

Application Guidelines for Village Center Designation

Introduction

Village center designation, as provided for in 24 V.S.A. chapter 76A, was created by the legislature to recognize and encourage local efforts to revitalize Vermont's traditional village centers. While village center revitalization is an ongoing *process* to improve a community's vitality and livability, village center designation is only one tool and its focus is on supporting commercial activity in the center of Vermont's villages. Communities who pursue village center designation are encouraged to undertake other activities that support long-term revitalization.

These Guidelines provide instructions for communities preparing applications for village center designation. *Revitalizing Village Centers*, included in the second half of these Guidelines, offers additional information designed to help communities improve their village centers.

Application Requirements

In most cases, an application is made by the Town selectboard, and designation may be sought for more than one village center if each one individually meets the requirements. However, if an incorporated village has an approved municipal plan and planning process independently confirmed by their regional planning commission, then it will be the applicant for designation of its village center. An application must be complete to be considered, and applicants are encouraged to contact Vermont Downtown Program (VDP) staff in advance to discuss their proposed boundary and clarify application requirements. There are no specific forms to fill out, but an application must contain the following elements and information:

- A. **Cover letter:** the cover letter must contain the following:
 - Name of the Town or Incorporated Village;
 - Name, address and daytime phone number of the primary contact person; *(please note that this number may be disbursed as a contact to media unless you indicate otherwise)*
 - Minutes or resolution showing that the application for village center designation has been authorized by the Town or Incorporated Village.

- B. **Notification:** Both the regional planning commission and the regional development corporation must be notified of the municipality's intent to apply. The application must include copies of the letters to each of these organizations notifying them of the intent to apply.

- C. **Confirmed Planning Process:** A letter from the municipality's regional planning commission must be included in the application, stating that its planning process is "confirmed" under 24 V.S.A. §4350 by the commission. Confirmation means that the municipal land use plan, and planning process, have been reviewed and approved by that commission.

D. Village Center District Boundary: The boundaries must be consistent with the following statutory definition:

“Village Center” means a traditional center of the community, typically comprised of a cohesive core of residential, civic, religious, and commercial buildings, arranged along a main street and intersecting streets. Industrial uses may be found within or immediately adjacent to these centers.”

The boundary should be drawn around the center or core of the village including its traditional anchor points such as the post office, commercial buildings, town hall, churches and other public buildings that typically comprise the center of a village. Residential and industrial properties that occur within this core may be included, but areas that are predominantly residential or industrial should not be included in the village center boundary.

The following list of common characteristics of village centers is provided to help further define a village center for the purposes of designation. These are supplemental to the statutory definition (above), and intended to help communities draw appropriate boundaries.

- A traditional center of socio-economic activity.
- The center, or core area of the village, which often will be different, and smaller, than the village (municipal) boundary.
- Development densities should be uninterrupted, although there may be some public space, like a park or green, within a village center. Development is also consistently more compact than development outside the village center.
- Pedestrian-oriented rather than auto-oriented.
- Commercial (and industrial, if it exists) activities should be within and part of the traditional development pattern, not on the outskirts.
- Smaller scale than a downtown, but often with a mix of uses that can be similar to downtowns.
- Unique character within the designated area, evolved over time, reflecting a community’s economic, social and cultural changes. The center is also defined by the activities that take place there.

If a center is clearly a downtown, then application should be made for designation as a downtown rather than a village center. If in doubt, applicants are encouraged to call VDP staff.

Finally, a village center should not be confused with a growth center. The purpose of village center designation is to support *revitalization* of what exists rather than to support areas where new growth should be targeted. Certainly there can, or should be new development that can fit within a village center. However, the identification and planning for growth centers is a separate issue.

1. **Map and Ortho photo:** A map must be included, delineating the boundary of the proposed village center district, clearly showing the buildings and

properties that are within the district. The map must show the following information:

- a. Streets by name
- b. Buildings identified by type (e.g., commercial, civic, industrial, residential)
- c. Boundary clearly indicating which buildings and properties are within the boundary
- d. North arrow and scale
- e. Property lines should be shown, but if not available, are not required

The preferred base map is a tax map, if available, showing all the information listed above. The boundary should follow property lines. However, where a building that should be included in the village center sits on a large tract of land, the boundary should be drawn to exclude the excess open land by using a setback from the center of the road, or other means that make clear what land and which buildings are within the boundary. Large parcels of undeveloped land cannot be included in the village center district.

An ortho photo is also required showing the village center boundary. The ortho photo must be of a scale that shows all of the village center and some of the surrounding area to indicate the village center in its context.

The regional planning commission may be able to help with mapping. However, if a map or certain information is not available, the applicant should contact VDP staff to discuss alternatives.

2. **Photographs:** Photographs are required, showing key areas of the village center district, particularly at the edges and other areas where there may be questions about the consistency with the definition of a village center. Photographs should show the streetscape rather than just individual buildings, giving a sense of the context of the area. Photos should be mounted on paper on the original application and clearly labeled with the property address and keyed to the map. Clear photocopies can be used for the 15 additional copies of the application.
3. **Optional Information**
 - Zoning District Boundary – Zoning boundaries can often help explain the community's intent for development and uses within the village center. In such cases, applicants are encouraged to include these boundaries on their village center maps.
 - National Register Historic District boundary - Any commercial buildings listed on the National Register that are within the designated village center boundary may be eligible for the 5% Vermont Income Tax Credit for Substantial Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings, which is one of the primary benefits available to designated village centers. In order for property owners, the municipality, and VDP to easily determine which properties in the village center are listed on the National Register, it is

suggested that the boundary of any National Register Historic District, or any buildings individually listed on the Register, be indicated on the village center map submitted as part of the application. The municipal office or regional planning commission should have information on National Register properties, or contact the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation at 802-828-3046 (suzanne.jamele@state.vt.us).

Application Information

Sixteen (16) copies of an application are required. The copies of the maps and photographs should be clear. The applications are due at the address below no later than 4:30 p.m. on the first Monday of any month in order to be considered for that month's meeting. Applications will be considered by the Downtown Development Board, which meets on the 4th Monday of each month, usually in Montpelier from 12 to 2 p.m. A village center must have received designation before an application for benefits can be considered.

Representatives of the municipality are strongly encouraged to attend the Board meeting when their application is considered. A meeting agenda and a copy of the staff review will be sent to the contact person identified in the application about a week before the Board meeting. By statute, the applicant's regional planning commission and regional development corporation are members of the board when an application from their region is considered, and they can provide additional information at the hearing.

Applications (16 copies) should be submitted to:

Vermont Downtown Program

Department of Housing and Community Affairs
National Life Office Building, Drawer 20
Montpelier, VT 05620-0501
Phone: 800-622-4553 or 802-828-3211
www.HistoricVermont.org

Vermont Downtown Program Coordinators

Joss Besse Phone: 802-828-5212 email: joss.besse@state.vt.us
Laura Gresh Phone: 802-828-3042 email: laura.gresh@state.vt.us

Renewal of Village Center Designation and Amendments

A village center will remain designated for three years. In order to retain designation at the end of the 3 year period, the municipality must submit a request for renewal, demonstrating that it continues to meet all of the requirements for designation. Amendments to the district, if necessary, may be made upon application to and approval by the Downtown Development Board.