and the city have partnered with the Central Vermont Community Land Trust to develop the project; this year we applied for a \$20,000 planning grant from the Vermont Community Development Program, with a \$5,000 match from the city Revolving Loan Fund for the traffic studies required. We are also working with the Pyralisk to use a \$400,000 grant they received from HUD to support the construction of the arts center.

Housing Trust Fund/River Station Condominiums. In March of 2005, voters approved an additional one cent on the property tax to be placed in a special revenue account called the "Montpelier Housing Trust Fund," (HTF) the purpose of which is to create homeownership opportunities affordable to low and moderate income households. In 2005 the first allocation was made to the Central Vermont Community Land Trust, which will use the funds to render 3 or 4 units at River Station Condominiums affordable to persons earning less than 80 percent of the county median income. In March of 2006 the voters approved a second allocation to the Housing Trust Fund. Applications for HTF funding were due by January 5, 2007. In 2007, we provided \$52,000 from the Housing Trust Fund to subsidize loans to income-eligible applicants who were purchasing condominiums at River Station.

River Station Apartments. Construction was completed at River Station Apartments in the summer of 2005 and the building was fully occupied last year. This 36 unit apartment building was developed by the Central Vermont Community Land Trust with assis-

tance from the City of Montpelier in the form two loans, one for \$100,000 from the City's Revolving Loan Fund and a second of \$584,900 which originated from a Vermont Community Development Program Grant awarded to the City. Twenty-nine of the 36 units are affordable to households earning less than 60% of the median income for Washington County.

Home Share Vermont: Central Vermont Home Share began in 2003 following the City's successful grant application to the Vermont Community Development Program. The program matches elderly or disabled homeowners with individuals who are seeking a place to live in exchange for helping with household chores, providing companionship or a protective presence in the home at night. It is unique in that it meets two goals. First, it allows seniors and persons with disabilities to stay in their homes by providing needed services. Second it provides an affordable housing opportunity by bringing a person into an existing home. The program is administered by the Central Vermont Council on Aging under the direction of Betsy Reid.

Housing Data. The Department continues to track housing development trends, sales statistics, and other demographic data in an effort to accurately assess the communities housing needs and guide the City in the adoption of appropriate development regulations. Some of this data can be viewed on the City's web site at:

<http://www.montpelier-vt.org/cda/housing.cfm>.