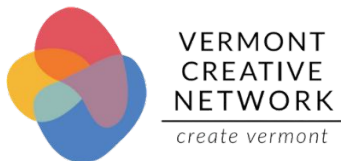


Strategies for *Thriving* Public Spaces



Meghan Asbury
Planner & Zone Agent
March 6, 2022

Agenda

- Introductions
- Quick definitions: equity, diversity, and inclusivity
- What are Livable Communities and Placemaking?
- Placemaking and Vermont's Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Creative Economy
- How to get started
- Free resources to engage your community
- Funding opportunities for your community
- Downtown and Village Designation Importance
- Success Stories
 - White River Junction
 - Rutland
 - Rupert
- Summary
- Q&A
- Links to resources

Introductions: TRORC and the 3CVT Region



- TRORC is an association of thirty municipalities in east-central Vermont. TRORC is governed by a Board of Representatives appointed by each of our member towns. Our primary goals are to advocate for the needs of our member towns, and to articulate a vision for building a thriving regional economy while enhancing the region's quality of life. The Commission's staff provides technical services to local, state and federal levels of government and to the Region's non-profits and businesses. TRORC offices are located at the King Farm in Woodstock.



- VCN was established by the Vermont Legislature in May 2016 as an initiative of the Vermont Arts Council. The Network is a broad collective of organizations, businesses, and individuals working to advance Vermont's creative sector.



- Cornerstone Creative Community, or 3CVT, is a Zone of the VCN. If you're located within the 3CVT Zone and consider yourself to be part of the Creative Sector, you're a member of 3CVT! The Zone is led by the 3CVT Steering Committee of working volunteers convened by Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission, the Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, and the Vermont Council on the Arts. The goal of this committee is to broaden and build the future partnerships that will be needed within the creative economy at all levels.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity in Planning

- **Brief Background:**

- In the United States, planning became a standardized practice and profession in the early 1900s and there is a legacy of inequitable planning that historically discriminates against people that are not white, not able bodied, not male, not wealthy, not Christian, and so on.
- Health, income, mobility, and other inequities are institutionalized in policies and practices that disproportionately limit opportunity and assign burden to groups based on race, age, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, religion, or disability.

- **Planning for social equity means recognizing planning practices that have had a disparate impact on certain communities and actively working with affected residents to create better communities for all.** (APA.org)

- **Equity** means “providing resources according to **need** to help diverse populations achieve their highest state of health and other functioning. Equity is an ongoing process of assessing needs, **correcting historical inequities**, and creating conditions for optimal outcomes by members of all social identity groups,” (APA.org)
- **Diversity** involves including, understanding and valuing differences in individual and group characteristics such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, age, (dis)ability status, and sexual orientation,” (APA.org)
- **Inclusion:** an environment that offers affirmation, celebration, and appreciation of different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences, thus allowing all individuals to bring in their whole selves (and all their identities) and to demonstrate their strengths and capacity
- More on inclusive language guidelines at the [American Planning Association](#)

Livable Communities and Placemaking

“A **livable community** is a place where people of all ages and abilities can thrive, with access to appropriate and affordable housing and transit, and close proximity to necessary and recreational services including health care, shopping, outdoor spaces, and gathering places

- Vermont League of Cities & Towns



Source: Vermont League of Cities and Towns

Cultivating public spaces in which to gather, socialize, and engage with others is an integral part of a **livable community**.

“**Placemaking** is about strengthening the connection between people and the places they share by re-inventing and re-engaging with public spaces so they are once again the central focus of public life.” (VLCT)

The most successful placemaking projects put people at the forefront of creating change in their community.

Placemaking and Vermont's Tourism, Outdoor Recreation, and Creative Economy

Why do people want to live and visit Vermont?

What are we already doing right?

Village greens, outdoor markets, grange halls, fairgrounds, main streets, skating ponds, community gardens, walking trails, and fishing docks are examples of public places Vermonters have enjoyed for centuries.

These places and experiences provide Vermonters with meaningful opportunities to connect with one another, share ideas, recreate, grow food, share a meal, shop, or simply rest and enjoy the unique sights and sounds around them.

Source: Better Places Toolkit



Arts and Culture Montpelier, Vermont



Beautifying and Greening Waterbury, Vermont



Recreation and Physical Activity St. Albans, Vermont



Community Events Braintree, Vermont



Access to Local Food Brattleboro, Vermont



Street Improvements Bradford, Vermont

How to get started

- Energy
 - In this case energy is including ideas, creativity, and time
 - These are necessary to take an idea from a thought to a project
- Organization
 - Every initiative needs a point-person or group
 - This keeps the ball moving and ensures participation from community members
 - Communication: use town listservs, Front Porch Forum, Facebook, and Instagram to gather community interest and engagement
 - For help with organizing your community, look to your local Planning Commission, Historical Society, and Selectboard, as well as your Regional Planning Commission and Regional Development Corporation, the Vermont Council on Rural Development, Preservation Trust Vermont, and so on. If you have an idea that involves the creative economy (and it probably does!) find the Zone agent with the Vermont Creative Network for your region.
- Funding
 - Downtown and Village designation programs
 - Local, municipal, state, national grant opportunities
 - Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts

Free Resources for Placemaking

“Do-it-yourself community projects ... all have one ingredient in common: they involve community members working together to bring attention to overlooked spaces by addressing neighborhood issues or demonstrating desired improvements within a public or sometimes private space,” (Vermont League of Cities & Towns)

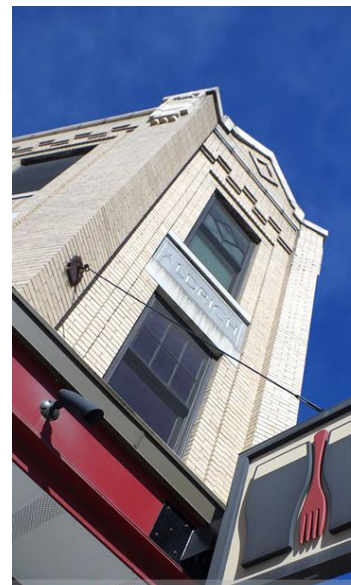


- [Better Places](#)
 - Toolkit (see left)
 - Checklists for community engagement
 - Better Places Program Funding opportunities
- [DIY Community Cookbook](#) by [Community Workshop LLC](#) and [AARP Vermont](#)
 - See also AARP Vermont Community Challenge on Slide 10)
- [Preservation Trust of Vermont](#)

Image: Better Places Toolkit

Funding Opportunities for Community Projects

- Downtown and Village Designation
 - Why is this designation important for placemaking and livable communities?
 - ***Opportunities for funding and tax credits***
 - Once designated, the community is eligible for historic tax credits for interior and exterior building improvements, capital transportation improvement projects, priority consideration for other state grants (ACCD, VTrans), traffic calming and guide signs for tourism, and more.
 - How to do it
 - Contact the Dept of Housing and Community Development
 - Schedule pre-application meeting with DHCD in your town
 - Build support by reaching out to local merchants, chamber of commerce, regional planning commission, selectboards, etc
 - Write the application (your RPC can assist you) and submit
 - Present the application to the Downtown Board



Downtown Designation Program

Application Guidelines



Department of Housing
and Community Development
Community Planning + Revitalization
October 2019

 **VERMONT**
AGENCY OF COMMERCE & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Source: State of Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

More funding: community grants and TIF

- Community grants through AARP Vermont
 - AARP Community Challenge
 - The [AARP Community Challenge](#) provides small grants to fund quick-action projects that can help communities become more livable for people of all ages.
 - Three Types:
 - The Flagship Grant for creating vibrant public places that improve parks, open space, and access to amenities
 - Capacity building micro-grants for walkability and community gardens
 - Demonstration grant for systems change in terms of improved transit and accessory dwelling unit design competitions
- Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
 - This is a tool that municipalities can use to finance public infrastructure improvement.
 - Incur debt to finance public infrastructure
 - Pay back debt with tax revenue from improvements
 - Apply for designated TIF District status through the Vermont Economic Progress Council
 - More on this in next slide

Success Stories: White River Junction

Status: Unincorporated Village of the Town of Hartford, VT

Population: 2,000

Year TIF was approved: 2011



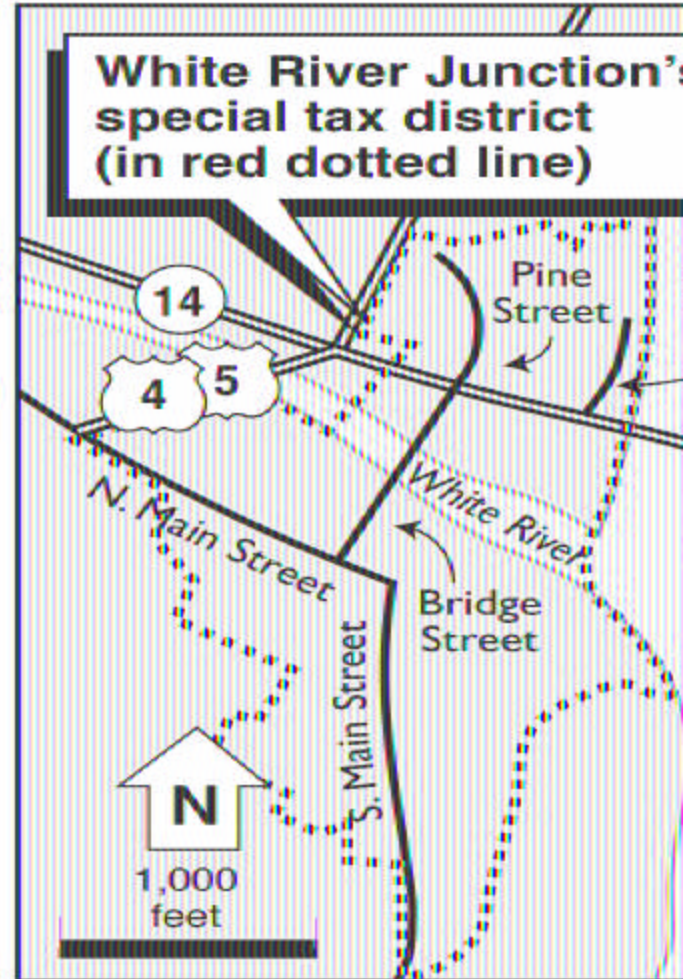
Source: 2012
<https://www.mynbc5.com/article/tif-explained-invigorating-development-in-white-river-junction-1/3303538>



Source: 2021 <https://weirdandwonderful.substack.com/p/i-like-you-upper-valley-a-tale-in>

Success Stories: White River Junction (Continued)

- Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District
 - The idea of a TIF district is that a town borrows money to build infrastructure, which helps to spur development and increase tax revenues, with the increase in tax revenues used to pay off the debt.
 - Year Created: 2011
 - In 2016, The Villages were being built, Trailbreak was being built, Tuckerbox expanded, and Piecemeal Pies opened.
 - Selectboard members and local developers combined with the town of Hartford and additional community support made this possible.



Success Stories: Rutland

In 2020, the City of Rutland started transforming Center Street into a safer, greener, more vibrant place to walk, shop, and dine.

- Center Street is the heart of downtown and is home to retail shops, restaurants, offices, services, and the Paramount Theater. Rutland City is one of Vermont's largest cities with a population near 16,000.
- Center street offers residents and visitors walkable connections to parks, a farmers' market, a grocery store, and other retail stores.
- [View the Center Street Scoping Study](#)



Source: Rutland Center Street Scoping, City of Rutland, Rutland Planning Commission, Rutland Redevelopment Authority, Downtown Rutland Partnership, Vermont Agency of Transportation, DuBois and King,

Success Stories: Rupert's Sheldon Store Cafe

- Rupert, VT in Bennington County has a population of under 800 residents.
- There was no gathering place in town, so community members gathered together with municipal and state assistance, and the Rupert Village Trust was born.
- The Rupert Village Trust leases space to an independent café operator, schedules events and programs, and implements a comprehensive marketing plan to assure that the café has the best possible chance of long-term success.



Source: <https://rupertvillagetrust.aplos.org/>



Source: <https://ptvermont.org/the-sheldon-store-project-rupert/>

- The Sheldon Store has been a part of Rupert's community and history since it was first opened as the Farmers' Exchange and the Grange Hall in the late 1800's. By applying for a Bruhn Revitalization Grant, they were awarded: \$100,000.
- The grant will support structural and roof repairs on the main building and porch.
- Bringing it back to life as a community center and café will make it possible to showcase this history to the community and visitors alike, as well as add economic activity to an area currently without any stores or cafes.

Summary

- Talk to your **neighbors, friends, community members** about an opportunity with a public or private space in your town or village
- Loop in Selectboard members and Planning Commission members, and your local Regional Planning Commission and Regional Development Corporation
- Explore types of funding
 - Is your town or village a designated Village Center or Downtown?
 - What grants (local, state, national) are you eligible for?
 - Are you in a TIF District and if not, would that be possible for your region?
- **Don't give up!**

Q&A

If I don't have an answer, I will help you find it!

Recommendations for a town that has no town staff?

- A shared town person/manager
-

Thank you!

For additional questions, email masbury@trorc.org

Links to resources

Full resources document:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1C4r1h8FMmRAwrDHMJjT6uEJ6SufuWI94g4iG6tcli_U/edit?usp=sharing

By Slide:

Slide 3:

1. Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission - <https://www.trorc.org/about/>
2. Vermont Creative Network - <https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/vermont-creative-network/vcn-about>
3. 3CVT (Cornerstone Creative Community) - <https://www.ecvedd.org/3cvt/>

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2. American Planning Association - <https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>
3. <https://www.planning.org/knowledgebase/equity/>
4. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/diversity-activities-report.pdf>

Links to resources continued

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2. Community Workshop, & AARP Vermont. (n.d.). DIY Community cookbook. Retrieved March 1, 2023, from <https://www.communityworkshopllc.com/diy-community-cookbook>

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 - a. *The Better Places Toolkit was created by the DHCD Better Places team: Claire Tebbs, Richard Amore, and Gary Holloway with vital support from Jenni Lavoie and Jackie Cassino. We are forever grateful to the time and expertise of the Better Places partners who reviewed and provided critical feedback on the toolkit, including Michele Bailey, Vermont Arts Council, Kelly Stoddard Poor, AARP-VT, Suzanne Kelley, Vermont Department of Health, Sarah Waring (formerly) and Kate McCarthy, Vermont Community Foundation, and Jonathan Berk, Ebrahim Varachia, and Camryn Greer, Patronicity. Toolkit illustrations are by Juhey Kim, DHCD Intern 2019-2020. The Three Pillars of Placemaking concept is credited to Co Design Studio, offering research on best-practices in placemaking, free placemaking guides, and a placemaking dictionary. This is a living document and will grow alongside the Better Places Program and you, Vermont Placemakers across the state. Your feedback on this toolkit, and how it can be adapted to reflect your work and meet your needs is important to us. Connect with us anytime.

Slide 7:

1. Asbury, M. Planner and Zone Agent. 128 King Farm Rd, Woodstock, VT 05091. 802-457-3188 ext 3014, masbury@trorc.org

Links to resources continued

Slide 8:

1. Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Vermont Community Foundation (VCF), Vermont Department of Health (VDH), & Patronicity. (2023, February). *Chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/Better-Places/CPR-Better-Places-Toolkit.pdf* [PDF]. One National Life Drive Deane C. Davis Building, 6th Floor Montpelier, VT
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Links to resources continued

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4. Hongoltz-Hetling, M. (2016, December 13). Planners consider upgrades to WRJ. Retrieved March 3, 2023, from <https://www.vnews.com/Hartford-Selectboard-considers-new-White-River-Junction-infrastructure-projects-6845449>

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