

# CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION



November 18, 2010

William Fraser  
City Manager  
City of Montpelier  
City Hall  
Montpelier, VT 05602

Dear Bill,

Congratulations to your municipality and planning commission! The 2010 Master Plan has been approved and the City's planning process has been confirmed by CVRPC as outlined in statute. I have enclosed the resolution that was adopted approving your municipal plan. I've also enclosed a copy of the staff/Committee review of the Plan with their recommendations. We are hopeful that any recommendations made by the Committee will be considered in future editions of the Plan.

We have notified the Department of Housing and Community Affairs that your Plan and planning process have been approved/confirmed according to Title 24 Chapter 117. Confirmation of your planning process means that the municipality is eligible for the next round of municipal planning funds. If you are applying for a municipal planning grant, please be sure to include a copy of the attached resolution in your grant application.

If you have any questions or need further information, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurie".

Laurie Emery  
Office and Grants Manager

Enc

cc D. Borgendale, CVRPC Commissioner  
G. Hallsmith, Director of Planning

# CENTRAL VERMONT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION



## RESOLUTION

**WHEREAS**, the City of Montpelier, Vermont prepared a municipal plan in accordance with Chapter 117 of Title 24 of the Vermont Statutes, and the Regional Planning Commission found that the Municipal Plan meets all the requirements for approval under both the Commission's review process and Section 4350 of Chapter 117;

### **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT**

The Regional Planning Commission concludes that the Municipal Plan:

1. is consistent with the goals established in Section 4302 of the Act;
2. is compatible with the Central Vermont Regional Plan;
3. is compatible with the approved plans of other municipalities in the region;
4. contains all the elements as required in Section 4382 of the Act;

**AND** does hereby **APPROVE** the 2010 City of Montpelier Municipal Plan.. It is noted that when an adopted municipal plan expires, its approval also expires. Recommendations made by the Regional Planning Commission's Review Committee are attached and should be considered when developing the next edition of the Municipal Plan. If the municipality has zoning or other regulatory bylaws or is considering adopting bylaws, it is important that the bylaws are in compliance with the current Municipal Plan.

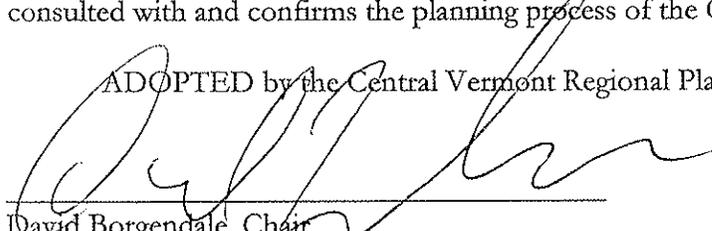
**AND WHEREAS**, Title 24, VSA, Section 4350 requires that CVRPC consult with member municipalities with respect to their planning efforts;

requires that a municipality have a plan approved by its regional planning commission in order to have its planning process confirmed;

and requires that a municipality maintains the use of local funds for local and regional planning;

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that, in compliance with Title 24 VSA Section 4350, CVRPC has consulted with and confirms the planning process of the City of Montpelier.

ADOPTED by the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission at its November 9, 2010 meeting.

  
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David Borgendale, Chair

**Montpelier Municipal Plan**  
**Staff Review and Recommendation**  
October, 2010

**Background:**

The following is a review of the Montpelier City Plan under the provisions and standards of Chapter 117, Section 4350, wherein it is stated “a regional planning commission shall review and approve plans of its member municipalities, when approval is requested and warranted.” Conditions warranting approval include findings that the plan:

- Contains each of the ten elements listed in section 4382 of Chapter 117;
- Is consistent with the thirteen goals established in Section 4302 of Chapter 117.
- (“Substantial progress toward attainment” of these goals is the standard by which consistency is evaluated); and
- Is compatible with the Regional Plan and the approved plans of other municipalities in the Region.

**General Comments:**

CVRPC has approved previous versions of the Montpelier City Plan in 1990, 1995, 2000, and 2005. The Plan before us now is a complete rewrite. At nearly 250 pages, it is dense and ambitious. It is the product of an impressive and unprecedented public input effort involving over 800 residents and stakeholders. In 2007, an effort called “*Envision Montpelier*” was launched for the purposes of directing this campaign. Through the course of the Plan’s development this group held monthly stakeholders meetings to garner public input. The City also established five citizen committees (*Economics and Livelihoods, Governance, Infrastructure and the Built Environment, Natural Environment, and Social and Human Development*) to work on specific sections of the Plan. Other outreach efforts included a statistically valid citizen’s survey, on-line participation, and other public meetings. The Plan strives to continue to make planning a democratic process in the City, as it contains numerous strategies for future input, feedback and monitoring.

The result of this process was a Plan of great complexity and uniqueness. It has gained international attention, in part for its long- term focus (50 years) and attention to sustainability. It is comprehensive and integrated, addressing not only the dictates of Chapter 117 (the Plan contains a helpful matrix showing where each statutory requirement is addressed in the document), but issues not usually found in municipal plans (health and wellness, food, and restorative justice, for example).

Montpelier’s recently designated Growth Center is the centerpiece of the Plan in many ways. This area is the focal point for many of the City’s strategies for commercial/civic development, and particularly for residential growth. In fact, it was conceived of primarily as a residential growth center and is a critical part of the City’s effort to reverse the population decline and housing shortages of recent decades. The Plan designates the growth center as the “receiving

the street network. Maps for both the motorized and non-motorized transportation network appear on pages 87 and 88, respectively.

**4. A utility and facility plan consisting of a map and statement of present and prospective community facilities and public utilities...**

Utility and facility planning are addressed primarily in Chapter 3 of the Plan (“*Natural Resources*”) wherein public sewer and water systems and solid waste management are addressed, and Chapter 4 (“*Infrastructure and Built Environment*”) which discusses the infrastructural needs for future neighborhoods. In addition, Chapter 7 (“*Social and Human Development*”) addresses emergency services (fire, police, and emergency management), health services and public facilities. A map of the City’s infrastructure and facilities is provided on page 35.

**5. A statement of policies on the preservation of rare and irreplaceable natural areas, scenic and historic features and resources.**

Chapter 3 “*Natural Environment*” contains numerous goals, targets, and strategies designed to protect Montpelier’s natural resources. Historic features are addressed largely in Chapter 4, which contains a section titled “*Architectural History and Design*” (pages 79-85). Natural and historic resources are also addressed peripherally in other parts of the Plan. The Plan contains numerous maps depicting its natural resource base, including: *Conservation Lands, Biodiversity Conservation Areas, Important Views and Vistas, Wildlife Habitat, Wetlands and Waterbodies, and Natural Communities*.

**6. An educational facilities plan consisting of a map and statement of present and projected uses and the local public school system.**

Educational resources and facilities are covered extensively in Chapter 7 (“*Social and Human Development*”) and Chapter 5 (“*Economics and Livelihoods*”) of the Plan. These sections contain information on public facilities, enrollment trends, private institutions, and adult education programs. Goals, targets and policies relating to education and childcare appear on pages 217 - 222. School sites are displayed on a *Community Facilities* map, referred to above.

**7. A recommended program for the implementation of the development plan.**

Every chapter of the Plan contains a set of goals, targets and strategies intended to implement the City’s vision. Responsible parties are identified to help carry out specific action steps. Furthermore, the Plan contains an entire section devoted to a discussion of the methods by which the Plan will be implemented (“*Implementing the Master Plan*”, pages 236-238). This section explains that the document will be used to guide local decision making (including public spending) and help Montpelier participate effectively in regulatory processes, including Act 250.

## The Goals:

### **1. To plan development so as to maintain the historic settlement pattern of compact village and urban centers separated by rural countryside.**

The City's commitment to the implementation of its newly designated Growth Center is a strong indicator of its desire for an overall land use pattern characterized by a compact urban center separated by rural countryside. The Plan states that the City will "*promote high density development within the Growth Center*" by increasing allowable densities and even enforcing "*minimum density*" requirements (page 134). The Plan strive to maintain lower densities, conserve important resource lands, and maintain its existing parks and conserved lands outside of the Growth Center (see Goals 5 and 6). The Plan also recognizes that Montpelier's successful implementation of a Growth Center (and the new housing choices it could generate) could reduce development pressures on neighboring rural towns.

### **2. To provide a strong and diverse economy that provides satisfying and rewarding job opportunities and that maintains high environmental standards, and to expand economic opportunities in areas with high unemployment or low per capita incomes.**

Despite the fact that Montpelier's percentage of total jobs within the region is declining slightly, it is still *the* job center of Washington County, hosting more than twice as many jobs (Just over 10,000) than any other municipality. The Plan contains a detailed and comprehensive chapter on the local economy ("*Economics and Livelihoods*", pages 146 - 180) which establishes policies designed to maintain an economy that is strong, diverse, vibrant and sustainable. This section addresses current and future employment statistics, green jobs, the "creative economy", income, childcare, adult education, local food production, processing and distribution, and even alternative currencies. It strives to "*meet human needs*" and "*promote an entrepreneurial spirit.*" Once again, the City's Growth Center is a critical piece of its vision for the local economy. A few of the specific strategies offered in the Plan include:

- \* Creation of jobs through the implementation of Biomass District Energy Project (see Goal #7)
- \* Policies for local purchasing and investment
- \* Creation of a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district for infrastructure investment within the Growth Center
- \* Providing incubator space, tax incentives and loans programs for new and expanding business
- \* Revising and streamline regulatory review for commercial uses in the downtown
- \* Redeveloping underutilized properties, including brownfields

### **3. To broaden educational access to educational and vocational training opportunities to ensure the full realization of the abilities of all Vermonters.**

The Plan states that "*Montpelier is a learning community where people share questions and experiment with ideas. Accessible learning opportunities support a life-long process that fosters*

**6. To maintain and improve the quality of air, water, wildlife and land resources. In accordance with Act 250.**

The Master plan does a remarkable job identifying the above resources. It contains discussions of, and maps depicting: *Steep Slopes, Ridgelines, Flood Hazard Zones, Endangered Species, Conservation Lands, Biodiversity Conservation Areas, Important Views and Vistas, Wildlife Habitat, Wetlands and Waterbodies, Agricultural soils/parcels, Historic Districts, and Natural Communities* (mostly in Chapter 3).

Furthermore, the document strives to protect the City's most important resources through an array of goals and policies, including, but not limited to:

- \* Control of invasive species
- \* Expanded buffers for flood protection
- \* Density bonuses for development projects that avoid or protect important resources
- \* Alternative transportation initiatives to save energy and reduce emissions (see also Goals 4 and 7)
- \* Promotion of Low Impact Design (LID) techniques, such as green roofs and rain gardens
- \* Reducing waste through "green purchasing", and offering better composting/recycling/reuse options for residents and businesses
- \* Protection of sensitive areas through, fee purchase, voluntary easements, transfer of development rights and resource overlay districts
- \* Focusing new growth and in-fill development in the designated Growth Center (See Goal #1)
- \* Creation of a plan for stormwater management
- \* Attention to urban trees and street trees
- \* Continued use of Design Review in the Historic District (Vermont's largest!)

**7. To encourage the efficient use of energy in the development of the renewable energy resources.**

Montpelier's vision with respect to energy issues is summarized in the following quote:

*"Energy efficiency in Montpelier is maximized. Montpelier's energy is generated by renewable sources of local origin. The delivery of energy is structured to encourage efficient use and affordability."* (page 126).

Among the ideas offered to attain this vision are:

- \* The implementation of a combined heat and power Biomass Energy Plant to serve the downtown core (The City recently received an \$8 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to pursue this project)
- \* Creation of a Clean Energy Assessment District (CEAD), as per Vermont's recent enabling legislation
- \* Development of a wood pellet processing plant within the City
- \* More energy conscious purchasing by the City

The Plan states that the City should “*enact zoning regulations to insure that the extraction of earth resources is in compliance with best practices to minimize harm to all other resources and insure that site restoration is completed so that the aesthetic qualities of the area are preserved and enhanced.*” (page 74).

The Plan’s response to other natural resource questions has already been addressed under Goals 5 and 6.

## **11. To ensure the availability of housing for all Vermonters.**

The Plan states, as one of its primary goals, that “*Montpelier (have) a mix of housing that is affordable, safe, healthy, accessible, eco-efficient, in diverse neighborhoods that enhances the experience of people who live here and fosters community.*” (page 126).

In accordance with this Goal, Montpelier has been actively seeking ways to arrest and reverse the population declines and housing unit slow-downs witnessed over the second half of the last century. Indications suggest that these efforts are yielding results, as the average number of units being created per year jumped from about three during the 90’s to around thirty in the first half of the 2000’s. The City’s continued commitment to “growing” this trend is evidenced in its Growth Center planning and designation. Montpelier conceived of its Growth Center as primarily a residential one, realizing that all of the City’s other goals for a vibrant and flourishing community were dependent upon its resident population. It is the City’s hope that the Growth Center designation will qualify it for Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to expand infrastructure as well as other state and federal community development programs.

The City has designated the Growth Center as the “*preferred receiving area*” for 80% of the 476 new units allocated to the Montpelier under CVRPC’s Housing Distribution Plan over the next ten years (narrative page 116, Map page 117). In fact, the Growth Center has been designed to accommodate an even larger number of unit than this.

Furthermore, and in accordance with the Distribution Plan, the City strives to “*accommodate an average of 50 new housing units per year*”, citywide (page 137). The Plan also contains a map depicting the location of all housing units developed over the five years preceding the Plan (page 118), as required by the CVRPC Distribution Plan .

These ambitious goals for the creation of new housing are not just idle talk. The Plan contains numerous strategies and action steps to help bring them to fruition. A very small sample includes:

- \* Maintaing the City’s Housing Trust Fund for affordable housing
- \* Reducing sewer and water hookup fees for accessory apartments
- \* Revising zoning to make it less cumbersome for homeowners to add rental units and for the creation of mixed use projects
- \* Reducing density requirements and considering “maximum lot sizes” in the Growth Center

The Montpelier Master Plan has clearly and unequivocally met all the statutory mandates of Chapter 117 required for “approval” of the document by the CVRPC. On that basis alone, the Town Plan Review Committee recommends its approval to the full Commission. In addition, it is important to understand that many of the bold and innovative goals and strategies for housing development and “smart growth” land use principles proposed in this Plan are dependent on the continued good standing of the City’s current State Growth Center designation. As such, any action other than approval would not only defy CVRPC’s statutory responsibility, but jeopardize the implementation of the Master Plan and aspects of the Regional Plan, as well.