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Seeking a vision

Just imagine! Montpelier wants residents views on their city - a century from now

By Patrick Joy

TIMES ARGUS STAFF

MONTPELIER – Lifting her eyes from the daily piles of permit applications, site plans and tomes of zoning ordinances, Planning Director Gwen Hallsmith is focusing a little further down the road – 100 years down the road.

Jumpstarting a process called “Envision Montpelier,” Hallsmith and the planning department are attempting to imagine the city as it ages over the next 30-100 years – and they want you to imagine and plan along with them.

“The master plan is really a five-year look ahead, but we want to look not just at the next five years, but further out. Once you get to a 30-100 year time frame, you get beyond the traditional

“This is going to be a serious community outreach process.”

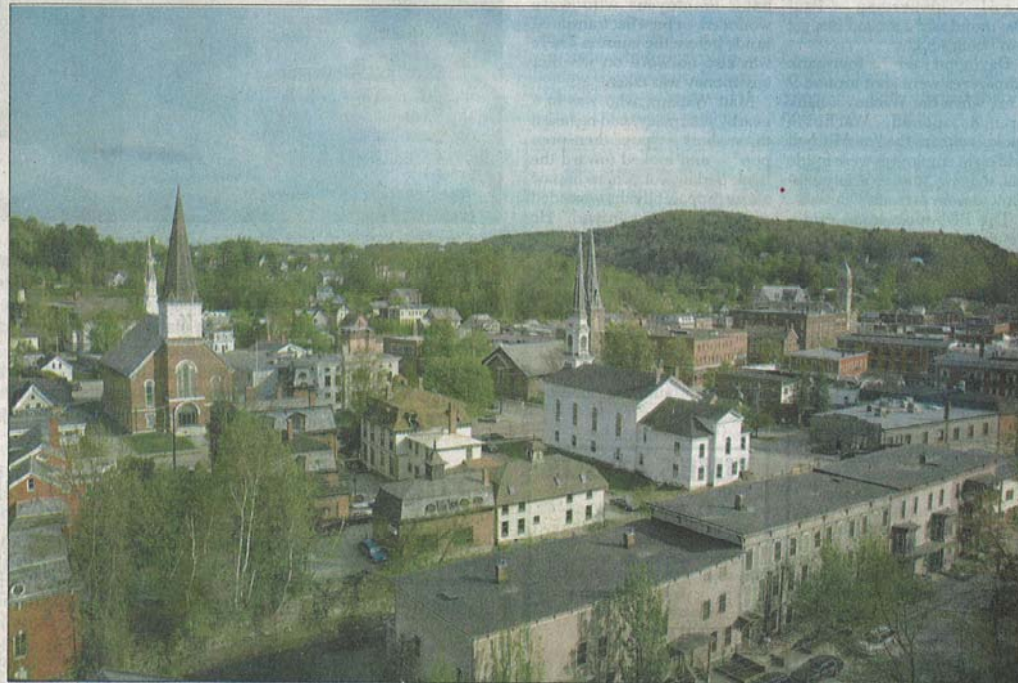
Planning Director
Gwen Hallsmith

master plan elements, you start thinking outside the box. And we need to get as many perspectives on that as possible.”

Hallsmith and a number of Americorps volunteers will kick off “Envision Montpelier” this weekend at the farmer’s market. But, they don’t plan to stop there.

“This is going to be a serious community outreach process,”

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Sandy Macys / Times Argus

Above, a view of the state capital from Cliff Street on a brilliantly clear May day in 2007. Montpelier’s planning director says she’s looking for city residents’ views and vision of what the city might look decades down the road, even a hundred years from now. She’s planning a major outreach effort — and your view is needed. See Page A5 for details on how to get involved.

Vision

(Continued from Page A1)

said Hallsmith, who was hired last year at the capital. "We'll be going door to door, hitting the other festivals and organizations such as the Rotary. This isn't going to be the standard public hearing where you come to us. We're going to get out there."

Hallsmith's goal is to develop a sustainable master plan with long-term ideals. The process will be used in part to update the standard master plan as well.

"I think it's really important," she said. "We have to think about what we want the city to be. I think there's a lot of room for creativity and this process opens the door for that. We're talking about thinking out beyond the life of our current infrastructure - all the roads and bridges and those sorts of thing tend to need to be replaced in that time span. This process allows us to think about what we want to keep and what we want to switch."

Hallsmith, who has a background in municipal planning and served as deputy secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources at the end of the Dean administration, said a long-term vision also moves beyond the standard planning trio of infrastructure, land-use

and environmental concerns.

"If you focus on those things only, you miss the key drivers," she said. "We need to understand social systems and economic systems as well. Those are the things that drive land-use and infrastructure and impact the environment."

For Hallsmith, one of the benefits of a long-term set of goals and priorities is that it usually outlives the terms and whims of city leaders.

"Right now, we are recruiting multi-stakeholder groups to work with this," she said. "We want stakeholders driving this process and designing the future - this whole concept needs to be a community owned rather than city owned. And that means recruiting people that have a vested interest that goes beyond the current leaders. A long-term plan can help hold the city accountable as personnel changes."

She said on Monday that the more visions her office collects, the more comprehensive a document they can create.

"I did a similar exercise in Calgary (Alberta, Canada) and we had 20,000 responses," she said. "We've got 8,000 people in the city and I'd love to get everybody to participate - but, of course we'd settle for a high percentage."

Your vision is needed

Want to get involved?

How do you want Montpelier to be....

30 years from now?

100 years from now?

The City wants to know.

Join people from all over the city - businesses, residents, artists, bureaucrats, musicians, young people, senior citizens, immigrants, students, teachers, people of faith, activists, historians, curmudgeons, lawyers, and leaders in an exciting new planning effort designed to help Montpelier move toward a sustainable future.

Learn more about what makes the city tick. Find its strengths and weaknesses. Meet interesting people. See your old home through new eyes. Discover unexpected solutions to old problems. Get to know your neighbors.

Interested?

Do you want to help shape the city's future?

Contact Gwendolyn Hallsmith, Director of Planning and Community Development
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