

**Fair Haven Planning Commission**  
Town of Fair Haven - March 5, 2025 - Regular Meeting

**Commissioners Present:** Robert Richards - Chair, Linda Sienkiewicz, Deb Laiacona

**Commissioners Absent:** Patrick Frazier, Jason Coupal - Vicechair

**Others Present:** Phil Adams - Zoning Administrator, Jennifer Jackson - Minute-taker, Logan Solomon - Rutland Regional Planning Commission Representative

Hand outs:

1. Cover Letter Draft

**Agenda**

**1. Call to Order:**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm by Chairman Richards.

**2. Review of Minutes of Previous Meeting:**

**Approval of Minutes: Regular meeting - February 19, 2025**

Mrs. Laiacona asked if she should abstain from voting due to her non-membership at the last meeting. Chairman Richards stated that due to their only being 3 members present she will need to vote.

Mrs. Sienkiewicz **motioned to accept the minutes of February 19<sup>th</sup> as written.** The motion was seconded by Chairman Richards. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Chairman Richards stated there would be a slight re-arrangement of the agenda to finish up town business before beginning the work with Mr. Solomon of the RRPC.

**3. Other Business:**

**a. Review of Mail:**

- i. Chairman Richards stated he received a Letter of Resignation from the Planning Commission from Patrick Frazier. He read the letter, explaining reasons for his resignation and hope that he can rejoin in the future.  
**A motion was made by Mrs. Laiacona to accept the letter of resignation with regret.** The motion was seconded by Mrs. Sienkiewicz. All were in favor and the motion passed. Chairman Richards stated he would turn the letter in to Joe Gunter for record and reporting of an open position with the Commission.
- ii. Chairman Richards stated that Mrs. Laiacona had been appointed by the Selectboard to the Planning Commission on Monday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March. ZA Adams asked how long her term would be. Chairman Richards stated she is finishing out the three year term of Mrs. Pritchard. ZA Adams left to get the Town employee page of the town report. He reported that Mrs. Pritchards term ended in 2026. Mrs. Sienkiewicz asked about her term. ZA Adams stated it ended in March 2025.

- iii. Chairman Richards stated a blueprint of the SubStation that will be constructed by the underpass of Rt 4 arrived in the mail from Green Mountain Power. Mrs. Sienkiewicz asked what the benefit of the substation is to the town. Chairman Richards stated it increases the town's power capacity up to area standards. ZA Adams stated there are no local permits required for electrical generation, just subdivision of land permits required.

b. **Public Comment:** None

#### **4. New Business:**

**Continue work on required components for Fair Haven to qualify for a Downtown Designation.**

DownTown Designation Application Packet

([https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD\\_Web\\_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-DT-Application-Guidelines.pdf](https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/ACCD/ACCD_Web_Docs/CD/CPR/State-Designation-Programs/CPR-DT-Application-Guidelines.pdf))

Mrs. Sienkiewicz reported about the Cover Letter. She stated she copied the edited version from Mr. Solomon that included the town information in the template of the Town of Hardwick's application which was approved. Copies were passed out.

Mr. Solomon asked Mrs. Laiacona how familiar she was with the process of Downtown Designation and the Neighborhood Development Area. Mrs. Laiacona explained she is on the Economic Development Committee and the Downtown Partnership and has all the papers and information that Mrs. Pritchard passed on from previous meetings. She stated she needs to get more familiar with what the Planning Commission is doing. Mr. Solomon gave a brief description. He also explained that Gary Holloway, Vermont State Downtown Program Manager, is willing to review parts of the application as they are finished and give critics. He is also eager to meet with the EDC & DT Partnership. Chairman Richards asked again about extending the Neighborhood Development Area north to make up for losses due to the River area. Mr. Solomon stated that is a very good question for Mr. Holloway, he will have great advice. He is also not confident that the area will be able to move north of Rt 4.

Chairman Richards suggested the PC start by going over the Cover Letter changes. Mr. Solomon read the Cover Letter with the PC and made mostly grammatical corrections as it was read out loud. Chairman Richards asked if the revolving loan fund needed to be acknowledged in the cover letter? Mr. Solomon asked for a good example of where the fund has already helped downtown businesses. Chairman Richards explained that the funds have helped the Brewery and Rosie's Bistro. The funds come from USDA and average about \$40,000 total. Mr. Solomon modified the document while they were talking, adding to the last paragraph of page 1 "The town has a revolving loan fund supporting multiple businesses over the years." Chairman Richards asked that a copy of the letter be sent to the town Manager for review and asked if anything else should be included. Mr. Solomon stated no. Chairman Richards asked if it should be run in front of Mr. Holloway. Mr. Solomon stated it should.

Mr. Solomon then guided the PC to the Downtown Designation application checklist with the PC.

1. The Cover Letter: Mrs. Sienkiewicz asked if there was a list of documents included created yet. Mr. Solomon stated it is basically a table of contents and will be created once it is all packaged. He will do the creation.
2. Authorization and Notification: Chairmand Richards already gave the Minutes from the selectboard meeting saying the town is interested. An email needs to be sent to Devon Neary, the director of RRPC, and Lyle Jepson, executive director of CEDRR as notice of intent, Mrs. Sienkiewicz will work on its completion. She requested that Mr. Solomon share a copy of Hardwicks letter as a template. The public notice needs to be posted in the paper of record of the towns intent to apply, Chairman Richards will assign this task to Town Manager Gunter.
3. Confirmed Planning Process - This was Mr. Solomon's responsibility and he reports taht it is complete.
4. "4. The municipality must meet at least one of the following to demonstrate its planning commitment:
  - Adoption of a design control district, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4414(1)(E);
  - Adoption of a local historic district, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4414(1)(F) (please note that this is not the same as a National Register district);
  - Adoption of regulations that adequately regulate the physical form and scale of development that the State Board determines substantially meet the historic preservation requirements in subdivision 24 V.S.A. §4414(1)(E) and (F);
  - Creation of a development review board authorized to undertake local Act 250 reviews, in accordance with 24 V.S.A. §4420."

Chairman Richards stated the Adoption of a Local Historic District is almost complete, but because of the change in timeline to September completion all the public notices and adoptions will take place at one time. The PC then discussed potential new zoning for a local historic district. Chairman Richards will give a copy of potential new regs to the selectboard. Mr. Solomon will run the regs by Mr. Holloway.

5. Community Reinvestment Agreement; This had been delegated to Mrs. Pritchard and Chairman Richards believes Mrs. Laiacona is in a good place to take it over. Mr. Solomon will tweak and e-mail the form from Hardwick to help Mrs. Laiacona show community by-in. Mr. Solomon reminded that they need to show by-in from multiple entities. Mr Richards felt sure that by talking with local business that more ideas would be gathered.
6. Capital Budget and Program; Chairman Richards will get together with Town Manager Gunter together the needed parts of the town capital budget as parts are wrapped into the entire budget. Mr. Solomon suggested they show too much rather than too little. Mr. Solomon stated the Hardwaich budget had a "narrative" section as well as a full budget included in their application. Mrs. Laiacona suggested making a document saying how things are funded. Chairman Richards stated that the water bond was just passed. Mrs. Laiacona asked if things that have recently happened can be included. Mr. Solomon explained that there is both a narrative section and a spreadsheet budget. He will ask for Mr. Holloways advice.

7. Downtown Organization - explained more on page 8 of the application packet.

Organization Structure Requirements

- a. Description of current organization structure (501(c) (3) non-profit organization, municipal commission, downtown improvement district/tax assessment district, etc.).
- b. Copy of bylaws, articles of incorporation, mission statement and other relevant documents demonstrating the organizations primary commitment to downtown revitalization.
- c. Description of roles and responsibilities of board members, officers, executive director and/or program coordinator, committees should be clearly defined in the bylaws.
- d. Current list of board members and their affiliations.
- e. Five-year strategic plan with a description of goals/objectives, strategy for implementation and timeline for completion.

Mr. Solomon asked about the status of the ECD & DT partnership. Mrs. Laiacona explained that at the January meeting the name change was adopted. They are looking for more business owners to get involved and are actively recruiting people. They are working on the new bylaws. Glen Traverse, Chair, has a meeting with Greg Holloway in the works. Mr. Solomon asked if a template from Hardwick would be helpful. Mrs. Laiacona agreed that it would be. He stated he will send all of Hardwicks info from this section. He also stated that Mrs. Laiacona is welcome to give out his email as needed for questions.

Water and wastewater Compliance and reserve Commitment; The appendices were given to Mr. Solomon at the beginning of the meeting. He was concerned of the "reserve Commitment" which had to have a "formal action" - which needs to take place. Chairman Richards stated he didn't know what would be an adequate reserve. Not much structure can be added in the designated area. Solomon stated he will check with the state as to what that meant to them. He did respond with the fact that he knows Fair Haven has a lot of capacity.

Chairmand Richards asked if for part (a) of the Organization Structure Requirements the EDC fit. Mr. Solomon explained that yes "municipal commission" works, the State encourages separate entities, but a municipal entity is OK.

8. Municipal Wastewater Compliance and Reserve Commitment;

Mr. Solomon stated that Compliance with appendices are completed. Will send to Mr. Holloway for Review. However the second component of the section isn't, the reserve commitment. Mr. Holloway stated that the reserve commitment is best as a municipal resolution. He asked that as much information as possible be put into the resolution. Hardwicks example is a good template. Chairman Richards isn't sure how the Selectboard would feel about designating a specified quantity. Mr. Solomon explains that Hardwick projects growth so they calculated a percentage. Chairman Richards then states that the apartments above capacity could be computed with potential

development. The PC then had a discussion of how this could happen. Chairman Richards ended with deciding he will take the question to Town Manager Gunter and the Selectboard. Mr. Solomon stated he would share Hardwicks example with Fair Haven's modifications. He noted that Hardwick gave ranges of expansion

#### 9. Funding Resources

- a. Evidence of the municipality's financial commitment demonstrated by a commitment by the municipality to implement at least one of the following:
  - i. A special assessment district created to provide funding to the downtown district.
  - ii. Authority to enter into a tax stabilization agreement for the purposes of economic development in a downtown district.
  - iii. Other multiple-year financial commitments among the parties subject to the approval of the Downtown Board.
- b. Proposed downtown organization budget with funding sources (see sample budget on page 10).
- c. Plans to pursue long term, sustainable funding strategies (e.g. business improvement district, local option tax, etc.).

Mr. Solomon stated that the Revolving loan fund meets the requirements of part (c). Mr. Solomon has to check on the Tax Stabilization policy as the policy isn't only for Downtown, it is for the entire town. The funding source box needs to be run by Mr. Holloway. Town contributions to Downtown organization needs funding. Chairman Richards stated this is a bit of an issue as the town doesn't have money to fund a person designated to Downtown, he would like some advice from Mr. Holloway on this.

#### 10. Downtown Designation Boundary Map;

Mr. Solomon stated there are two maps required. 1 that is just a map, the second requirement is a labeling of the downtown buildings with photographs. Mr. Solomon is happy to put it together just needs the photos. The PC stated they will gather the photos.

#### 11. Other Required Information: No discussion

Mr. Solomon asked about the Neighborhood Development Area. He explained he is looking and bringing findings about more zoning and town plan info to add. ZA Adams asked if during the adoption of the Historic District and Regulations as soon as it is warned if there are any applications coming in would the ZA look at them with the more restrictive regulations. Mr. Solmon stated yes, but will give more clarification later.

#### 5. Adjournment:

Mrs. Sienkiewicz made a **motion to adjourn at 8:45 pm**. Mrs. Laiacona seconded the adjournment motion. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Jennifer Jackson, Minute-taker

\*\*\*The Next Regular Commission Meeting will be held on March 19, 2025\*\*\*



Vermont Community Investment Board

One National Life Drive

Deane C. Davis Building, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor

Montpelier, VT 05620-0501

Dear Members of the Vermont Community Investment Board,

The Town of Fair Haven is pleased to submit the attached Downtown Designation application materials for your consideration. We are requesting this designation for the historic Village of Fair Haven, which has served as the town's commercial and civic center since its founding. The proposed area builds on our existing Village Center Designation, with the addition of one abutting business and two small extensions:

- Northwest along Washington St up to Our Lady of Seven Dolours Catholic Church.
- North along N Main Street up to Fair Haven Dental

The area depicted in the proposed designation has been part of Fair Haven's historic commercial core since our founding and remains central to our town's economic and social life today.

Under 24 V.S.A. § 2793, a Designated Downtown is defined as *"the traditional central business district of a community that has served as the focus of socio-economic interaction in the community, characterized by a cohesive core of commercial and mixed use buildings, some of which may contain mixed use spaces, often interspersed with civic, religious, residential, and intersecting side streets that are within walking distance for residents who live within and surrounding the core and that are served by public infrastructure such as sidewalks and public transit."* The State's Planning Manual specifies that designated downtowns serve municipal populations of at least 2,000 residents, generally encompassing 50 to 100 acres, and have commercial parcels comprise roughly 50% of designated downtown land use area. Fair Haven meets all these criteria with a population of 2,736 people as of the 2020 decennial census, a proposed acreage of **approximately 80 acres (Logan to precisely calculate at later date)**, and commercial uses make up about 55% of the included parcels, such as Carl Durfee's Department Store, three restaurants, a brewery, a flooring store, a walk in veterinary service as well as other retail establishment. Many commercial establishments are in two-to-four story mixed-use blocks from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Fair Haven is committed to revitalization. Recent infrastructure investments include a \$2 million waterline upgrade, a redesigned public parking lot at the southern end of the Fair Haven green, and the addition of period-style street lighting. Future plans aim to improve traffic flow and

pedestrian safety on Route 4A (Main Street). Business owners take great care in maintaining their properties, and the town actively supports their efforts when possible.

While our Village Center Designation has helped promote reinvestment, the additional tools from the Downtown Designation are needed to address long-term vacancies and unlock redevelopment potential. One example is the historic Culver Block (circa 1895) —home to a ground-floor laundromat and a third-floor auditorium that once housed the Fair Haven Opera House, now awaiting restoration. Supporting the reopening of the Opera House as a value-added cultural opportunity is a listed action item in the 2024 Fair Haven Town Plan, in addition to applying for the Downtown Designation. Downtown Designation would provide access to more financial incentives and Act 250 exemptions under Act 181, making projects like reopening the Opera House more feasible.

Achieving Downtown Designation is the next step in our revitalization efforts, strengthening Fair Haven's role as a destination for western Rutland County and the state. On behalf of the Fair Haven Selectboard, Fair Haven Planning Commission, Fair Haven Economic Development Committee and Downtown Partnership, local business owners, and residents, we respectfully submit this request for your consideration.

Please feel free to contact any of us with questions.

Respectfully,

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*Joe Gunter Town Manager,*

*5 Park Place, Fair Haven, VT 05743 Fhmanager@comcast.net, (802) 265-3010 ext.5.*

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*Robert J. Richards, Chairman, Planning Commission,*

*59 South Main St., Fair Haven, VT 05743, Brichards2355@gmail.com, 802-683-6378;*



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*Philip Adams, Zoning Administrator,*

*5 Park Place, Fair Haven, VT 05743, Fhza@comcast.net, 802-265-3010, Ext 7.*