

SABIN'S PASTURE

MONTPELIER VERMONT



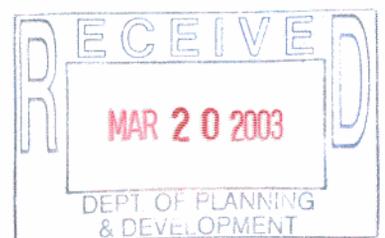
A VISION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

March 2003

Presented by
Central Vermont Community Land Trust

With assistance from
Jean Vissering Landscape Architect

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Argosy Foundation
Vermont Housing & Conservation Board





CENTRAL VERMONT
Community
LAND TRUST

107 N. Main Street • Barre, Vermont 05641
TEL: (802) 476-4493 • FAX: (802) 479-0120 • TTY/TTD: (800) 253-0191
EMAIL: cvclt@together.net • WEB: www.cvclt.org

March 2003

Dear Friends,

The Central Vermont Community Land Trust's goal is to create and preserve affordable housing opportunities for lower income households in the central Vermont region. We have developed approximately 300 homeownership and rental housing units. Our service area is Washington County and northern Orange County. We also operate the Homeownership Center of Central Vermont and engage in a variety of community development projects. We are a community-based membership organization, with a strong commitment to broad-based participation in development decisions.

Over the last year, the Central Vermont Community Land Trust (CVCLT) has worked with other organizations and concerned Montpelier residents to see if we could arrive at a proposal for developing Sabin's Pasture that would be acceptable to those interested in conservation of open space, as well as those who wish to address Montpelier's need for new housing.

These discussions occurred in a peculiar context: the land is privately owned and a private developer holds a purchase option. Without site control, we wondered about the usefulness of negotiating a development plan. If we can express a community vision for Sabin's Pasture, but we cannot turn this vision into a reality, why do we keep meeting? We agreed to move this project forward for two reasons. First, the housing advocates and the open space advocates have been embroiled in contentious debates, particularly around changes to Montpelier's zoning regulations. Discussions about the future of Sabin's Pasture became a forum for airing differences of opinion and opening communication between factions. Second, it is our hope that our work *will* influence what actually gets built on Sabin's Pasture. The site plans evolved through numerous community discussions and they reflect a range of interests. We believe that the plan presented in the following pages may have an easier time obtaining permits as a result of this community process.

With funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Argosy Foundation, CVCLT hired landscape architect Jean Vissering to guide the Sabin's Pasture discussions. Representatives from the following organizations participated in these discussions:

- Central Vermont Community Land Trust
- Friends of Sabin's Pasture
- Montpelier Housing Task Force
- Trust For Public Land

The attached narrative and site designs were prepared by Jean based on her research of the site and over the course of numerous meetings with the four organizations. **These materials are not a consensus development plan.** Individuals participating in the discussions

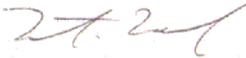
objected to some components of the plans, and the plans have not been formally reviewed by the governing boards of the organizations. However, it is fair to say that Jean's plans do reflect substantive input from housing developers and open space advocates.

CVCLT's guiding principles on the project are as follows:

Development on Sabin's Pasture is appropriate on the lower end of the pasture along Barre Street. The development must reflect Montpelier's existing residential patterns with respect to scale, density, layout, and appearance. Development uses should be mixed and include housing for residents with a broad range of incomes, as well as commercial and retail space. The development must include permanent conservation of a significant portion of the site for open space including the slate quarry, steeply graded areas, and the high meadows. Development of Sabin's pasture creates an opportunity for innovative design and programming. The community must be fully involved in site design.

I believe that the proposal, which is illustrated and described in the attached materials, meets these principles. If you have any feedback on the process or product of the Sabin's Pasture discussions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Martin Hahn
Executive Director

SABIN'S PASTURE SITE ANALYSIS

Sabin's Pasture lies just to the east of Montpelier's more intensive downtown residential neighborhoods. It is roughly bounded on the west by Blanchard Brook, and an undeveloped tract of land owned by Vermont College. Barre Street and a right-of-way owned by the State of Vermont Agency of Transportation's Division of Rail, Air and Public Transportation (RAPT) form the southern boundary of the property. The Elk's Club owns the land east of Sabin's pasture and various properties fronting on streets off of Town Hill Road are to the north.

According to the *Times Argus* newspaper, Sabin's Pasture was part of an "old family farm dating back to the mid-1800s, first dairy, then livestock and sown fields, before all farming operations ceased in the 1960s. The site features a spectacular canyon of a former slate quarry begun by the Sabin Slate Company in 1882 with 35 employees cutting durable black slate that still adorns the roof of the graceful seminary building at nearby Vermont College." (*Times Argus*, March 6, 2001.)

Sabin's Pasture is about 100 acres in size. Roughly half the property remains as open meadows, and the remaining woodlands of mixed deciduous and coniferous species, generally cover the steeper portions of the property. There are indications of high water table (wetland plant species) along the northern portions of the Blanchard Brook valley. The property was not inventoried as part of Montpelier's Open Space Study, but it is likely that the diversity vegetative types on the property provides excellent wildlife habitat. Blanchard Brook is an intermittent stream and is routed through underground culverts on the lower portions of the property. Sabin's Pasture rises from an elevation along Barre Street of about 547, to a high point of nearly 790 feet in elevation. Much of the land is very steep. Slopes over 20% are shown on the site analysis map. An old stone quarry has vertical sides up to 60 feet high presenting safety and liability concerns.

Although the property is now posted with "No Trespassing" signs, the Zorzi family generously allowed people to enter the property for many years, and there are abundant signs of use. Numerous footpaths enter and cross the property. From several points in the higher open meadows there are spectacular views especially to the west where Camel's Hump, College Hall, and the Capitol Dome form three compelling focal points. Views to the south and southeast are less dramatic. Foreground development along Barre and River Streets is mixed, and much of the commercial and industrial uses are unsightly.



People have used Sabin's Pasture for walking, picnics, and cross-country skiing. The west-facing hill sloping toward Blanchard Brook has been a popular sledding hill. An old road from the lower meadows off Barre Street extends up into the woodlands to the northeast. From there, informal paths extend to the Elk's Club land, with the potential of connecting all the way to the trail system at U-32 Jr./Sr. High School. The railroad right-of-way owned by the Vermont Agency of Transportation's Rail, Air and Public Transportation Division is slated for development as a recreation path that will become part of the Cross Vermont Trail.

In addition to Sabin's Pasture's open space and recreational value, it has substantial real estate development value. Montpelier's Master Plan identifies the site as a location for growth, as it is one of the few remaining land parcels within the City's boundaries that remains available for building new housing. According to the Montpelier Housing Task Force, the City continues to experience a net loss of housing units (through conversion of properties to non-residential uses and of multi-family properties to single-family homes). Housing prices are escalating and local residents are priced out of the market. Some see Sabin's Pasture as an opportunity to respond to Montpelier's housing crisis.

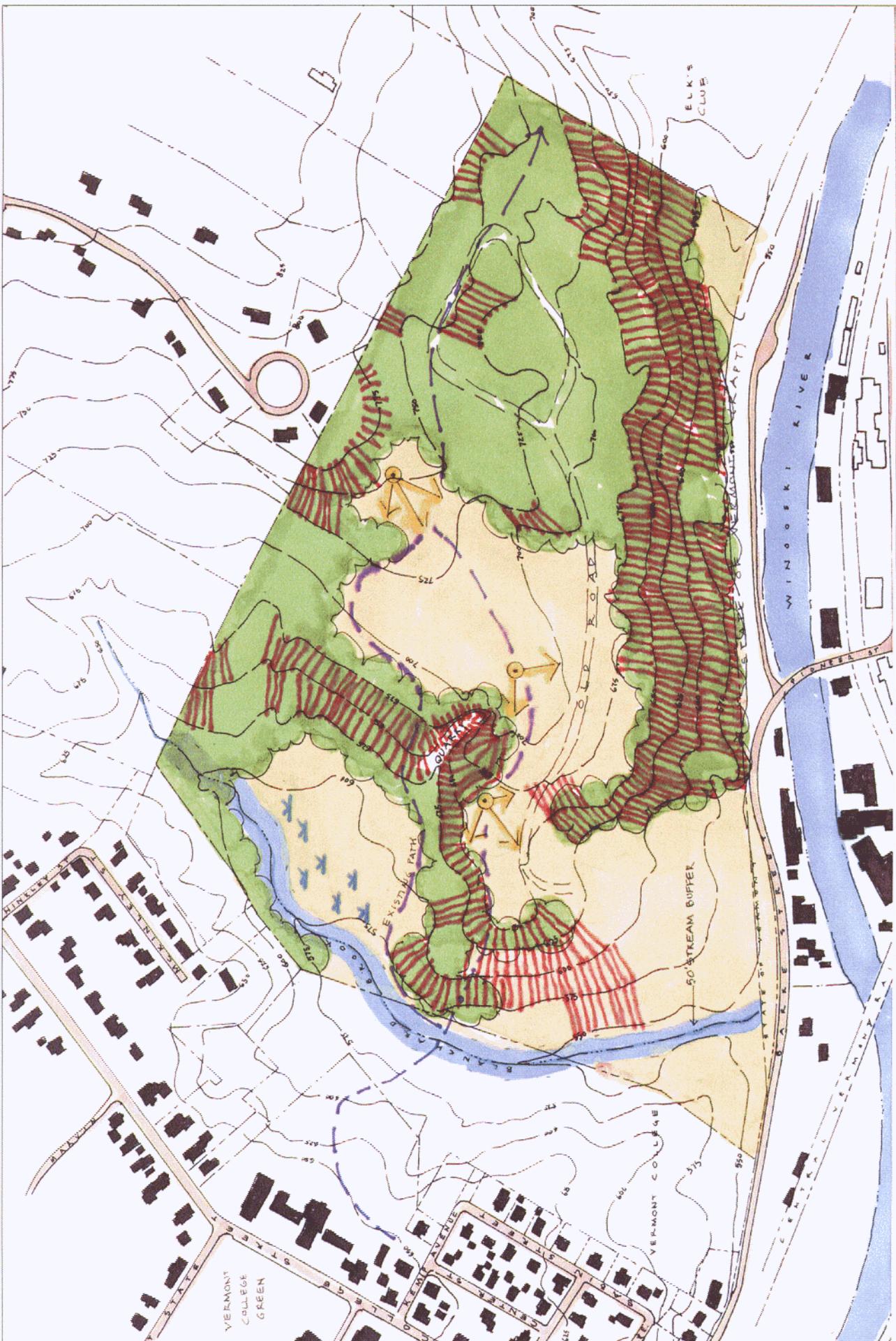
SABIN'S PASTURE

MONTPELIER VERMONT

SITE ANALYSIS

CENTRAL VERMONT COMMUNITY LAND TRUST
 JEAN VISSERING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

SLOPES >20%
 VIEWPOINT



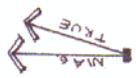
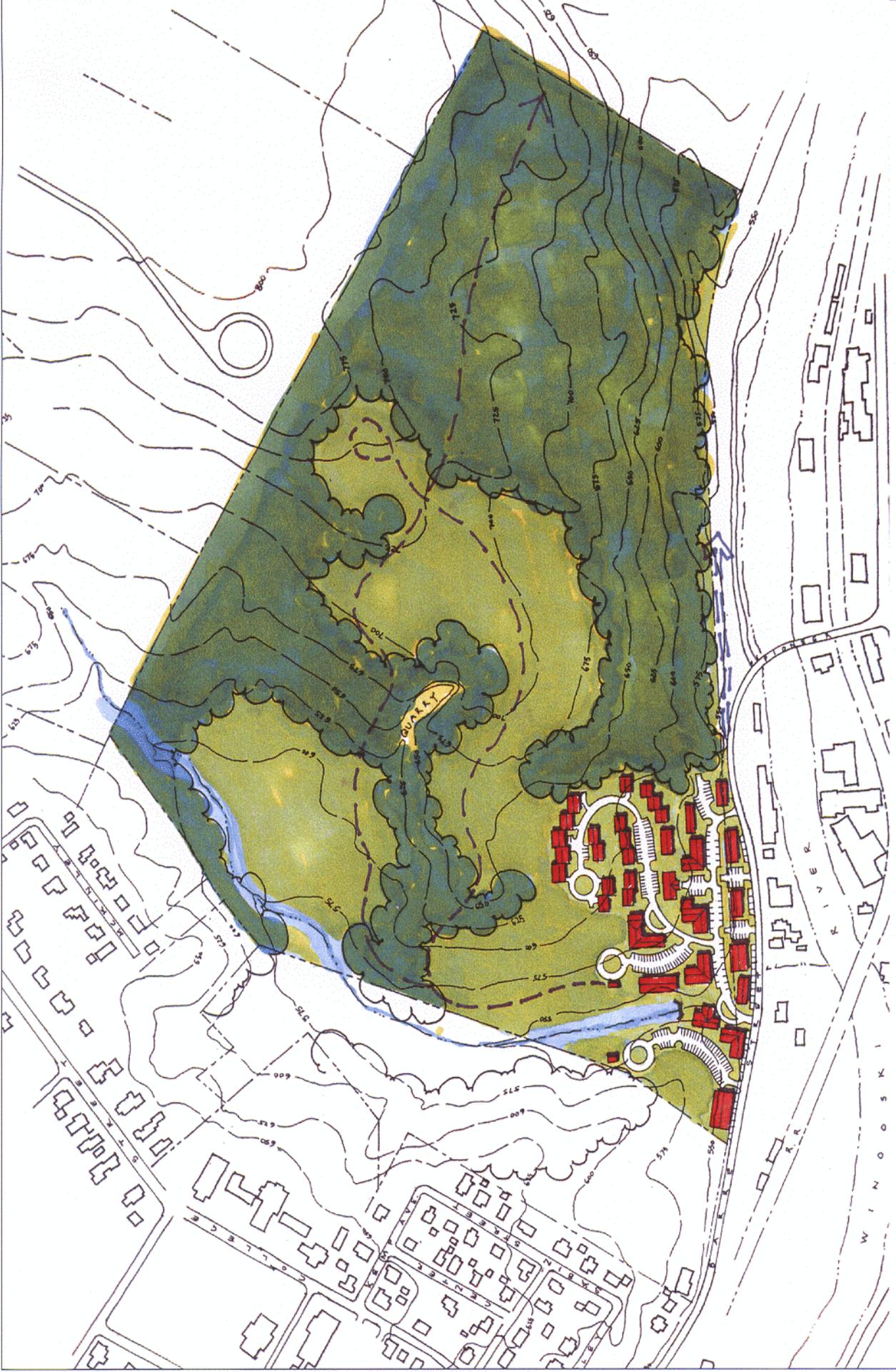
SABIN'S PASTURE

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Over the next several pages we will describe and illustrate a design for a mixed-use project on Sabin's pasture that incorporates many principles of "smart growth". The project would protect about 85 acres of valuable open space yet provide approximately 125 new housing units, 10 office units, and 5 commercial units. About 50% of the housing units would be affordable to households with low and moderate incomes. The project would consist of about six to seven three story buildings fronting along Barre Street. These buildings would be close to the street separated only by a sidewalk and a small green space about ten feet wide. Parking along Barre Street would be in parallel parking spaces and three small to medium-sized parking lots. Due to the slope of the land, the buildings would be built into the slope with access from the upper terrace to the second floor level. A one-way street would parallel Barre Street. Buildings at this level would be reduced in height to mostly two stories, but with a similar close relationship to the street and sidewalk. The steep slope will require a winding access road to upper residential areas, but buildings would have a consistent orientation to the street so that the development appears unified and in character with other nearby older residential neighborhoods.

Units are calculated based on an average size of 1200 square feet with an additional 300 square feet per unit for hallways and stairs, or a total of 1500 square feet per unit. The plan shows 23 new buildings on the site and a total building footprint of 103,835 square feet. Parking is calculated on 1.5-spaces/residential units, and 1.5 spaces per 400 square feet of office or commercial space. There are a total of 251 parking spaces and 2,150 linear feet of roadway. The cul-de-sacs add another 942 feet of roadway (calculated as a circle with a circumference of 314 feet, and a radius of 50 feet), sufficient for fire trucks and other large vehicles to turn around.

We have assumed in this design proposal that the State of Vermont right-of-way would be relinquished (we have had preliminary indications that this is possible). We feel that there are significant benefits to the project fronting directly on Barre Street. It would take advantage of reasonable slopes, have a more intimate and accessible relationship to the street, and allow the development to be located lower down on the slopes. We realize that this option will require finding an alternate route for the Cross Vermont Trail in this location.



SCALE: 1" = 400'

CENTRAL VERMONT COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

JEAN VISSERING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

SABIN'S PASTURE
 MONTPELIER VERMONT
CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

SABIN'S PASTURE

MONTPELIER VERMONT

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS PLAN

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 JEAN VISSERING LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



SABIN'S PASTURE

DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: Maximize development on the lower slopes off Barre Street in order to reduce the impact on the land and to preserve as much open space as possible.

- Development will be concentrated on the flatter and lower slopes near Barre Street. (Meeting this goal requires development within the Agency of Transportation's right-of-way. Preliminary discussions indicate that the State is willing to consider relinquishing the right-of-way.)
- Concentrating development will require buildings to be built into slopes, and the use of retaining walls to stabilize steep slopes.
- Some buildings will have entrances on the first floor from below, and to the second floor from above.
- On-street parking and one-way roadways will create an efficient use of space as well as a pattern that is typical of an urban village.
- Concentrating development will minimize roadways and provide a pedestrian scaled development that is similar in organization to nearby residential and mixed-use areas.
- Sufficient green space around buildings must be provided in order to absorb runoff from the steep hillsides behind the development.

Goal: Provide a mix of low, moderate and high income housing to ease Montpelier's housing demand.

- Provide approximately 125 housing units, 50% of which will be affordable to low to moderate-income households.
- Provide a mix of housing types including rental apartments and condominiums; with the possibility of attached single-family units with garages.
- Units along Barre Street may be larger and up to three stories in height; units will decrease in size and height to two stories. The uppermost units will be further reduced in height to one-and-a-half stories.

Goal: Encourage a mixture of uses (approximately 85% residential, 10% office, 5% commercial) in order to provide a more dynamic and traditional neighborhood, and to take advantage of the existing mixed-use character of Barre Street.

- Focus commercial development along Barre Street and on the first floors of three story buildings.
- Encourage neighborhood-focused businesses such as a small variety store, café or restaurant, day care center, medical offices, or Laundromat.
- Offices can be on first and second floors, but preferably within the first two tiers of the development.

Goal: Protect as much contiguous open space as possible.

- The developed area occupies about 12-14 acres of the property leaving approximately 85 acres or about 85% open.
- The protected area includes the most recreationally and visually valuable portions of the property. The high meadows, sledding hill, and northern wetlands are all protected.
- The protected portions of the land could be used as parklands to relieve pressure on Hubbard Park and provide a recreational focus for surrounding neighborhoods and residents of the eastern part of Montpelier.

Goal: Retain the important visual resources of the site, which are identified in the Views and Vistas Study.

- Development is focused near an existing development center of Montpelier. Barre Street is already developed for mixed uses. The proposed development could enhance this part of town.
- The high meadows, important distant views, and recreation areas remain intact.
- Buildings on upper slopes are only one-and-one-half stories in height so that views from the lower hilltop are not blocked.
- The development is adjacent to existing woodlands, which will reduce the apparent scale of the buildings.
- Coniferous tree plantings will soften views of the development from the open space areas.
- Attractive building styles will make foreground views generally more attractive than those that currently exist along Barre Street and River Street.
- Buildings are oriented parallel or perpendicular to the street, a pattern that is typical of Montpelier's older neighborhoods. Although roadways must curve up the steep hillside, the buildings themselves form the dominant visual impression.
- Buildings are similar in scale to buildings in the surrounding areas. El shapes, pitched roofs, and a mostly parallel or perpendicular orientation will make them consistent with older residential neighborhoods close the downtown.
- Buildings will be built into the slope further reducing their apparent scale.
- Parking areas should be largely hidden by tree plantings and by buildings. Their visual impact off site should be minimal.
- Parking lots are broken into numerous smaller lots to minimize their impact.

Goal: Enhance the recreational potential of the site.

- Existing trails, the sledding hill and viewpoints remain intact and could be part of a public park system.
- Two potential park structures are shown on the plan which could include an interpretive and information center, and/or a picnic shelter or concession stand. There is additional parking shown for public use.
- A ridgeline trail system could be established which would parallel and intersect with the Cross Vermont Trail. The potential exists to establish trails that link into the U-32 cross-country trails.

Goal: Use sustainable development practices.

- Minimize the amount of land that is required for development.
- Maximize permeable surfaces that will absorb water runoff. Approximately 5% of the project would consist of impermeable surfaces. Parking areas could be constructed of permeable pavers such as Turf-Block to further reduce the amount of permeable surface area.
- Buildings are oriented to the south for maximum solar gain. The north sides of buildings will be built into slopes and sheltered by tree plantings.
- Plantings on steep slopes and retaining walls will reduce erosion.
- Sidewalks, mixed uses, and a compact development form create a pedestrian friendly environment.
- The project is within walking or biking distance of many services, and would form a potential bus stop should a public transportation system be established.
- The project is within a designated growth center for Montpelier.

Goal: The development should comply with both the City Master Plan and with zoning ordinances.

- This type of development is strongly advocated in the City's Master Plan, given strong demand for housing and limited availability of developable land.
- The design would provide a meaningful amount of additional housing for the city.
- The plan provides adequate parking for the uses and densities proposed.
- The plan should meet the City's fire codes. Cul-de-sacs have a 50-foot turning radius. The total amount of roadway does not exceed the City's limit for dead-end roads without an alternate access road.
- The project should be within the allowable density, even with the changes that were recently proposed to this district.

DESIGN CHALLENGES

Although this design proposal has many benefits, it is not without challenges that will need to be resolved. These include the following:

- The concentration of buildings, roadways and parking areas will require terracing the slope with retaining walls. This will add to the cost of the project, but may be offset by the reduction in roadway.
- The concentration of development also raises questions of surface runoff. Providing a settlement pond on site will be challenging since it is unlikely that Blanchard Brook could be used for that purpose.
- The market for the type of housing and commercial space proposed is less certain than for more common development forms such as single family homes, single-use developments, and box-type industrial/commercial uses.
- The ownership and management of the open space portion of the property will need to be addressed. There are clear benefits to the open space being in public ownership but the cost of management may be an issue. An easement that allows public use could be another alternative.
- The quarry presents a safety and liability issue that must be addressed.
- Although Blanchard Brook is already piped underground through the lower portions of the site, the proposed plan would require that a larger section would be placed underground. Any underground culverts would need to be routed around buildings. Blanchard Brook is an intermittent stream.
- By fronting the development on Barre Street, the right-of-way is no longer available for the recreation trail. Alternative locations would need to be provided such as a bike lane along Barre Street. Alternatively the path might be accommodated along the first tier of streets within the project.

DESIGN OPTIONS

During the discussions with housing and open space advocates a number of design options were brought to the table. These alternatives included developing more and less of the site than is shown on the plan recommended here. A few of these options are discussed below along with the reasons they were rejected. All of the design options considered protected at a minimum the upper meadow areas, the sledding hill and most of the upper slopes around Blanchard Brook. This valley was considered too steep and too wet to be considered for development. While the upper meadows are well suited to development, they are highly valued for their spectacular views, and are extremely visually sensitive.

Maximum Development Option

The upper woodlands to the northeast of the site offer some of the flattest land on the site. We explored the possibility of locating single-family homes on small to medium-sized lots within these woods more or less along the old farm road. While such lots would likely be very saleable, there are two disadvantages to this approach. This option would involve a minimum of 2000 feet of dead-end roadway in order to provide access to the upper woodlands, and there would be no possibility for an alternative access for emergency vehicles. In order to preserve some of the existing woodlands, the development would need to be relatively low in density, an inefficient development pattern and one that would result in a few very high end homes.

Minimum Development Option

While it is possible to place 125 or fewer units very easily and comfortably on the site in a tight, efficient, yet attractive manner, this scale of development would not contribute a great deal in solving Montpelier's housing needs. The proximity of this property to the downtown and to an already developed mixed-use area suggests makes it a logical place to provide a more intensive neighborhood-scaled project.

Project Set Back from State Right-of-Way

The project could be set back from Barre Street leaving the State Transportation Right-of-Way intact. This would allow the recreation trail to be located in front of the project. The disadvantages of this approach would be to create a development pattern that is more suburban in character, rather than one typical of downtown neighborhoods in the vicinity of the project. The land close to Barre Street is a reasonable grade for development, and would work well for a more intimate and accessible project. Commercial uses would likely prefer frontage on Barre Street. Only a small portion of the 50-foot right-of-way would be needed for the recreation path, so that a large greensward would need to be managed in some way. It would have the further effect of requiring development to extend further up the hill.

DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

Number Of Building Units (1500 Square Feet/Unit)			
Residential Units	Office Units	Commercial Units	Total Units
125	15	7	147

Building Location	Building Footprint	Total Floor Area
Barre Street	28,585	85,755
2 nd Tier	29,250	60,000
3 rd Tier	30,000	60,000
4 th Tier	16,000	24,000
Total Square Feet	103,835	229,755

Roadways And Parking			
Roadways	3,092 linear feet including cul-de-sacs		
Parking	68 parallel spaces	183 pull-in spaces	251 total spaces

Developed and Open Space Acreage	
Total Property Acreage	100
Contiguous Open Space	87
Overall Developed Area	13
Approximate acreage of impermeable surface	5