Governance

6.1 Montpelier's Governance System

As the state capital, it is important that Montpelier's governance system sets an example for the rest of the state. "Governance" encompasses the structures and functions of city government, as well as the human needs we have for civic engagement, empowerment, equity, access to information, and the ability to resolve community conflicts adequately. The community systems established to meet these needs all relate to the way we use power and the way we share power and responsibility with one another. Montpelier has many assets that contribute to a healthy governance system.

Self-determination means having the personal power necessary to make choices that help determine the path of one's life. It is a fundamental need, and drives many of the choices we make. As individuals and as communities, we need *conflict resolution* systems. Today, court systems, mediation services, and the legislative process are a few ways that our communities meet this need.

> **Earth Charter Principle IV.13:** *Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.*

We often hear the word e*quity* when we're talking about economics. Yet even though economic equity is one way in which this need expresses itself, our ability to gain economic equity is directly related to the power we have. There are other equity issues not related to economics. All of the rights movements through time – voting rights, women's rights, rights for people with disabilities –are powerful expressions of our need for equity.

Access, an aspect of how we use power, is hard to categorize completely on its own. It is a close companion of self-determination; if we have adequate self-determination, it may indicate that we have access to the facilities, institutions, systems, etc. that we require to meet our needs. Yet access is slightly different from self-determination, in that it describes the ways in which the systems themselves are structured, rather than the motivation and autonomy that individuals might have.

Municipal Government

As stated in the City Charter, "The municipal government…shall be known as council-manager form of government. Pursuant to its provisions and subject only to the limitations imposed by the state constitution and by this charter, all powers of the city shall be vested in an elective council, hereinafter referred to as the council, which shall enact ordinances, codes and regulations, adopt budgets, determine policies, and appoint the city manager, who shall execute the laws and administer the government of the city."

"The mayor shall be the chief executive officer of the city subject to the operation of the provisions herein contained respecting a city manager. The mayor shall use the mayor's best efforts to see that the laws and the city ordinances are enforced, and that the duties of all subordinate [elected] officers are faithfully performed. The mayor shall take care that the finances of the city are properly managed, and shall bring before the city council whatever the mayor may deem worthy of their attention for prudentially and efficiently carrying on the affairs of the city."

> **Earth Charter Principle IV.13(b):**
> *Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.*

According to the Charter, the city manager "shall be the administrative head of the city government, and shall be responsible to the city council for the administration of the affairs of the city, and carrying out the policies of the city council. The powers and duties of the city manager shall be as follows:

(a) The city manager shall see that all laws and ordinances are enforced; and

(b) Shall exercise administrative control over all departments herein created or that may be created by administrative codes; and

(c) Shall make appointments and removals as provided in this charter; and

(d) Shall prepare the annual fiscal budget to be submitted to the city council on or before the date set each year by the city council; and

(e) Shall attend meetings of the city council, take part in the business discussion, and make such recommendations for the determination of policy as the city manager may deem expedient; and

(f) Shall act as purchasing agent for all city departments, except schools; and

(g) Shall fix the salaries and wages of all employees under the city manager's jurisdiction in accordance with this charter, fiscal budgets, and personnel policies; and

(h) Shall administer the personnel policies, job classifications, and pay plan; and

(i) May delegate responsibility for administrative duties to department heads and subordinate officers; and

(j) Shall perform such other duties as may be prescribed by this charter or required by the city council."

The City's programs include the Public Safety and Protection Program, Municipal Development Program, Management and Support Program, and Parks, Conservation, & Recreation Program. Numerous City departments, committees, and projects fall under each of these programs. See the City's Annual Report for more detailed information.

Elections

One way citizens play an active role in city, state, and national government is through voting. Voting gives citizens the opportunity to elect individuals they believe will successfully carry out the duties of public office. In the 2010 local election, 6,068 Montpelier citizens were registered, but only 2,171 people (about 35% of those registered) actually voted. If Montpelier strives to have a truly representative government, some work needs to be done to increase the number of voters expressing their opinions at the polls. The presidential election often brings a greater turnout than local elections: In the 2008 presidential election, 6,161 Montpelier citizens were registered to vote; of that number, 4,827 (about 78% of those registered) turned up and voted.

Civic Participation

Montpelier's small size and close-knit community aid in the quality of civic life. Residents have a variety of ways to engage in City happenings. The recently overhauled City website provides residents with City board and committee meeting dates, agendas, and minutes. Additionally, Onion River Community Access media (ORCA) televises many City meetings and events, and the televised meetings are available on the city web site.

> **Earth Charter Principle IV.13(c):** *Protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and dissent.*

The three largest political parties in Vermont are the Republican, Democrat, and Progressive Parties. The Vermont Progressive Party is a liberal political party which has held a handful of seats in the Vermont legislature for two decades and has run candidates for numerous state and local elections. It has had official recognition as a political party by the state government since 1999.

Educating the youth in civic processes is important to the Montpelier community. Currently, youth representatives serve on the City's Planning Commission and Conservation Commission, and other boards and commissions have begun considering how to best represent the diversity of voices in Montpelier.

Montpelier High School has a student government made up of a group of 4 representatives from each class and 4 officers that are elected by the student body. The group meets bi-weekly and works on projects that benefit both the school and the community. Last year the student government funded and worked on a 50x16' patio adjacent to the cafeteria. This year, they plan to have 6 picnic tables made for the outdoor space.

The Central Vermont League of Women Voters (LWV) is based in Montpelier. The LWV is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging the informed and active participation in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Most recently, in response to a proposal to begin bottling water from a spring in East Montpelier, the Central Vermont LWV conducted a study of the best ways to protect ground water.

Another active group is the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Vermont. The ACLU of Vermont is an organization of Vermonters dedicated to the defense of individual rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, as well as the Vermont Constitution.

The Older Women's League (OWL), a national grassroots membership organization that focuses on issues unique to women as they age, runs a "Green Mountain" chapter out of Burlington, VT. The chapter has many active members residing throughout the state and provides numerous opportunities to middle-age and older women.

Founded in 1979 and located in Montpelier, the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) is committed to cross-disability services, the promotion of active citizenship and working with others to create services that support self-determination and full participation in community life. VCIL is a non-profit organization directed and staffed by individuals with disabilities, and works to promote the dignity, independence and civil rights of Vermonters with disabilities.

Capital Area Neighborhoods! (CAN!)

CAN! is an organized network of support for city residents. Currently, the City is organized into 18 neighborhoods and a little more than half of those neighborhoods have CAN! leaders that work to organize their neighborhoods. CAN! promotes emergency management, community building, and civic engagement. For the second year in a row, CAN! volunteers distributed resource guides to Montpelier residents in order to connect neighbors with community resources. Additionally, many CAN! groups organize activities, such as potlucks and yard sales, in order to build community within their neighborhoods. At present, Montpelier CAN! is examining its potential to promote civic engagement and increase access to local government. CAN! may serve as an avenue for community members to learn about what's going on in the city and express neighborhood-wide concerns.

enVision Montpelier

Throughout the enVision Montpelier planning initiative, nearly 400 community members attended committee meetings and provided input for the future of the City. Rather than being oriented toward people who are always willing to attend municipal meetings, a goal of the initiative has been to reach out to a broad spectrum of the public. Participants were solicited from Montpelier High School, the Kellogg-Hubbard Library, the Hunger Mountain Co-op, Shaw's grocery, the Gary Home, the Farmer's Market, and the faith community. Ultimately, a

diversity of community members have been engaged by the enVision initiative and therefore, have had their hand in shaping the City's future.

The Montpelier Community Justice Center (MCJC)

The MCJC is a great asset to the community and is a cost effective alternative to the mainstream criminal justice system. The Center's missions is "To ensure that the people it serves have the resources they need to resolve conflicts and promote problem solving in creative ways that encourage feelings of fairness, safety, and inclusion." Run by two experienced mediators and over 40 volunteers, 617 lives were touched by the programs and services of the MCJC in 2009. Two notable initiatives from 2009 include the Conflict Assistance Program and the Restorative Reentry Program. The Conflict Assistance Program assists

A Sampling of MCJC Trainings and Educational Programs:

- Building Compassionate Social Systems
- Nonviolent Communication
- A Personal Tour of Restorative Justice
- Basic Reparative Board Processes
- Insights into Managing Workplace Conflict

neighbors and others in conflict find solutions to the issues that cause them distress, while improving their communication skills and their ability to handle future conflicts. The Restorative Reentry Program matches each client or person returning from prison with a Circle of Support and Accountability (COSA) comprising of three or four trained volunteers. The intensive group mentoring provided by the COSA lasts for at least a year helps the client develop the habits necessary to be a good citizen and contribute positively to the community.

Earth Charter Principle IV.16(b): *Implement comprehensive strategies to prevent violent conflict and use collaborative problem solving to manage and resolve environmental conflicts and other disputes.*

6.2 Goals for the Montpelier Governance System

Citizens of Montpelier developed four long-range goals for Montpelier's governance system. The goals are meant to reflect the vision of the City that community members would like to leave for future generations.

Self-determination
Montpelier subscribes to the principles of democratic governance and recognizes that it cannot thrive without an informed and involved citizenry. The City therefore promotes civic education and strives to make it as easy as possible for community members to be knowledgeable about and engaged in issues of the day. Citizens likewise recognize their rights and responsibility to play an active role in civic life.

Access
Montpelier recognizes that all members of the community have a right to participate in public discourse about the city's present and future and to have a meaningful say in municipal decision-making. The City is responsible for ensuring that there are no barriers to public participation. Aware that its mechanisms for civic input may not keep pace with changing demographics, it reviews and revises its procedures every few years to ensure broad participation.

Equity
Montpelier realizes that communities grow stronger when all their members are able to help shape their common future. Our public officials thus work to remove barriers to participation by reaching out to all members of the community and empowering them to participate in civic dialogues and decision-making processes. Factors such as language, age, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, time, finances, ability, knowledge, and health prevent no one from taking part.

Conflict Resolution
Montpelier residents strive to defuse tensions and resolve disagreements in the early stages. It develops lasting and satisfactory solutions and helps people discover their own power to settle disputes.

Key to Recommendations (next page)

Goals are long-range visions for the community. Goals are identified by letters (A, B, C, etc.) at the top of each page.

Targets are measurable benchmarks toward the goals. Targets are identified by numbers (1, 2, 3, etc.) at the top of each table.

Recommended Strategies are action steps toward the targets. Recommended strategies are listed by number/letter (1a, 1b, 1b.1, etc.) within each table.

6.3 Governance Recommendations

Goal A: Self-Determination

Montpelier subscribes to the principles of democratic governance and recognizes that it cannot thrive without an informed and involved citizenry. The City therefore promotes civic education and strives to make it as easy as possible for community members to be knowledgeable about and engaged in issues of the day. Citizens likewise recognize their rights and responsibility to play an active role in civic life.

1		By 2015, when interviewed, 90 percent of residents in all ranges of income and cultural background rate opportunities to be involved in community matters as "Good" or "Excellent."	Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	1a	The City increases public outreach, so that people know about and feel comfortable participating in the civic process.	City Staff, CM
	1b	Create, disseminate, and continuously update a "Citizens' Handbook" that clearly explains local government processes and opportunities in which residents can participate.	CM
	1c	The City increases the diversity of ways that citizens can participate in local government (call-in, email, blog, online video, etc.) to accommodate time availability.	CM
	1d	Provide childcare at public events to encourage participation and build a sense of community.	Stakeholders
	1e	Organize discussions with expert panels, in order to educate the public about city issues/happenings.	Stakeholders
Additional Indicators		By 2015, participation rates in contested elections and appointments reflect a general interest in City matters. Participation in formal and informal government reflects the cultural and demographic makeup of the City.	
2009 Montpelier Citizens' Survey		✓ 79 percent of residents rate **opportunities to be involved in community matters** as "Good" or "Excellent." ✓ 82 percent of residents rate **opportunities to volunteer** as "Good" or "Excellent."	

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Goal A: Self-Determination

2	Elected officials, board members, and city staff carefully elicit and address citizen input to local processes. By 2015, 90 percent of residents in all ranges of income and cultural background report that Montpelier employees' responsiveness to citizen concerns as "Excellent" or "Good."	Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies **2a**	Upon entrance into a City position, employees, elected officials and board members receive training in listening, conflict management, communication, and outreach skills.	CM
2b	Upon entrance into a City position, employees, elected officials, and board members receive a copy of the Citizen's Handbook.	CM
Additional Indicators	By 2015, 85 percent of City residents can identify their City Council Representative.	
2009 Montpelier Citizens' Survey	✓ 83 percent of residents report the **responsiveness** of City of Montpelier employees is "Excellent" or "Good." ✓ 88 percent of residents report that the **knowledge** of City of Montpelier employees is "Excellent" or "Good." ✓ 89 percent of residents report that the **courtesy** of City of Montpelier employees is "Excellent" or "Good." ✓ 86 percent of residents report their **overall impression** of City of Montpelier employees as "Excellent" or "Good."	

Goal A: Self-Determination

3		By 2015, young adult participation in Montpelier civic activities is significant. Young voters (ages 18-24) turn out at the polls ahead of national averages and the rate of young adult voting has grown.	Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	3a	Develop and implement a consistent civics curriculum in all K-12 Montpelier schools. Develop adult education classes to teach new Montpelier residents about local and state civic processes.	School Board, CVABE
	3b	Identify and support community service and internship placements for students to participate in civics affairs.	Stakeholders
	3c	Create opportunities for youth and young adult representatives to serve on city boards and commissions. When appropriate, representatives are selected by youths themselves.	City Council
	3d	Strengthen school student councils. Develop meaningful connections between the councils, the community, and student government associations at local higher education institutions.	School Board
	3e	Present an annual youth agenda to the city council.	Youth
	3f	Create and support a student advisory committee to the school superintendent. This student advisory committee would also advise city commissions and boards on key issues.	School Board

4	By 2015 date, voter registration has increased.	Responsible Party

Recommended Strategies	4a	Provide continuing, strategic education to the public about the importance and responsibility of voting.	City Clerk
	4b	Provide incentives, such as free transit to voting stations, to increase voter turnout.	Stakeholders
	4c	Generate interest and trust in the municipality by increasing public information on government activity.	Stakeholders

Goal A: Self-Determination

5	By 2015, the City of Montpelier has co-operative, supportive, and mutually beneficial working relationships with governing bodies in the region.	Responsible Party

Recommended Strategies	5a	The City of Montpelier reaches out to regional governing bodies to initiate and strengthen collaborative ventures among nearby communities.	City Council
	5b	Representatives of the city on regional governing bodies have a direct link to the public and elected officials through elections and regular reporting.	City Council
	5c	Community leaders and residents of Montpelier join with those of surrounding communities to learn about proposed developments and opportunities for cooperation.	Stakeholders
	5d	Educate the general public through a series of newspaper articles about regional issues.	Media

Goal B: Access

Montpelier recognizes that all members of the community have a right to participate in public discourse about the city's present and future and to have a meaningful say in municipal decision-making. The City is responsible for ensuring that there are no barriers to public participation. Aware that its mechanisms for civic input may not keep pace with changing demographics, it reviews and revises its procedures every few years to ensure broad participation.

1		By 2015, the average number of citizens attending annual enVision Montpelier meetings to participate in public discourse and contribute thoughtful input to the city's ongoing activities has increased.	Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	1a	Convene enVision groups annually to review goal completion and discuss progress toward enVision goals and new City happenings. The City ensures strong promotion of meetings.	Planning Commission
	1b	The enVision Governance committee further explores other forms of participatory government.	Governance Committee

2		By 2015, Montpelier CAN! serves as an access point for residents to connect with local government.	Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	2a	The city provides needed resources to CAN! groups and continually recruits and supports effective leadership. **2a.1** Help identify community meeting rooms in each of the CAN! geographic areas. **2a.2** Identify and educate informal community organizers about ways to connect fellow residents with local government.	City Council, Planning Department
	2b	Ensure some City Council meetings take place within the community, especially when a project or development affects a particular neighborhood.	City Council

	2c	Ensure some decision-making is decentralized to the neighborhood level. For example, neighborhoods are consulted in the Capital Planning funding process, so that they can contribute input on infrastructure improvements.	City Council

Goal B: Access

3	By 2015, City buildings, transportation facilities, processes, and documents are made available to those with limited access.	**Responsible Party**
Recommended Strategies 3a	The City works to develop a plan to come into full compliance with the ADA regulations required by Titles I-V and implements the plan so that all public facilities are accessible to people with limited mobility, vision, hearing, and who speak other languages.	City Council

Earth Charter Principle IV.13: *Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making, and access to justice.*

a. *Uphold the right of everyone to receive clear and timely information on environmental matters and all development plans and activities which are likely to affect them or in which they have an interest.*
b. *Support local, regional and global civil society, and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.*
c. *Institute effective and efficient access to administrative and independent judicial procedures, including remedies and redress for environmental harm and the threat of such harm.*
d. *Eliminate corruption in all public and private institutions.*
e. *Strengthen local communities, enabling them to care for their environments, and assign environmental responsibilities to the levels of government where they can be carried out most effectively.*

Goal C: Equity

Montpelier realizes that communities grow stronger when all their members are able to help shape their common future. Our public officials thus work to remove barriers to participation by reaching out to all members of the community and empowering them to participate in civic dialogues and decision-making processes. Factors such as language, age, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, time, finances, ability, knowledge, and health prevent no one from taking part.

1	By 2015, 90 percent of residents with all ranges of income level and cultural background rate opportunities to be involved in community matters as "Good" or "Excellent."		Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	**1a**	**The city creates a model of engagement that reflects the diversity of the community, by reaching out to underrepresented populations through a variety of methods.**	**CM, City Staff**
	1b	**The city uses proactive measures to encourage more diversity in leadership positions.** **1b.1** The city attracts diverse groups by initiating special marketing from recognized leaders.	**City Council**
	1c	**The media embraces the diversity of the community.** **1c.1** Educate the media on diversity issues. **1c.2** Increase media coverage of diverse cultural events/holidays.	**Stakeholders, Media**
2009 Montpelier Citizens' Survey		✓ 79 percent of residents rate **opportunities to be involved in community matters** as "Good" or "Excellent."	

2	By 2015, a process has been undertaken to evaluate the voting districts in light of the census and the neighborhoods.		Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	**2a**	**City Council considers City voting district changes based on both equitable population distribution and the neighborhoods.**	**City Council**
	2b	**A regular meeting schedule between City Councilors, board members, and CAN! Groups is established.**	**All Boards, CAN!**

Goal D: Conflict Resolution

Montpelier residents strive to defuse tensions and resolve disagreements in the early stages. It develops lasting and satisfactory solutions and helps people discover their own power to settle disputes.

1		By 2015, 80% of citizens who seek help to resolve non-criminal disputes will be informed and have access to the Community Justice Center for assistance in resolving the conflict collaboratively with the other parties directly involved in the dispute. When the City is a party to the dispute, the appropriate City representative will participate in a collaborative problem-solving process.	Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	1a	The City supports restorative justice programs and alternative models of dispute resolution and community service offered by the Community Justice Center.	Stakeholders
	1b	The Community Justice Center will partner with CAN! to provide training to citizens in conflict resolution and to help citizens learn about the help available through the Community Justice Center and how to access it.	Community Justice Center, CAN!

2		By 2015, 100% of appropriate misdemeanor criminal acts (as defined in a Memorandum of Understanding between the Montpelier Police Department and Community Justice Center) are referred to the Community Justice Center for a Restorative Justice process.	Responsible Party
Recommended Strategies	2a	By 2011, a memorandum for the referral of misdemeanor criminal acts to the Community Justice Center for a Restorative Justice process is drafted.	Police, State's Attorney's Office, Community Justice Center
	2b	The City offers Community Credits or inducement for reparative Community Justice Center board service.	Onion River Exchange, Community Justice Center
	2c	The Community Justice Center reaches underserved groups in their recruitment process for reparative boards.	Community Justice Center