

Montpelier Planning Commission
January 26, 2009
City Council Chambers, City Hall

Subject to Review and Approval

Present: Karen Vogan, Chair; Jesse Moorman, Anne Campbell, Claire Benedict, and Arianna Lewis, Youth Member. Mayor Hooper was also present.
Staff: Gwen Hallsmith, Director of Planning and Community Development.

Call to Order:

Chair Karen Vogan called the meeting of the January 26, 2009 Montpelier Planning Commission to order at 7:06 P.M.

Review of Minutes:

There wasn't a quorum for the minutes.

Montpelier Bikes Recommendations:

Becka Roolf said she is going to ask how many members of the Planning Commission are bicyclists, or at least ride a bike at least in the summer time. Ms. Roolf said they circulated some information with the agenda. The Montpelier Bikes Group was originally formed as a sub-team of the Montpelier Energy Team and originally formed as a little stand alone group at the Energy Town Meeting that the Energy Team hosted in 2007 at National Life. From that meeting came some teams that have gone on to do some specific work, like the District Energy Team. The Montpelier Bikes Group has also been in that category of a group that has continued on and has developed some recommendations. They have some funding through the Mazer Foundation which has enabled her to spend some time looking at things within the city of Montpelier.

There are basically four recommendations they want to bring before the Planning Commission tonight. one has to do with bicycle parking; one has to do with a complete streets resolution which is basically including all modes of transportation in all street projects, even repaving projects; the third is working on developing a Bicycle Master Plan; and the fourth is a potential revision to the sidewalk riding ordinances that the city currently has.

Montpelier Bikes is a bicycling culture in the city of Montpelier for active transportation, personal health, environmental benefits, downtown business support youth mobility, community livability, and pure joy.

Bicycle parking is the first item on their agenda. As you all know, Montpelier does have a fair amount of bicycle parking downtown. A fair amount of it is of older non-recommended rack style so bicycles may not fit in the racks, particularly if they have fenders or a rack on the bike and the bicycles may tend to tip and lean over. Some of the bicycle racks have really narrow bars and they are meant much more for the road bikes from the 70's and not mountain bikes. We have bicycle parking, and the city is to be commended for putting it in a number of different times, but a lot of it is pretty old.

Ms. Roolf showed a picture of modern bike parking that is used in Cambridge, Massachusetts as well as Toronto and a number of other locations. Montpelier Bikes is proposing something pretty similar to that. Then, the inverted "U" racks, which look like an upside down U stuck into the pavement on each end, is like what we have in front of the Coffee Corner, are good because you can lean your bike against them and it provides two points of contact to support the frame and hold the bike up. She showed an

example of a bike rack at the Park and Ride here in Montpelier. That is modern bike parking, and it is one that architects seem to love, partly because you get a lot of spaces for the amount of money you spend. It is actually not preferred type of bike parking because you don't have two points of contact on the frame. If you park your bike there, depending on how lock it, it can tip over, particularly if you are using your bike for transportation and it has stuff on it balancing the frame is really important.

Ms. Vogan inquired about the Dutch bike rack. She asked if they would be recommending that they are separate structures and not something integrated into a meter.

Ms. Roof said one of the things they had been talking about is the idea of putting them on parking meters and they have yet to figure out whether it will totally work out. The concept would be similar. Some cities are actually removing their parking meters and going more toward the meter box system like we have on Stone Cutters Way because they are easier to staff. As cities are removing their parking meters they are taking their old parking meter posts and converting them for bikes.

A member of Montpelier Bikes added that in some cases they want to try to avoid having car drivers getting irate at having to go around bicycles to get onto the sidewalk, particularly if there is an elderly person or disabled person in the car. It's nice to have things separate. When people park their car, close the windows and lock the car, with the exception of some bad neighborhoods in big cities, people don't tend to mess with your car, but if your bike is in a place where it is easily knocked down they tend to get seen as something that is disposable. Often you will come back at the end of the day and your bike will be lying on the ground and people have removed things from it. It's nice to have your bike in a place where it isn't going to be annoying somebody and where it will get knocked over accidentally.

Mr. Moorman said he had a question about the U shaped racks. Is that intended for two bikes per U?

Ms. Roof replied yes, that a bike could go on the other side as well. You can park two bikes on that type of rack.

Ms. Roof said specific detailed location on the sidewalk is something you would be paying attention to in terms of not putting them at the end of a crosswalk so you wouldn't be blocking pedestrian access. That is something that needs to be worked into specific siting.

They did a bicycle parking survey and asked people questions about where do you think it is important to the community to have a bike rack. Then, they asked if they would use the rack in that location. Some people think it is important that we have bicycle parking at all of the transit stops but nobody says they will ever park there. They want to put bike parking where people are going to use it. One exception to that kind of twist is that a lot of people said it is very important to have a bicycle shelter at the Main Street Middle School but apparently not a lot of Middle School students took their survey. There were not very many people saying they would park there, but they still felt it was valuable to the community. They see all of the bikes parked there during the day, and they ride in different types of weather than some adults do.

They also asked about bike shelters and lockers. She showed an example of a bike shelter in Olympia, Washington. She also showed an example of a bicycle locker in Burlington along the bike path near the commuter train station was. Bicycle lockers are usually rented so there needs to be someone who shepherds them. They can be rented by the month or by the day. If they are located in a location like an airport you would want to be able to rent it by the day. If it were in a location where there was a commuter type location you might want to rent it by the month.

Mayor Hooper said the point of the bike shelter is weather protection, and the point of the locker is bike protection.

Mr. Roofl replied yes. She's not sure you would leave her laptop computer, but she certainly would leave a lot of stuff on her bike in a bike shelter that she might otherwise take off when she got to a destination.

Complete streets resolution is a concept that you would accommodate all modes of transportation – pedestrian, motor vehicle, bicycling, transit – as well as accessibility in terms of ADA with all whenever you are doing anything to a street such as repaving it, reconstructing it, or creating a new street. A number of cities, states, and counties across the country have passed a policy that says that they want to do this as part of their transportation projects. It is less expensive to include things from the beginning than it is to retrofit, and it is certainly less expensive to include bicycle accommodation on a street like this than it is to build a separate bike path. She showed an example of a street that is just build for cars, and then the same street if it were reconfigured to make it work for all of the different modes of transit.

A member of the audience said he questions a bike path right next to parallel parking. It's not a good situation.

Ms. Roofl said they have done studies of bike lanes next to parallel parked cars. It has been controversial in the bicycling community because you can get “doored” if the car opens a door in front of you. They actually find that most bicyclists ride further out when they have a bike lane in this situation than they do without a bike lane. She tends to ride far out so a bike lane would hamper her in getting as far out as she can from parked cars. Most bicyclists feel more comfortable being further away from the parked cars when you get “doored.”

Mr. Moorman said when they are retrofitting where is the give to allow the bike path?

Ms. Roofl said they measure carefully and try to figure out where it is going to fit on each individual street.

Ms. Vogan said she was thinking about Barre Street where you can't even drive two cars down the street.

Ms. Roofl said the smallest community that has done this is Desoto, Missouri where there are 6,500 people, and their median income is definitely lower than Montpelier's.

Some different types of treatment that you might provide for bicycling whenever you are looking at retrofitting or accommodating on street versus having a separate bike path are bike lanes, shoulders and sharers. Bike lanes have been around for awhile. She doesn't know when they became officially something you could incorporate according to the national standards. A bike lane consists of a line or stencil with an image of a bicycle, a directional arrow, and usually there is also signage that indicates it is a restricted lane. This is part of the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices. It is accepted throughout the country.

The blue area indicates a conflict zone. The standard for this is now green asphalt, and that was actually based on a study done in Burlington regarding to what color should be used for this because this was handicapped parking. Everything is very standardized for street signs just like stop signs are red.

Ms. Roofl showed an example of a paved shoulder, and the bicycles are actually going downhill and moving pretty fast. This paved shoulder isn't quite wide enough to accommodate the bicycles at speed.

Sharers are new. Sharers indicate bicycle positioning further away from the cars than some bicycles might tend to ride and direction. Wrong way bicycling can be problem. Sharers are a treatment that you can put on a street where there is not enough space for a bike lane. It just indicates that bikes can be here. You could go around and take pictures of cars on the street. This helps bicycles to feel more comfortable riding in the right location further away from parked cars. It helps motorists to know that bicycles can be on that street, and it helps bicyclists to know how to ride the right direction. This is new. They have done studies on it, and it has become fairly well accepted and it is scheduled to become included in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control, which is the traffic engineer's Bible, in the 2009 edition which some people think might come out in early 2010. It's not controversial that it's in there. This will be included. It has passed all of the committees, and the comments they received were well received.

A bike path is a separate thing. It's like what we have along Stone Cutters Way.

A Bicycle Master Plan would be basically figuring out what facility would fit on each street in two different modes. One is going curb to curb with existing pavement and being opportunistic. Some day what do you want there when you finally do a major reconstruction of that street?

The fourth thing is the sidewalk riding ordinances. Currently, the city has an ordinance, which she provided the detail to members of the Planning Commission in handouts that restricts bicycle riding for all ages within the Central Business District. The Montpelier Bikes recommendation is to really tighten that up. They really believe in riding on the sidewalk if you are 5 and with your parents.

Ms. Hallsmith said if she understands her correctly that Montpelier right now has a lot more streets that are prohibited and she is recommending just the ones in red.

Ms. Roolf replied correct.

Mr. Moorman asked if there was any signage.

Ms. Roolf replied there is currently signage, and they think the signage is currently just where the red section is.

Ms. Roolf said as far as bicycle parking the Montpelier Bikes Group based on their survey we asked people where there particularly should be parking and also where they would likely use it themselves. They haven't gone through the fine details saying Library is number 1 and the Library is number 2. They need to figure out if they are going to have parking on the parking meters and if that will work out in terms of space, or if they need to use separate posts.

From a planning perspective what the Planning Commission should know and approve is the concept of putting distributed bicycle parking throughout downtown on sidewalk locations where there is enough space that it doesn't block pedestrian access.

Ms. Vogan inquired about the parking lots.

Ms. Roolf said they certainly could bicycle parking back there. There is bicycle parking in front of City Hall. Generally, putting in a big bike rack is like building a parking garage. Why would you go to the parking garage if there is plenty of street side parking? What they would do is put shelters in some locations where there is enough volume that it would make sense to have a shelter. There are many bike racks in town. They are generally inferior in design and they also are not distributed along the

streetscape. Generally, bicyclists are going to lock their bikes to the closest object they can find, and currently that is often a tree. This is to provide better bike parking.

The other thing they found in their survey is that 80 percent of bicyclists who responded to their survey told them they use cable locks. Cable locks with a conventional meter you can use any meter right now to lock up your bike. That works better with a U lock because if you have a cable lock unless you take the time to back it around you can lift it over the head of the parking meter. This design keeps you from doing that. It's not a super secure bicycle parking design, but they thought it was in keeping with the fact that most people here say they use cable locks which are generally less secure than U locks. She doesn't think there is a lot of concern about bike theft unless you have a really nice bike, in which case you don't want to lock it anywhere outside.

Mayor Hooper said the issue of just having a post unassociated with the meter is that it is one more thing in the sidewalk in terms of snow removal.

Ms. Roof said that is why they are trying to do this if they can confirm it works for everybody.

Mayor Hooper asked how people putting money into the meter feel about that.

Ms. Roof said she had talked to a couple of people. Generally, the bike is in a direction that you don't have so much problem getting to it. She did talk to someone who said they liked the idea of having a home grown solution.

Ms. Vogan asked wouldn't having the bikes off the street and behind the buildings be an extra security measure.

Ms. Roof said generally you will find that people won't use it if you do the big bike lot approach. We have bike parking that is currently in that type of design. The place where people would use it is perhaps if they are long term parker and they want shelter. Unless you can offer shelter or some reason to go there, they are going to park wherever is closest to their destination. This is mostly street side parking to serve people who are going into a local business.

Ms. Benedict said if there is bicycle parking now and people aren't using it, how do you make the leap that people are going to use this bicycle parking? How do you know the problem is the racks?

Ms. Roof said the problem is distribution. This is distributed along the streets. Let's say you are driving your car downtown and there is parking all along the street, but everyone is saying why don't you go park in the parking garage? What is your incentive to do that?

Ms. Vogan asked do they know that people aren't using the bike racks now because of distribution. Is this just an assumption they are making?

Ms. Roof said it is an assumption she is making, but it is an informed assumption and bicycle/pedestrian planners across the country will tell you that is a reason people don't use bike racks. Where is that bike going to be located on the sidewalk versus being locked to a tree? This can often be a problem which is to lock a bike to a railing that is part of a wheelchair ramp going up to a building. That is a place she has been asked not to park on the wheelchair ramp going up to the high school, so instead she parks her bike on the tree next to the front door. There is a bike rack but it is all the way around back and she is attending a meeting at the front door in the auditorium. People park wherever it is closest, especially with a bicycle.

Ms. Roof said the second detailed recommendation is on bike shelters and lockers. There were some specific locations, and the Co-Op was the number one choice with the Main Street Middle School being second. These are places where people tend to ride more in all types of weather. They don't have the funds to do this currently, but the concept is some day they would like to have bike shelters in these locations and think there should be bike lockers at other locations. The ones highlighted are the ones The Montpelier Bikes Group recommended. She would also add a bike shelter at the Library, probably to the existing bike rack.

Mr. Moorman asked if she knew the approximate cost of the bike lockers. Are they made commercially?

Ms. Roof said they were manufactured commercially and they are about \$2,000 a piece.

Mr. Moorman asked if she knew what the rental fee was.

Ms. Roof said she could find out what the fee is. They don't recoup their cost. It takes a long time to pay back a car parking space, too.

Ms. Hallsmith said this is what The Montpelier Bikes Group was chartered to do with the Mazer grant they received from the enVision Montpelier Project. There is money right now in the capital fund to put in bike racks so some of what they are describing they could do as soon as it is warm enough to do after getting a permit from all of the appropriate committees. Assuming the permits were obtained they would be able to move forward and get the bike racks installed. They are still hoping for a list of specific sites from The Montpelier Bikes Group.

Ms. Roof said she thought that would be needed for the Design Review Committee and not for the Planning Commission.

Mr. Moorman asked what the cost of the bike racks was. The circle design is the leading option.

Ms. Roof said if they use the recycled bike wheels they should be \$20 each, or a little bit more if they have to pay for shipping. They would like to have the racks installed before May, which is when the bike swap is. The Montpelier Bikes Steering Committee includes representatives from Onion River Sports as well as from Free Ride. They also have a connection from the National Quality Bicycle Parts which is a major distributor of bicycle parts across the country, and he has offered to put the word out to bike shops to let them know The Montpelier Bikes Group would like to have some wheels. The same thing is true with Cooperative Bike Shops across the country.

Ms. Vogan said the only questions she still has remaining about the streets they want to open up to sidewalk traffic. She understands the average 5 or 6 year-old bicycling to school with their parents on the sidewalk, but a lot of those kids aren't getting tickets for bicycling on the sidewalks. While it would be nice to make it so they are not doing something illegal she has been on the sidewalk when adults have been illegally bicycling and it is a real hazard. The sidewalks are bit congested and difficult to walk down from time to time anyway. She is just concerned about adding grown up bicyclists to the sidewalks.

Ms. Roof said the recommendation as far as the streets to restrict sidewalk riding would still include all of the core downtown area. It seems that having a law that is consistent with what you want to be the actual reality is a good idea. A lot of people find Barre Street to be intimidating to ride on so she sees a lot of adult bicyclists riding on the sidewalks there. This is the only place she will ride on the sidewalk,

which is headed up Northfield Street. You are going up a very steep hill and also around a blind corner. Here she feels it is actually safer to ride on the sidewalk herself. Then, on a section of Route 2 where there isn't much foot traffic she rides on the sidewalk.

Ms. Vogan asked if it was their recommendation to allow access where the green line is, or to allow access everywhere.

Mr. Moorman said he would suggest leaving Barre Street in the red district because they have the parallel bike path on Stone Cutters Way and it is such a dangerous street.

Ms. Roolf said you shouldn't be allowed to ride your bikes on Barre Street which works great if you happen to be going somewhere that the parallel bike path on Stone Cutters Way goes to, but there are quite a number of residences on Barre Street. The only time she rides on Barre Street is when she is going to visit a friend. There are quite a few houses along Barre Street; including lower income that bicycling is a mode of transportation for.

Ms. Vogan asked Becka Roolf to give the Planning Commission a summation of her four recommendations. They should probably all agree that they want to pass them on to City Council or not.

Ms. Roolf said the first recommendation would be about bike parking, which is to endorse the concept of having distributed bicycle parking using a ring on hooks design throughout the downtown area with locations prioritized based on space on the sidewalk combined with input from their survey. The second part of bike parking would be to pursue in the long term bicycle shelters and bicycle lockers. Probably the city would need to get a grant, and there are funds available for this type of thing. There is a whole lot of money coming out of Washington, D.C. and bicycle facilities are eligible. They are transportation expenses. Communities that are ready to say they would like to put this money into these projects have that opportunity. She doesn't know what the future holds on that, and they aren't ready right this moment. The city would need to get further funds in order to be able to do that. The concept of putting shutters and lockers at specific locations would be a recommendation.

The second recommendation would be Complete Streets for the city to endorse a Complete Streets policy resolution. They would need to work out some language. She would welcome input on what that process looks like.

The third is to endorse the idea of doing a Bicycle Master Plan. The city has talked about seeking some planning funds to work on that. It has been floated for a couple of different possible grant programs. Actually, Gwen and she applied one year and didn't get it. They think they have strengthened the application since then. They need to apply for a transportation enhancements grant, but they don't like to fund planning. They might perhaps have to apply for a municipal planning grant.

The fourth thing is the sidewalk riding ordinance.

Ms. Vogan asked members if they were prepared to vote on her recommendations as a whole package, or vote on them individually.

Ms. Campbell said she would like to make a motion that they come back to the next Planning Commission meeting with the written set of proposals, including the details on the Complete Streets. She is a little uncomfortable passing a motion now to put forward to City Council when we don't really know exactly what it is we are proposing.

Ms. Roolf said she could give them a written advance packet of information. She would agree that the Complete Streets is not ready for prime time. If the Planning Commission were to say they agreed with the concept and please come up with some detailed language that would be a great start. She has circulated a couple different sample Complete Street Resolutions to those involved in The Montpelier Bikes Group. They thought it was a great concept but didn't have a lot of word smithing to offer her.

Ms. Vogan said in terms of looking at this group of recommendations from Ms. Roolf and does the Planning Commission feel comfortable asking City Council to take this up as an issue is what their role in this process is.

Mr. Moorman told Becca Roolf he had one question, which is about the fourth recommendation to change the ordinance. Section b says to modify the ordinance to clarify the walking (pushing bicycles on sidewalks) is permitted anywhere. Thanks for including the pertinent ordinances. He didn't see anything that prohibited that.

Ms. Roolf replied there is nothing other than some cities implements signs that just have a bicycle circle/slash which means no bikes. That doesn't mean it is okay if you are walking it.

Mr. Moorman said people are already parking their bikes on the sidewalk, so they are on there already.

Ms. Roolf said the Master Plan ultimately will be much more of the kinetic side of transportation. The parking they have done a pretty good analysis of. She doesn't think that would change a part of the Master Plan.

Mr. Moorman asked if the Master Plan was the step in the direction where they can bike from here to Barre and back. That is what he is after.

Ms. Roolf replied there are plans for the Central Vermont Regional Bike Path, and it has been in the works for 15 to 20 years. A Bicycle Master Plan for the city of Montpelier would take a look at what other accommodations you could make.

Mr. Moorman said the Planning Commission is prepared to endorse recommendation #1 which is the bike parking, the ring design where appropriate, throughout the city. He would move recommendation #1.

Ms. Campbell said it could be as simple as recommendation #1 from Montpelier Bikes.

Mr. Moorman moved the Planning Commission pass The Montpelier Bikes 1st recommendation concerning the bicycle parking. Ms. Campbell seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ms. Vogan said they had passed on to City Council the recommendation that they take up Montpelier Bikes first recommendation. The Planning Commission would like to hear from them further about the Master Plan and Complete Streets idea. We need to hear from the police and the car drivers and pedestrians about sidewalk usage.

Ms. Benedict said the police might have some history on this they could share.

Ms. Roof said the ordinance says currently that bicyclists must yield to pedestrians. Some cities do have a detailed ordinance that bicyclists may ride at walking speed, or just slightly faster than walking speed.

Ms. Roof said with Complete Streets she understands that some language needs to be developed, and she would appreciate guidance on how to do that. For a Bicycle Master Plan she would like to know what further detail the Planning Commission needs.

Ms. Hallsmith said, like Beckah said, they have been trying to come up with a Bicycle Master Plan for a couple of years so the Planning Commission in so far as they have acted on the municipal planning grants we have applied for in the past. The next time their action would be needed would be the next time a grant application comes up where they could apply, but there is no reason to imagine they would oppose that.

Ms. Roof said there would be one available in August 2009. That is through transportation enhancements.

Ms. Hallsmith said there probably will not be municipal planning grants. They have taken that right out of the budget.

Ms. Vogan said they have probably done all they can with their recommendations for tonight.

Growth Center Draft Final Application:

Ms. Vogan said the Planning Commission is going to have some discussion amongst each other. There will be a public hearing on this February 9th assuming they approve what is in front of them tonight.

Ms. Hallsmith presented a brief overview of the application. It has been posted to the web site and made available to all who are interested in it. The city received a municipal planning grant from the state to prepare the growth center application, and the municipal planning grant helped us hire a professional consultant, Michael Crane, and the Regional Planning Commission, to help us crunch the numbers on what we could expect for growth in Montpelier over the next 20 years. To apply for a growth center application you have to first prove that you are growing, and that's not the case in Montpelier or at least over the last 15 to 20 years. In fact, we haven't kept up with the regional averages for housing development. Partially, this is because it is much easier to develop in the green fields outside of the city than it is to develop inside the city itself, much cheaper, much easier, and as a result when you look at the configuration of housing development in the Montpelier area and in Central Vermont what we see is a sprawl pattern.

When they started this exercise the Regional Planning Commission was finalizing their housing plan for the region, and at first they had used the existing development patterns to project into the future. That's really where this started. Basically, this was regional planning for sprawl, that it doesn't meet Montpelier's goals of including more compact smart growth urban development within our boundaries so we don't have all of the growth sprawling out into the prime agricultural land and open areas outside of the city. The projections we had to put together were actually difficult to do because they had to take a number of different types of projections and use a couple of different types of analysis as well as look at both trends in permitting in Montpelier and some of the current trends that are going on in the world, such as increasing oil prices, increasing interest in moving into Montpelier to determine the fact that we were going to be growing. They have come up with some pretty solid projections on population and housing growth, based both on the residential projects that they have determined to be pipeline projects which are projects that have been permitted in the past or proposed now, and also the type of demand for

housing that was in place when the study was originally done. Again, they used a number of different types of modeling, linear regression, geometric modeling and then took the average of all of the housing models and put in a projection for housing and population. Those are found on page 12.

Housing they anticipate in the next 20 years from 2009 to 2029, an increase of 706 units, with a revised population projection of a net change of 1,328 people. If you look at historic trends, this doesn't even bring us back to the level of population we had here in Montpelier in the 1970's because we have been on a steady decline since then. It isn't as if we are calling in this growth center model for massive changes in the city but rather just to reclaim our position as a center of housing and economic development for the region.

When they looked at what they would like to see as the boundaries of the growth center, they looked at their current Master Plan and our current zoning. The boundaries they are proposing at this point can be found on page 21. They didn't want to have to go through zoning changes or Master Plan changes to accommodate the growth center. This is partly because of some developments that were moving forward that they wanted to be able to use the growth center designation to mobilize TIF financing (Tax Increment Financing) to help fund the infrastructure for those developments, and that certainly includes the Sabin's Pasture Project. Their feeling was that if they could use tax increment financing to help pay for the infrastructure on that and similar projects we could hope to include more affordable housing in those projects. Right now the way those projects are moving forward it would be hard to imagine that they would be affordable for moderate income families in Montpelier.

They thought that growth center designation, like most other land use laws, is malleable over time that they would start with what was currently zoned in Montpelier. None of the growth center designation changes the amount of density that is allowed in any of these districts. They would take a look at in five years and see what the result was and modify it as necessary.

The primary purpose for the growth center designation was to encourage housing development in the city, and that's why they have included the medium density residential districts. The way the state's growth center policies are structured when you are accommodating 1,300 new people and 706 new housing units you also need to explain how you are going to accommodate the jobs that those people will have. The models that are used to project commercial development and employment development have specific standards for offices and commercial and industrial space. That is what drives the prediction of the number of new different commercial spaces that we'll need to accommodate this population growth.

Everybody knows we are seeing a change in the economy. Not just the complete disintegration we are watching right now, but also the fact that the creative economy is a large part of what they are seeing growth in here in Montpelier. She doesn't believe that they are going to see commercial growth in the same way that they have seen it in the past. A lot of the housing they will be producing will actually turn out to be employment centers as more and more people work from their homes in hard wired offices they build into their homes as new homes develop. That is certainly a strong trend in our area. Nonetheless, in order to meet the standards of the state growth center process we do need to show where we are going to put new commercial space. Since they are not rezoning, what they have done in this application is included our existing General Business, Industrial and Downtown Districts. There are certain areas they have specifically left out, namely the National Life property because that is a large undeveloped area with rather uncertain tax status at this point and they felt it was important not to include in the growth center because of the potential for both problems with the tax increment financing and not real certainty over what was going to occur there. Most of the other parts of the city that are in the district now are fairly well developed. There is not a lot of open land in those areas, although

certainly there are areas within what they are proposing that could stand to have some redevelopment. She is thinking specifically of the area along River Street where there are a lot of deteriorated properties and where things like pedestrian access and bicycle access are particularly poor.

There is a whole lot of material where we have to describe all of the different Master Plan statements we have about encouraging smart growth, all of the different planning efforts that have been made in the past to do that. She has included a large section on the planning they are doing around enVision Montpelier because, of course, that plan is oriented toward being a sustainable city.

Mr. Moorman said the whole premise of having to show where you can grow the jobs David Borgendale took issue with that premise, as well as him, insofar as we have a lot of jobs in Montpelier and have a lot of commuters who come here. Given the downturn in the economy maybe people will see that it makes sense to live a lot closer to your office. He can see us filling a housing need.

Ms. Vogan asked if they were concerned about that being in the application. Are we just putting that in the application to fill the need to prove it?

Ms. Hallsmith said it is a good point that we already have a lot more jobs than we have people who live here so needing to create new commercial space is not a pressing need. The reason the projection was made has more to do with the way the whole process works. When she broached the subject of taking out areas like the River Street section and the Industrial District she was reminded by the rather expensive consultants that would mean we would have to recalculate and do a lot of number crunching all over again, and it would cost money. We actually do not have any more money to spend on consultants on this project at this point. The normal growth center applications were \$25,000 grants. We had a regular planning grant for this, which was a \$15,000 grant. They found it is a good idea to get a \$25,000 grant to do these because she has ended up doing a lot of work the consultant would have done completing the application, but she is not in a position to recalculate all of the employment projections and the population projections based on the new area we would establish if we reduced the size of the district.

Ms. Campbell said she wonders in the statistics where she cites the way the population increases during the day for employees, would it be insufficient to note there that because of this nature and the number of commuters to work that there is already inadequate housing for the existing jobs.

Ms. Hallsmith said they do say there is a housing shortage in Montpelier.

Ms. Campbell said the summary response speaks immediately to the new jobs that will be created which are the rationale to support the need for 706 new housing units. She is wondering if it wouldn't be worth adding that there is inadequate housing for the already existing jobs in town. It just seems to strengthen the case.

Ms. Campbell said one thought that occurred to her is whether or not if we are granted growth center designation if it will affect current development practices and permitting regarding PUDs. There are a number of parcels that are split between MDR and LDR. Currently, that's not relevant in a PUD because you combine the number of permissible units and can build anywhere on the lot. If we get growth center designation, are you then constrained?

Ms. Hallsmith replied that a growth center designation does not change the zoning. The next question we need to answer after growth center designation is where we want the TIF district to be. The TIF district is not actually constrained by the growth center, although if there were particular parcels where

we wanted to extend the boundaries of the growth center to include the parcel instead of the zoning the state board did indicate they would be interested in that. That would mean there would be parts of the growth center that were zoned correctly because there is a standard for growth centers they have allow, which is 6 units per acre and the LDR districts do not allow that. It makes it a slightly weaker application. Then, the questions would come up about why this parcel and not that parcel. There are probably over 100 parcels that are divided by the MDR and LDR lines because we run the lines along the topographical line, the height which the water system could go without additional pumping. It makes sense to maintain the growth center along the zoning boundaries but to possibly include the parcel boundaries in the TIF district.

Ms. Campbell said currently when a development proposal comes before the DRB the number of permissible units on a given parcel is spread across. It doesn't matter if it is LDR or MDR. They aren't going to say that is in the LDR district which isn't in the growth center therefore you have to move it to the growth center.

Ms. Hallsmith said it doesn't change the zoning. Everything that is allowed under the current zoning will continue to be allowed. The growth center designation does relate to where the infrastructure can go if the city is paying for it with a TIF, but it doesn't change the zoning. There is no reason why you couldn't propose a particular type of housing on any part of the parcel regardless of whether it was in the growth center or not. There are a lot of ways around the issue. We could consider extending the boundaries around certain parcels, but taking big chunks out requires that we go to the drawing board with the calculations. And that is going to cost money. Just because it costs money doesn't mean we don't do it, but she didn't feel she was in the position to do that as staff without further authority because they don't have the money in the Planning Department budget and they have finished the grant.

Ms. Vogan inquired what their options were. Do they have any opportunities to come by funding to change this before we lose their order in the application pile?

Ms. Hallsmith replied they were offered funding by some of the groups that have an interest in reducing the size of the district, but the leadership felt that was not going to work. They felt it was cleaner to continue the way they were going. None of them have any ownership of this particular configuration and the intent was to produce housing. The Planning Commission could say shrink it or grow it, or the City Council could say to shrink it or grow it, and at that point somebody would have to fund the recalculation of all of the numbers we need to work with, which is probably \$2,000.

Ms. Vogan said it might be a good time to hear from members of the audience.

Tino O'Brien said his very limited understanding of the concept of a growth center is that it involves looking at a broad range of issues and resources other than just housing and commercial development for jobs. He is curious whether effort has been put into looking at the other resources, whether it is land use, conservation, wildlife, agricultural land, etc. and planning on how to preserve and protect that as well as to develop housing and jobs.

Ms. Hallsmith said it is actually a required part of the application. The provisions of our current ordinances and master planning tools that do look out for our natural resources – wildlife, lands and historic district – we do have quite a lot in place now in Montpelier that does that. We have revised the zoning largely as a result of the Sabin's Pasture development to encourage clustering and to give density bonuses when people cluster away from conservation areas which include agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, protected areas, stream corridors, so they are able to answer their questions about how they are protecting natural resources by citing our current tools for doing that. Obviously, as development

proposals move forward in the city those questions are taken into serious consideration. There is extensive design control in the downtown that helps protect our historic resources. We are a risk community for floodplain management so they take a lot more responsibility than typical cities and towns do for floodplain management. The city obtains historic grants pretty regularly and is working on a couple right now that help catalog and maintain our city's historic resources. In her opinion are we at the same time we are seeking to encourage smart growth and make this a level playing field between city development and green field development and provide jobs for people, she thinks this helps us seek a good balance there. She doesn't think we are at a disadvantage when it comes to the protective measures that the city has in place already for natural resources and historic resources nor does she think the growth center designation will change that. In fact, she believes that a growth center designation will enhance the city's ability to protect our natural resources because with a TIF designation, with the ability for the city to access tax increment financing for infrastructure, that will put the city more in the driver's seat when it comes to where the roads are going to be located and where water and sewer pipes will be located. Right now when a large new property is developed we are at the mercy of the developer's plans, but with the city being a partner in infrastructure development we can actually say we would like the streets to avoid the natural areas and focus on concentrated cluster development and to focus on affordable development.

Tino O'Brien said it stimulates a lot more questions. What about redevelopment? How would tax increment financing encourage redevelopment in an already downtown area?

Ms. Hallsmith said if you look at the River Street corridor, tax increment financing is allowed to be used for infrastructure. If they could use that financing to improve the pedestrian access down River Street, put in more street trees and maybe build areas that make it a lot safer for pedestrians and bicyclists along there that would be a big step in helping redevelop some of those properties. We could potentially consolidate some of them and make it work better for different kinds of development so it isn't just one big long strip, which it is now. This proposal will not make that worse but has the potential to make it better. We don't have a lot of tools at our disposal to improve it otherwise. For example, in the downtown some of the things that could help building owners improve their properties would include better storm water management which is included in the tax increment financing that would be allowed. The kind of district heating system the city has been talking about conceivably could be considered city infrastructure that would help make the downtown buildings a lot more affordable. One of the things they are looking at as part of this proposal is making it easier to do that project because the pipes that travel around would be considered financeable around that scenario.

Someone questioned that didn't the city already have that ability with the existing downtown designation.

Ms. Hallsmith replied within the downtown, but not along Barre Street out to where the district energy plant is likely to be located.

Someone asked what percentage of the entire city the growth center designation was.

Ms. Hallsmith replied it is a big percentage of the city, but it actually isn't such a big percentage of the projected growth over the next 20 years. In a growth center designation you are supposed to draw a line that includes at least 51 percent of the proposed growth, and this includes about 70 percent of what the proposed growth is. Compared to Bennington who just got a growth center approved for 350 percent of their proposed growth is not very much.

They asked at what density.

Ms. Hallsmith said it is the density that is required under the statute which is at least 6 units per acre for residential housing for the entire growth center. They aren't proposing build out. That is not the goal necessarily, but given current trends that they can expect development to occur. Build out is like maximizing every possible square inch of developable space.

A member of the audience asked if that wouldn't be a smart way to proceed using less resource in deference to higher density.

Ms. Hallsmith replied that the city's high density areas are already virtually developed. There is not really any room within the designated downtown for a lot more development. That is another thing they had to do an analysis with. The parking lots they have in the downtown are largely owned by the state, and they don't have any control over what the state uses that land for. We can legitimately eliminate a lot of those parking lots from our consideration of what is developable because it is not, at least not under the city's ability. There is not a lot of developable land in the downtown. There is certainly not enough room to accommodate the next 20 years of growth in the city if we really do take seriously the idea that we ought to pursue smart growth and start to absorb some of the development that right now is occurring around us in a sprawl fashion. Day in and day out developers come in and wants a commercial property somewhere in our city, and it is hard to find anywhere to put them.

A member of the audience asked what was the process the consultants went through to arrive at the configuration of the growth center that is before us now.

Ms. Hallsmith replied that was a process that was done by the Planning Commission and some of the City Councilors. We looked at the zoning map to determine where the growth could occur.

It was asked if there were public hearings.

Ms. Hallsmith said this is the beginning of that process. They have not submitted the application to the state yet.

It was asked if the beginning of the public process was at the end of the contract with the consultant.

Ms. Hallsmith said they have discussed it in Planning Commission meetings before and City Council meetings many times, but they haven't had a draft application to present until now.

Eric Gilbertson said he lives on Richardson Street, which according to Public Works is the steepest street in the city. He has seven acres of land and that is included in the growth center. He wonders what the reaction of the Planning Commission would be if he came in and said it is a 1904 and the street is laid out and there are granite markers for the street. There is an existing plan for that area. If he came in and said he wanted to put in 100 units of housing and he needs sewer and water to keep going up Richardson Street, it seemed including that in the growth center piece he doesn't think he could ever get permits to develop that. If you say it is part of the growth center plan, what kind of message is that? Can he say because they said it is part of the growth center he can argue for a permit to develop it?

Ms. Hallsmith said she wanted to remind him that the growth center doesn't change the zoning. He can come in right now and make that proposal. The growth center does not change the zoning.

Mr. Gilbertson said it may not change the zoning but it is certainly different to say this part of the land is part of the growth center.

Ms. Hallsmith said she actually thinks it is much more powerful to zone it high density residential than it is to put it in a growth center. She believes that the growth center designation and TIF financing will enable the city to better protect our natural resources and put the growth where we really want it. Right now she would dare say it would be prohibitively expensive for anybody to put the infrastructure in the area he has just described.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if he could go for TIF financing because he is part of the growth center.

Ms. Hallsmith said he could only do that with the city's partnership. He couldn't do that on his own. Therefore the city and the public is more in the driver's seat with what happens there than they would be otherwise.

Mr. Gilbertson asked why they even included it in the growth center.

Ms. Hallsmith said the growth center isn't intended as a spot here and there; it is supposed to be an area that encompasses the general area where the city imagines we are going to accommodate 51 percent of the growth in the next 20 years.

Mr. Gilbertson said she is saying that the growth center is part of the back drop of the capitol. It's a natural area and the growth center should make it easier to put infrastructure in.

Ms. Hallsmith replied only with the city as a partner. The city has to approve it.

Mr. Gilbertson said that to him implies that if it is a growth center the city is interested in developing this.

Ms. Hallsmith said it says that with medium density residential. It says the city is interested in encouraging medium density residential development in that zone. You can make that application now. A growth center designation does not change that. What is smart growth if it isn't infilled development like he is describing. Maybe it is a steeper area. Sure, maybe it is harder to develop, but it's better than putting it in prime agricultural land outside the city. Smart growth is infill development.

Mr. Gilbertson said it would be stupid from a natural resources point of view, a city maintenance idea that instead of having a two block long street that is a 30 degree slope you would have a five block long street.

Ms. Hallsmith said it wouldn't be permitted.

An audience member asked why they included it in the proposal.

Ms. Vogan said when they drew the line they didn't say Eric Gilbertson's lot clearly doesn't belong in the growth center so let's take out and this lot doesn't belong. They drew it along the zoning lines.

Mr. Gilbertson said it also shows up on the steep slopes map.

Ms. Benedict said they don't need to do it because it is already naturally going to eliminate itself.

Ms. Hallsmith said the steep slopes were used in calculating a likely build out, and that is part of the reason why the growth center currently includes more area than what would be naturally developable if this was one big flat area. This is why it is expensive to do the recalculation because you basically

assign numbers to all of the areas that are undevelopable. Steep slopes are one of them; wetlands are another; floodplain is another. What you are likely able to accommodate over the next period of time are deducted out of the area, which is why she can say that instead of 51 percent this represents about 70 percent of the growth we are likely to see. Those areas that are steep, wet, protected, have wildlife habitat and resources that the city has already identified as wanting to preserve were subtracted out of that calculation in a mathematical sort of way using a sophisticated GIS system they have access to.

David Grayck said he heard them talk about they want growth to occur here so it doesn't occur on agricultural land outside of Montpelier. Is this proposal going to include specific restrictions by other communities to prohibit development?

Ms. Hallsmith replied the city doesn't have any power to do that.

Mr. Grayck said when they make that argument it is not one they can deliver on legally.

Ms. Hallsmith said if they have access to water and sewer and you can build housing on existing water and sewer lines that will be less expensive, or at least on the same playing field as building in a green field somewhere else.

Mr. Grayck said when they say this proposal is going to protect agricultural land outside of Montpelier there is really no guarantee of that. Practically speaking, maybe that will result, but there is no legal mechanism to guarantee that land outside of Montpelier actually won't be developed simply because of the growth center designation. Whatever the growth center designation proposal ultimately is there is no way to deliver on that one.

Ms. Hallsmith said she only has the power to address what is inside of Montpelier.

Mr. Grayck said that is why it doesn't make any sense to advocate for this on the premise that somehow you are going to protect land outside of Montpelier. That certainly might be a hope, but it can't be a fundamental legal obligation if that is what occurs. It would be nice if we had regional planning and maybe that could happen, if there were a way to have a regional growth center. You can't justify what we do here in Montpelier by promising or arguing that somehow land outside of Montpelier is going to be saved. He wished that were the case, and it would be wonderful if they could get other communities to sign on and make that kind of integrated county wide planning. Maybe there is a way to do that on a voluntary basis, to see if other communities would participate. He hopes that the idea that somehow by doing this we are going to protect land outside of Montpelier is not going to happen unless other communities sign on.

Ms. Hallsmith said she believes she can make a convincing case for why it arguably can happen even though Montpelier doesn't have any control over the development in other communities. There is only going to be a certain amount of growth that comes into this region anyway over the next 20 years. It's not unlimited. With climate change and the kind of economic chaos we're having whether any of the projections have any weight at all. It's seems now kind of silly to talk about growing when we are shrinking, and the economy is likely to shrink more. There is only a certain limited amount of growth that is going to occur in our region over the next 20 years. If Montpelier makes it easier to develop within our boundaries on existing sewer and water systems, existing built road systems, inside a school system that right now has surplus capacity that we are paying a lot for because we don't have enough children in the schools, arguably, we will be attracting more than the percentage of that growth than we would if we didn't do this. Yes, she can actually make a case for the fact that by doing this and by promoting smart growth within our boundaries we are going to be saving some of the development that

would otherwise occur on farm fields and other types of resources outside of our community even if she doesn't have any authority over that.

Mr. Grayck said that is just speculation. She doesn't have a legally binding commitment from other communities.

Ms. Hallsmith replied that sometimes an economically binding commitment is stronger than a legally binding one.

Mr. Grayck said they are hoping economically it would be more attractive, but if the centerpiece of selling the growth center is by having this growth center we will have a limited growth outside of Montpelier there is no way that can be delivered upon.

Ms. Hallsmith replied that the centerpiece of pursuing the growth center is for a number of different reasons. One is so the city can actually take more charge of our own destiny by accessing tax increment financing for infrastructure, and this is the only path for doing that. The second is that we have more capacity in a number of different public services than we currently use. That is actually an unusual position for a city to be in, and that means our taxpayers and our rate payers are paying more than they need to for the services they receive. As we move into economic hard times this is actually going to be a real trouble for a lot of people in the city, so by pursuing the growth center we can hopefully bring in more rate payers and more taxpayers to help shoulder the burden and bring in more kids for our schools. The way the school financing system works right now is that we get paid for the kids in our schools, and right now we are not getting paid for them because we don't have them. And part of the reason we don't have them is because we don't have affordable family housing in the city right now. A lot of the big old houses are going empty with the large old families that have left.

Mr. Grayck said those are all good reasons to have a growth center, but to suggest that somehow by having a growth center we're going to protect agricultural land in Calais doesn't seem realistic. There is no legal way to deliver on that, and you don't have other communities buying in to the idea that we are going to adopt zoning regulations in our community so we funnel growth into Montpelier. That just can't be the premise of what we are doing. It could be a hope, but we have no legal mechanism to suggest that if you adopt this growth center you are going to preserve agricultural land outside of Montpelier.

Ms. Vogan said that isn't the basis of the application, either.

Mr. Grayck said it would be good to make sure that is not a reason offered in favor of it.

Ms. Vogan said they can certainly protect the agricultural land that is left in Montpelier by encouraging growth in the district they have proposed for a growth center.

Mr. Grayck said there aren't going to be any farms in Montpelier so why would we plan for them?

Ms. Vogan said actually there are farms in Montpelier.

Ms. Hallsmith said there is a lot of undeveloped agricultural land.

A member of the audience said he would like to make a suggestion for the public hearing. They may have noticed that they have around here some people with experience and opinions about planning and growth, and you are not going to have that at an uninformed public hearing. He would encourage the

members of the Planning Commission to take some of the points they have made tonight and do a very good introduction on what a growth center is and the intention of the legislation which set it up a year ago and give some background on a growth center. Educate the people at the next hearing and they will have a much more productive hearing.

Ms. Hallsmith said tonight was supposed to be their internal working session. She just sent out the announcements of it as a courtesy to people that were interested.

Mr. Gilbertson said he thinks the growth center concept is a really good one, but putting forth a growth center without really being sure that you want and can accommodate the growth they are determining in the proposal is a good idea. His parcel is a different thing. If they counted that in the 70 percent of places where the city could grow...

Ms. Hallsmith said not if it were steep slopes.

Mr. Gilbertson said he looks at the Barre/Montpelier Road and River Street past Walker Motors and wonders if they really want to encourage strip development there, which is implied by the growth center. The boundaries should be carefully drawn to be sure that is really where you want to grow. Frankly, that is not what he sees. He thinks they should go back and cut the boundaries to insure these are the areas you really want growth and can accommodate growth. They should redo those calculations because he thinks submitting something like a big huge map and say where we want to grow and then if Wal-Mart or Home Depot comes in and says they want to put a store in on the Barre/Montpelier Road the city certainly has less ability to say no to that if you include it in the growth center because a growth center implies growth.

Ms. Hallsmith told Mr. Gilbertson that they hear him and his thinking about redrawing the boundaries, and she has heard that from several people. If the City Council directs them to do that, and provides the funding to do that that is exactly what she will do? She's not wed to these boundaries at all. She doesn't care where the boundaries are. As a staff person in the city right now she doesn't have the money to pay the consultants to redo the calculations. Until the City Council directs her to do it, and provides the funding to do it, she is proceeding under their direction to proceed with this application and get it done. It will come before them. They have to approve this application before it can go into the state. There will be a public hearing on it on February 9th, passing it on to City Council and they will vote whether to send it on to the state or not. There are many opportunities between now and the time they actually submit the application for those concerns to be heard and acted on.

Mr. Gilbertson said he would suggest she go to the City Council and get the money to do that because what they are submitting now is an application there are a lot of objections to. He thinks it should be recalculated before the application is submitted.

Ms. Hallsmith said the boundary lines are still the decision of the City Council and the Planning Commission's recommendation to the City Council. Right now they have recommended these boundary lines on a preliminary basis, so right now she is working within the constraints that she has been given by the city leadership. It's not up to her to arbitrarily or unilaterally change them. It is up to the Planning Commission and the City Council to do that.

Mr. Gilbertson said the Planning Commission also has to make a recommendation to the City Council.

Ms. Hallsmith replied they are going to be doing that after the February 9th hearing.

Mr. Grayck said given the topography of Montpelier and no matter where you draw a circle is going to be land that isn't developable within the growth center. Not matter where you draw a line there is going to be a certain percentage that is not developable.

Mr. Gilbertson he sees designating things as growth center the same kind of public perception of what can be done on that land.

Ms. Vogan said it isn't changing what actually can be done on that land. It isn't changing the zoning.

Mr. Gilbertson said he knows that, but they are changing the public perception when you say this land is part of a growth center.

Ms. Hallsmith said public perception doesn't actually develop land. Economics, development proposals, demand for housing and commercial buildings is what develops the land, and that is actually what they are trying to direct with the whole application.

Ms. Vogan said when he talks about a Home Depot or Wal-Mart proposing to come in they still have to go through the Act 250 process and the local zoning process. The growth center gives us the opportunity to have yet another way to participate by saying we do or do not want to give you infrastructure assistance.

Mr. Gilbertson said he would also like to be arguing for a Home Depot in an environmental court saying as part of Montpelier's growth center.

Ms. Vogan said it's still part of medium, high or low density zoning. It doesn't change the city's zoning and the restrictions we have on that area. She said she could definitely make an argument that we need to change a lot of the city's zoning, and that is part of rewriting the Master Plan and a whole much longer term process. In the short term we need money in the city of Montpelier to attract people.

Mr. Gilbertson said what they are telling him is that the growth center designation really doesn't mean anything.

Ms. Hallsmith replied it doesn't change the zoning.

Ms. Vogan said it doesn't mean more than the powers we already have. It doesn't mean more than what is in place.

Ms. Campbell told Eric Gilbertson that he did raise a question in her mind about changing zoning. If the city has land that is within the designated growth center and later deem we designated that based on the medium density residential zoning and find a parcel that we prefer to later rezone as low density, and it is within the growth center, the city's zoning trunks the growth center designation.

Ms. Vogan said they had this conversation at the very first enVision meeting.

Ms. Campbell said it does not preclude our later changing the zoning to decrease an amount of allowable density.

Ms. Hallsmith said they could also amend their growth center lines later. If we change the zoning and move one area into low density residential that is currently in medium density residential, then they could apply to have an amendment to the growth center that followed those lines. It's not a big problem

as long as they approve the application. It's not like any of this is cast in stone forever. Given the economic situation we are in it is certainly different than when they started the whole process.

Mr. Gilbertson said the population of Montpelier in 1890 or 1900 was 8,000 plus, and you are all of a sudden saying from 2010 to 2030 it is going to become 9,000.

Ms. Hallsmith replied it has been that high in the past.

Ms. Vogan said it doesn't project that we grow any bigger than the biggest that we have been in the history of Montpelier.

Mr. Gilbertson said it has been remarkably consistent over the last 100 years.

Ms. Hallsmith said they are hoping it grows a little because we have the infrastructure for it. We're paying for the infrastructure for it and could use more kids in the schools and more rate payers on the water and sewer bills. That is an important consideration.

Mr. Gilbertson said they don't want to be growing in inappropriate areas.

Ms. Hallsmith agreed but they have a lot already in place to help protect that, certainly more than any of the municipalities around us.

Mr. Gilbertson said he liked the concept of a growth center and he likes the idea of developing the downtown. He is a little alarmed at the 93 percent of downtown is occupied. Did she include the upper story space that could be developed?

Ms. Hallsmith replied they did.

Mr. Gilbertson asked if that was part of the 7 percent that is opened for development if they developed the upper stories.

Ms. Hallsmith replied they did a fairly extensive study of the possibilities in the downtown. You have to eliminate the state land. We can't do anything about the state land. A big chunk of our designated downtown is state land.

Ms. Campbell told Mr. Gilbertson she wanted to understand his major concern. He keeps saying he would like to see the areas where we don't want growth taken out of the growth center. To what end? He mentioned Home Depot. Is that the type of thing he is talking about?

Mr. Gilbertson said it is disingenuous to include areas in a growth center that can't be developed as a matter of principle. It is disingenuous to include the areas in a growth center where we don't want development. He is just thinking about increasing the strip on the Barre/Montpelier Road and developing that as a strip. He doesn't want to see any more strip development and would like to see some quality housing. If you put that in the growth center you are certainly encouraging development there and not putting housing on the Barre/Montpelier Road. It really doesn't reflect the reality of development opportunities or growth in Montpelier.

Ms. Campbell said her understanding is that when meeting with them they very specifically wanted the area along the Barre/Montpelier Road included.

Ms. Hallsmith said no, they don't care about that. The state doesn't care about that.

Ms. Campbell said and they don't care particularly about the potential for commercial development.

Ms. Hallsmith said that is where the balancing act between the population and job growth is. Personally, she doesn't have any objection to taking out what Eric is talking about. Until she has authority and money she isn't going to do it.

Ms. Vogan said she thinks the Planning Commission is open minded about this. They haven't set this in stone in their own heads either, and are planning to listen at the hearing.

Mr. Moorman said that is what the public process is all about. The Planning Commission needs their input.

Ms. Vogan said they have gotten to a point where they know we are out of money, and it is difficult for the Planning Commission to recommend spending more money at this time. They are curious about the difference between the public perception of what the growth center means and what it actually means. With a little bit more education at the public hearing is it possible that the public will better understand that the growth center doesn't have the power that it sounds like it has.

Ms. Benedict said they will probably need a sign that says zoning will not change.

An audience member said she would recommend that the Planning Commission not kick off the public hearing with a statement that we have run out of money and can't make any changes. That's not a good message to send if you are going to be open to recommendations from the public. The public needs to feel welcomed. Public input needs to happen in a way where it actually makes a difference.

Ms. Hallsmith said the major decision tonight was whether to move forward with a public hearing with the current application.

Ms. Benedict moved that the Planning Commission move forward with a public hearing with the current application. Mr. Moorman seconded the motion.

Ms. Campbell said it is her understanding that time is of the essence in terms of the likelihood of approval.

Ms. Hallsmith said it is a competitive process. The TIF is the competitive process and the TIF is what is pushing them to get it done, both because of the internal logic of growth center and TIF designation and also because some of the projects that are waiting in the wings hoping to get access to that financing.

Ms. Campbell said the citizens of Montpelier have to weigh the relative advantages of going back to the drawing board and redrawing the growth center boundaries against the advantages of moving forward in a timely manner.

The motion to move forward with a public hearing on the growth center was unanimous on a vote of 4 to 0. The public hearing by the Planning Commission on the growth center application will be held on February 9th.

Ms. Hallsmith said one of the funniest sides of this whole process is that she was in a struggle with what the posting deadline was around the public hearing. The main process the state is concerned with relates

to them. They haven't actually spelled out a municipal level process at all. In fact, we are not required to have a public hearing at the Planning Commission level. All that is required is that the City Council vote on it before it gets sent to the state. If you were looking for changes in the legislation that would give the citizens a lot more voice in what is going on, then codifying that would be a good idea. The Infrastructure Committee of the enVision Montpelier Process was considering this on a regular basis during those public sessions. It was really that committee that worked on helping to define the boundaries. It has been a very public process even getting it this far as part of enVision Montpelier. There is nothing in the state legislation except that the City Council has to vote for it. They don't even have to hold a public hearing.

Comments by Chair:

Ms. Vogan said she has been pushed into making some life choices based on the fact she is currently unemployed, and that doesn't include a rent in Montpelier any longer. She is moving out of Montpelier, and a little bit faster and sooner than she had anticipated because she is cutting out on a lease early and her landlord found a renter right away. This will be her last meeting as a Planning Commissioner.

Ms. Hallsmith said an interesting fact is that you don't actually have to be a Montpelier resident to be on the Planning Commission. If she imagines that this is a temporary relocation until she moved back here there would be no objection to her serving. They have had applicants from neighboring towns to serve on the Planning Commission. If she is willing to commute from Hardwick there is no reason why she would have to step down. It would be great if she could serve until they got through the growth center designation.

Ms. Vogan said she would be more than happy to stay on the Planning Commission, at least until somebody is available.

Adjournment:

The Planning Commission adjourned at 9:25 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Gwen Hallsmith, Director
Planning & Community Development