

CITY OF RUTLAND, VERMONT
Public Hearing
Monday, June 19, 2023

Members present; President Talbott, Aldermen Barbagallo, McCann, Tadio, Adams, Gillam, McClure and Davis. Aldermen Cupoli and Alderwoman Savage arrived at 6:32PM. Alderwoman Hooker was absent.

6:30 PM Public Hearing

President Talbott called the hearing to order at 6:30 PM and noted the meeting was for the Designated Downtown Capital Plan and Budget.

President Talbott introduced Barbara Spaulding, RRA and Ms. Spaulding explained the request. The purpose of the Downtown Capital Plan and Budget is a requirement of the Downtown Designation and evidence of the City's commitment to its downtown. The plan and budget are comprised of current initiatives in the Downtown and the City's planned investment over the next five years. The public hearing is to allow the community to make comment on the proposed plan as the City prepares to apply for renewal of the Downtown Designation. Brian Budrow of the Downtown Rutland Partnership (DRP) provided feedback received from Downtown Business owners.

The following questions, comments and concerns are from Downtown Rutland Merchants and Property Owners:

- Lighting on Wales Street (dark, unsafe feeling for employees and community members at night).
- Progress and timeline on Center Street Redesign taking too long.
- Merchants Row crosswalk by Opera House is extremely unsafe. With the move and expansion of Wonderfeet along with the location of the Boys and Girls Club, people are worried about the safety of our children. Solutions? Permanent bump outs, blinking crosswalk lights, or a temporary trial run of painted bump outs with traffic delineators and planters.
- Lack of improvement projects in the next 5 years.
- Finishing Center Street Marketplace Park to create a usable public space. (Seating, tables, landscaping, tree shade).
- Unattractive and hazardous sidewalks in less frequented corridors. (Related?).

Summary: Overall, the special benefits district constituents feel that not enough is being done by the City to improve the district's infrastructure and community/visitor experience. As the economic hub of the city and county, they feel that their private investments aren't being matched by City efforts.

Mr. Budrow then offered two solutions to increase pedestrian safety and beautification on a smaller, cheaper scale. The first solution would be to work with the Department of Public Works (DPW) and perform a "walk audit" of downtown infrastructure. The idea would be to create a list of small projects that could be completed by DPW during any down time. For example, grinding down and filling existing sign post stumps flush with the sidewalk, mending portions of sidewalks and curbs, and filling the remaining tree pits with concrete.

The second solution would be incorporating "Tactical Urbanism" in partnership with DPW and the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC). "Tactical Urbanism" is defined as an approach that refers to a city, organizational, and/or citizen-led approach to neighborhood building using short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change. Mr. Budrow has been working with the RRPC on using this approach to pilot a month-long project at the Merchants Row mid-block crosswalk

between Center and West Street using existing materials such as paint, traffic delineators, and planters to create a safer crossing point for pedestrians. Mr. Budrow also mentioned that the DRP has used this approach before in the summer park-let project. What started as a temporary solution to providing outdoor dining during the pandemic has grown into a permanent deployment of park-lets every summer that creates a welcoming atmosphere and economic boost to our restaurants and retail.

Ms. Spaulding continued that the City has secured several grants to invest in the Downtown including the Better Places grant for Depot Park and a VTrans Bike/Pedestrian Grant for the Train Station area. Ms. Spaulding foresees using Downtown Transportation Funds to potentially address the concerns for lighting on Wales Street and bump-outs on Merchants Row. This funding is only available annually and wouldn't be available if not for the Downtown Designation. The renewal of the designation will continue to allow the City to apply for funding for which it may not otherwise be eligible and the Downtown Capital Plan and Budget are integral to the City's Designation renewal application.

There were a few questions related to the Designation from Board members.

There were no questions or comments from outside the rail. President Talbott closed the hearing at 6:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Tracy L. Kapusta
City Clerk