

CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
Regional Plan Committee

Draft Minutes
February 2, 2021

4:00 – 5:30 pm

Via GoTo Meeting, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission
29 Main Street, Suite 4, Montpelier, VT 05602

Committee Members:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Dara Torre, Chair
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Julie Potter, Vice Chair
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Laura Hill-Eubanks
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ron Krauth
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marcella Dent

Berlin Representatives: Tom Badowski, Interim Town Administrator; Karla Nuissl, Berlin PC; Paul Simon, NTC Consultant
Staff: Clare Rock, Bonnie Waninger, Elena Juodisius

Call to Order, Adjustments to the Agenda

D Torre opened the meeting at 4:05pm. There were no adjustments to the agenda.

Regional Review: Berlin New Town Center (NTC) Application - Guests Karla Nuissl, Planning Commission Chair and Tom Badowski, Assistant Town Manager - Formal Regional Plan Conformance review of the New Town Center Application and consideration of comments.

T Badowski started to describe the revised concept plan as contained in the materials packet and noted some of the changes since the plan was last presented to the CVRPC Board on October 13, 2020. The most significant changes included a revised west entrance and the addition of 3 new buildings. P Simon took over the presentation and further described the concept plan and highlighted various details as labeled on the plan.

The Town did work with a wetlands specialist to further delineate the extent of the wetlands on the site and those are labeled on the plan. A large driver of the proposal is to have "Priority Housing" (as defined by Act 250) sited within the New Town Center to ensure much needed affordable housing is developed within the designated area. The plan also envisions new small retail spaces in addition the existing retail at the mall. To the south of the mall building, three residential buildings are proposed to face the green along with some retail across the street. Moving eastward, a medical clinic with some additional medical buildings are sited and will be linked by a pedestrian spine.

CVMC, a project partner promoted the need for address a safety concern and suggested a pedestrian bridge to link the existing hospital across Fisher Road to the new medical buildings located in the New Town Center.

T Badowski stated this a concept plan and the town is not seeking permits to build the buildings proposed on the plan, rather Berlin is relying on the partners to develop, and buildings may change

1 shape and size. He further stated the plan is a template, and Berlin supports the concept of housing as
2 the anchor of new development in the NTC. T Badowski acknowledges there has been some criticism
3 about the low level of new development in the mall parking lot. K NuiSSL added all the partners have
4 been involved in the approval of the concept plan.

5
6 Staff asked about the regulatory components the town has or will invest in to support the realization of
7 the concept plan. And what types of investment the town would invest in the next 5 to 10 years. The
8 Town noted the updates to the water system, updates to the town plan, and changes to zoning
9 regulations, to include a level of form based code. The town has spent approx. \$9 million in
10 infrastructure updates including upgrades to the wastewater infrastructure. The SB has adopted the
11 official map which depicts where development should occur based upon water and waste water service.
12 The Town recognizes that the work now really begins, once the designation is in place.

13
14 The Town will consider a TIFF district in the proposed designated area as a method to fund
15 infrastructure and has adopted a CIP. The town may also consider a possible option tax to help pay for
16 further infrastructure, such as sidewalks roads, and etc. T Badowski referenced the VLCT letter of
17 support and believes that really encapsulates the spirit and intent of the NTC project.

18
19 Staff summarized some of the contents of the memo which was included in the meeting packet. Staff
20 indicated that the overall initial concept of the NTC was found to be in conformance with the Regional
21 Plan when the RPC approved the town plan. Upon the submission of the actual detailed NTC proposal
22 this provides the opportunity to look more closely at the proposal and confirm conformance. Staff raised
23 the issue of the size of the shopping complex and whether new retail development at the NTC would or
24 should be considered part of the shopping complex. If so then the additional of new retail square
25 footage may not be in conformance, as the scale of an expanded shopping center has been identified to
26 better suited for our defined Regional Centers (Montpelier and Barre City.)

27
28 Discussion of the mall and its current status of conformance followed. It was generally agreed that the
29 mall is a pre existing condition. Committee members added the NTC plan is about bringing a
30 neighborhood to a shopping mall and this was a positive improvement to the area. If additional box
31 store were to be proposed this may be a different situation. Berlin representatives added that the mall
32 square footage would likely transition away from all retail as the changing nature of commercial and
33 desired commercial space would need to adapt and changing preferences. A committee member
34 expressed concern about the proposed plan doesn't look like a traditional downtown. Another member
35 recognizes the dynamic nature of the mall in current times and suggests an ongoing partnership
36 between the RPC and the Town as the area evolves and development does occur.

37
38 Further discussion about the wetlands followed, and indication that the Regional Plan promoted
39 protection of these resources. P Simon stated that the impacts are minimal and the need to balance the
40 form of the built environment with the many constraints of the site. The wetland area between RT 62
41 and the mall is already a heavily impacted wetland and the plan proposes to fix some broken wetland
42 areas and incorporate some stormwater management techniques which should help the integrity of
43 those wetlands.

44
45 The committee discussed the Towns readiness for entering the program, and one committee member
46 expressed concern about whether the town was ready. T Badowski suggested S Burlington didn't start
47 building until 12 years after getting designation. And that Berlin is a small town with fewer resources
48 and needs the benefits of the program in order to fulfill the vision.

1 Continued discussion included the following areas: Committee member noted the need to promote
2 affordable housing and this is another component of conformance with the plan (which was not in the
3 identified in the staff memo.) Staff inquired about the orientation of the block forms in the top node,
4 and questioned the position of the parking areas and suggested this may raise questions about whether
5 this form does display characteristics of a traditional downtown.
6

7 Berlin representative left the meeting and the committee continued discussions. Further conversation
8 touched upon how this proposal is a different than an Act 250 application as the RPC is evaluating a
9 permit application rather it is a plan. There was general recognition that the NTC plan conforms with the
10 plan on the whole, yet there are aspects which should be evaluated further in light of some RPC policies
11 such as those regarding wetlands.
12

13 The committee also discussed about whether it should be shovel ready, and questioned what type of
14 program should the New Town Center Program be. If towns are expected to as ready as South
15 Burlington then it is likely only a designation program for Chittenden County.
16

17 The committee decided to meet again and requested staff to draft a letter of conformance/support for
18 the committee to review and react to and to aid in the deliberations. Staff will send out an email polling
19 members on availability for another meeting.
20

21 **Committee Process - Review and approve attached 2020 Draft Rules of Procedure (ROP)**

22 J Potter made a motion to recommend the ROP to be approved by the Board, seconded by L Hill-Eubanks.
23 All in favor. Motion carried.
24

25 **Approval Minutes - Consider approval of the March 17, 2020 meeting minutes.**

26 The wrong minutes were included in the packet and therefore not acted upon.
27

28 **Adjournment**

29 J Potter made a motion to adjourn, seconded by L Hill-Eubanks. All in favor. Motion carried.
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31

Next meeting Date: TBD