

Country Club Road Site: Process & Progress

By William Fraser, City Manager and Evelyn Prim, Communications Coordinator

January 25, 2023

As most people are aware, the City purchased the former Elks Club property on Country Club road last year. Since the acquisition, the City has launched a planning process to better understand the opportunities and limitations of the site. Real Estate development consultants White + Burke, along with a full technical and architectural team, were retained to lead the site evaluation and public engagement process.

The project team has been working steadily to bring in as many perspectives and stakeholders as possible into the Country Club Road site planning process. Throughout the winter, the City has sought the input of many diverse stakeholder groups, including abutting property owners, the Montpelier business community, Native American tribal representatives, and students at Montpelier High School to name a few.

What We Learned in Fall 2022

Feedback from the Fall 2022 public engagement sessions has helped the City focus on expanding access and engagement with this project. Three themes emerged:

- **Housing and recreation.** Housing and recreation were the top priorities heard from the community, which is consistent with the approved bond for this project in March 2022. Housing was ranked of most importance and is an issue that overlaps with nearly all other issues facing our community.
- **Communication.** The importance of communication – not just government-to-citizen, but dialogue and discourse between the community and City administrators– were highlighted by many groups as being vital to the planning process. This aligns with the City's goal to provide responsible and engaged government through effective communication.
- **Community engagement.** Several groups noted the importance of proactive engagement of historically marginalized populations and individuals without internet or electronic access to information. This is an essential component of this project and will help ensure the future plans of this site benefits Montpelier and the surrounding community for generations to come.

All of these points have been echoed and supported by City staff, and the City Council.

Site Assessments

Using the results of the site due diligence analyses and natural resources assessment, the project consulting team created maps of the site showing the existing conditions and overlay of buildable areas. The site assessments are an important step in the master planning process because they give us a baseline for what's possible and clearly outline constraints, such as streams and other natural areas that play an important role in our community. The team then designed three sketches to test the opportunities and constraints for the site's potential development.

The test sketches show a spectrum ranging from maximum housing to maximum recreation, with a balanced model to demonstrate some of both. These visual tools to advance the conversation around potential uses and are **not** final concepts. They are also intended to help drive more feedback from the community about the direction of the preliminary layout. After all, it's much easier to "see" the potential vision when it's given the proper context.

Process & Progress

As we move into the next stage of the Master Planning process, the City will again hold a series of public meetings and open up alternative avenues for input. In the Winter 2023 Public Engagement stage, we are asking the public to:

- (a) recognize the difficulty in balancing multiple priorities, by
- (b) looking at the test sketches and understanding the limits and finite nature of the site, and to
- (c) choose some priorities for each buildable area.

A 5-minute video will be available on the website and the City's YouTube channel describing the property, the opportunities, and the questions for the public. There's a lot of information to cover, so please watch the video and complete the survey on the website using the platform Polco; if you're able and interested, please join us at a community meeting; and please share with your neighbors and friends as we try to get out the word during this early planning phase.

Winter Meetings

The Winter 2023 meetings will follow a similar format as the Fall 2022 meetings with multiple opportunities to attend. All three meetings will follow the same format and will present the same information. The first meeting will be held Saturday, January 28th on-site at 203 Country Club Road, in the building formerly the Elk's Lodge, from 10:00am to 12:00pm.

The second meeting will be held Thursday, February 2nd at City Hall from 6:00pm to 8:00pm and have a hybrid option to join remotely via Zoom.

The third meeting will be held remotely on Zoom Thursday, February 9th from 12:00pm to 2:00pm.



America's Small Town Capital

Space is limited for the on-site meetings, so please RSVP by going to <https://polco.us/mzxt4s>. If you have a Polco account, you can also find the RSVP link by logging in and searching for the City of Montpelier.

Recordings of each meeting will be posted on the project's webpage on our website.

If you can't make it to the meetings, please visit the website to review the materials, watch the 5-minute video on our YouTube channel, and take the survey. You are always welcome to also reach out to Josh Jerome directly, the City's Community & Economic Development specialist at jjerome@montpelier-vt.org. Josh will be collecting and integrating community feedback throughout the project with the consulting team.

Community Engagement

The City is using a wide variety of methods to glean input from the public. In addition to the meetings, the City will also be circulating a survey using the survey platform Polco. The City used Polco during the FY24 budget process and the National Community Survey last summer.

If you'd like to take the survey and receive periodic project updates, please sign up for notifications using the "Notify Me" feature on the City's website.

Continuing the Conversation

Tune in to WDEV on January 24th! Josh Jerome will be the 9 o'clock guest on WDEV's *Vermont Viewpoint* with guest host Pat McDonald. This will be a great opportunity to hear about the progress made on this project thus far, and the long-term benefits this site will bring to Montpelier and the surrounding communities. You can hear WDEV here in Montpelier on 98.3 FM and or 550 AM.

Thank you for reading this article and for your interest in Montpelier city government. Please feel free to contact me at wfraser@montpelier-vt.org or 802-223-9502 with any questions, comments, or concerns.