



City of Barre, Vermont
"Granite Center of the World"

Agenda for the Planning Commission

Meeting held on Thursday, June 10, 2021 ~ 6:30 PM

Remote Participation Only ~ Join Zoom Meeting

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Meeting ID: 945 5858 2778

Passcode: 417800

Phone: 1 (929) 205-6099 US (New York – Long distance rates will apply)

1. Call to Order
2. Adjustments to the Agenda
3. Public Comment (*for something that is not on the agenda*)
4. Old Business:
 - A. Approve meeting minutes of May 27, 2021
 - B. Continue discussion of role in Promoting ARP (American Rescue Plan) Funds for Housing
5. New Business:
 - A. MUTCD (*Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*) Manual Reform & Citywide Traffic Calming, Green Streets, and Bike/Ped Plan
6. Staff Updates
7. Roundtable
8. Adjourn

Planning Commission meetings are open to the public.

For questions about accessibility or to request accommodation, please call (802) 477-1465.

Barre City Planning Commission

May 27, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Present: David Sichel (Chair), Jackie Calder (Vice Chair), Michael Hellein (Secretary), Amanda Gustin, Thomas Lauzon, Rachel Rudi

Staff: Janet Shatney

1. Call to Order

6:44pm

2. Adjustments to the Agenda

1. No adjustments.

3. Public Comment

No public comment.

4. Old business

1. Approve meeting minutes of May 13, 2021

Motion: Lauzon, Second Calder, Approved

5. New business

1. Discussion of Role in Promoting ARP (American Rescue Plan) Funds for Housing

Chair laid the groundwork for discussion, outlining that \$100 million for emergency housing and \$149 million for housing would be made available under the ARP, leading to 5000 housing units statewide added by 2024.

Hellein stated that the Planning Commission has already delivered what's necessary to guide investment in the form of the Municipal Plan. Lauzon stated that Barre's proportional share of 5000 statewide units is 84, and we should do what we can to make sure that development happens, suggesting a whitepaper to encourage public/private partnership.

There was discussion of the role of the Planning Commission relative to other bodies and organizations for the purpose of economic development. Chair Sichel serves on the board of Barre Area

Development, Inc. (BADC) and he expressed a hope that organization would take a greater interest in residential development as a component of economic development. Consensus formed around creating a whitepaper summarizing the projects and investments recommended by the adopted 2020 Municipal Plan, with the Chair suggesting presenting the document to Council was a good way to start the conversation on future action.

Motion: Sichel, Gustin, and Lauzon will create a whitepaper document summarizing the Municipal Plan's recommendations for projects and investments in the context of the ARP. An outline will be presented at the next meeting (6/10) and a draft at the subsequent meeting (6/24). Hellein, Second Calder, passed unanimous.

6. Staff Updates

Shatney reported that the Assessor position is still unfilled, and that absorbs a lot of staff time. The upcoming DRB meeting is proving controversial as a result of an application to demolish a building to create parking. An at-large member of the DRB is resigning.

7. Round Table

No updates.

8. Adjourn

7:56pm, **Motion Hellein, Second Gustin, Adjourned**

Planning Commission New Business Item A

Councilor Hemmerick wrote to the Planning Commission Chair and Vice Chair, as well as the Chairs and Vice Chairs of the Paths, Routes & Trails, Transportation Advisory, and ADA Committees several people in early May 2021 to share some resources about a nation-wide push to reform the MUTCD (Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices). This manual is developed in Washington and adopted by the State of

Vermont -- too often to the detriment of safe urban streets, historic settlements, vibrant commerce, residential quality of life, and the preservation of human life.

Public Works officials like Director Ahearn, who are working to make the city function at its best, are often put on a rock in a hard place by these standards, since Federal and state aid creates obligations for the City.

On Merchant Street, for instance, where an MUTC double yellow centerline was applied, residents observed that this improvement made the speeding worse (the problem they were hoping to address), not better. Hill Street residents have made similar observations, where center line striping were put down by VTrans in the center-width of the street (even though parking is disallowed on one side of the street) thereby discouraging and making on-street parking less safe as cars began to consistently drive in excess of 40-45 mph. (When a speed trailer is present in certain stretches, this tends to drop too approx. 35.) If the street were not built to an excessive width at incredible expense to the taxpayers for paving, plowing, stormwater treatment, sweeping, and under-used on-street parking which can't be used in the winter (as many streets in the City have been), things could be



One federal manual dictates how we build our streets. We must reform it.

better. I believe Barre can become one of the most livable cities in New England, and it starts with fixing up our front porch (our busiest streets).

Driving behaviors like this (and a nationwide epidemic of pedestrian deaths) result because the MUTCD standards are highway road standards that get applied to city streets in ways that make urban places more dangerous and less livable. Highway standards (wider lanes, bigger signs, center line striping, sweeping curbs, limitations on on-street parking, the absence of roadside street trees between sidewalks and the lane, etc.) all signal to drivers to drive at highway speeds. Speed exacerbates the severity of any accident, is more likely to result in the death a pedestrian and has many negative impacts to adjacent residents and businesses. Fundamentally, roads and streets are distinct and do not serve the same function, but many of these Washington D.C. and car/construction industry-written standards don't work to support vibrant communities -- too often they're making streets less safe.

He shared a very interesting article by Bloomberg News:

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-05/it-s-time-to-rewrite-the-road-builders-rule-book> .

A host of North American cities and more than a dozen advocacy groups, including the [National Association of City Transportation Officials](#) (NACTO), the [League of American Bicyclists](#), the [National League of Cities](#), the [National Safety Council](#), and [America Walks](#) (where Councilor Hemmerick is currently working on [a campaign around this](#)) are now calling on federal transportation leaders to essentially scrap the draft MUTCD and start from scratch.

Also the National Association of City Transportation Officials, whose work should be recognized in any national code (and only to the extent that a national or international standard is needed) have also released this post. Their work to make cities more livable and authentically safer is beyond commendable. And the City's Plan recognizes this outstanding work:

<https://nacto.org/program/modernizing-federal-standards/>

Councilor Hemmerick is asking if any would be willing to co-author a letter for consideration by your municipal bodies for the manual's decision makers and transportation policy leaders in Vermont for final consideration by the Council asking:

1. That the manual be reformed in line with requests from the organizations named above (as well as other local bike/ped/sustainable transportation advocates here in Vermont);
2. That its application be refined within historic and compact settlements in Vermont leaning into the NACTO guides;
3. And that Barre staff and committees carefully apply the standards in the best interests of its citizens for multi-modal and complete streets.
4. Endorse a request that the City initiate in FY23 (as budgeted - or sooner if possible) to conduct a Citywide Traffic Calming, Green Streets, and Bike/Ped Plan to advance this City Plan implementation task that informs this City Plan implementation task (which I wish said street instead of road -- because we have too many 'stroads').

Excerpted Next Steps from our adopted Municipal Plan:

5. Develop and adopt road standards.

Status: The city has a set of road standards, but have not been formally adopted and are very old.

Timing: 2024

Partners: City Engineer, City Planner, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Council

Notes: Having an adopted set of road standards would enable the city to qualify for transportation grants. The existing set of road standards should be reviewed to assure that new roads will be accessible to emergency vehicles and that they will incorporate appropriate stormwater infrastructure before being formally adopted. All street segments in Barre City should be classified as arterial, connector or neighborhood streets, and adopted standards for each classification should reflect the appropriate planned usage as described in Section 3. This will also entail revisiting the Streets and Sidewalks Ordinance. **This project should take into consideration National Association of City Transportation Officials design guides.**

For your convenience, as follows are the 9 pages of the Transportation section of the municipal plan, of which this Next Step is listed.

TRANSPORTATION

planning for the transportation system

Barre City recognizes that the city's transportation system contributes significantly to economic vitality and community well-being. To achieve our vision for a healthy future, Barre City needs a transportation system that enables all residents to conveniently and safely travel around the community, accessing homes, jobs, schools, parks, shopping and services.

The transportation system directly affects health through traffic accidents, air pollution, and reduced physical activity. It also has indirect impacts on health as a result of economic factors such as access to employment opportunities, transportation costs, and the vitality of the local economy. Not only does the transportation system provide for the mobility of people and goods, it also influences patterns of growth and economic activity by providing access to land.

Barre City's transportation system is more than just roads. It includes:

- Sidewalks and paths traveled by pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Public transit;
- The rail line; and
- The connections between these modes of transport within the city and to transportation systems in the larger region.

Barre City has more potential for - and need for - effective and efficient transportation alternatives than most Vermont communities due to our relatively high density, compact development pattern and large percentage of residents who do not drive or own a vehicle.

key points

1. **Downtown Traffic.** Almost 17,000 vehicles per day travel on North Main Street, a large percentage of which is through traffic. Traffic creates both a significant challenge and potential opportunity for downtown revitalization efforts. The North Main Street Reconstruction Project from 2011 has improved both traffic flow and the appearance of the downtown streetscape. The project has mitigated some of the negative impacts of heavy traffic and created a more pedestrian-friendly downtown. This effort needs to be continued with the planned Merchants Row and the North Main to Summer Street projects.
2. **Downtown Parking.** The city is the principal provider of downtown parking with more than 500 parking spaces in several municipal lots in addition to on-street parking. Generally, Barre City has an ample supply of public parking, but improvements are needed to provide safe pedestrian access within parking lots, to maximize use of and direct drivers to available parking, and to make parking areas a more attractive part of our downtown. A more pedestrian-friendly downtown and near-downtown will also encourage people to park and walk from place-to-place, rather than driving to and parking at each destination.

3. **Pedestrians and Bicyclists.** There is demand for an improved sidewalk/path network in Barre City for pedestrians and bicyclists. Sidewalks and paths provide opportunities for exercise and a healthy, low-cost transportation alternative for those who cannot or choose not to drive. There are numerous challenges to overcome to construct sidewalks and paths including obtaining rights-of-way and securing funding. The city struggles to pay for the maintenance of existing sidewalks and paths, raising concerns about whether we should build more sidewalks and paths. The City has completed portions of the City Bike Path, and needs to finish those segments that will interconnect the completed ones.
4. **Public Transit.** Barre City has a large transit-dependent population – people who do not/cannot drive or do not own a vehicle – and many households that are burdened by increasing transportation costs. There are private taxi companies that operate within the City, as well as Uber and Lyft. While GMTA (Green Mountain Transit Authority) does provide public transit service in the city, a more robust public transit system is needed to fully meet the transportation needs of our residents. Improvements to the current public transit system could encourage more people to choose transit over driving to destinations within the city and region, thus reducing traffic and parking congestion. Expanding the number of people living or working downtown will expand the base of potential public transit riders, which should help support improved service in Barre City.
5. **Road Maintenance Costs.** Road maintenance costs consume a significant portion of the city’s budget. Road maintenance costs continue to rise with energy costs due to dependence on petroleum products (asphalt, vehicle fuel, etc.) making the challenge of keeping up with road maintenance needs more difficult for the city over time.

issues & challenges

Barre City has identified the following transportation challenges and issues that need to be addressed to achieve our vision for a healthy future:

1. **Facilities for Pedestrians and Bicyclists.** Barre City residents regularly identify improved walking and biking routes within the city and to neighboring communities as an important goal. However, given the city’s limited resources and other priorities, it continues to be a challenge to focus on this issue. The Semprebon bequest renewed efforts to complete the multi-use path between Barre City and Barre Town, and only certain segments have been constructed to date. If that project is successfully completed, it may spur further efforts to make the city a more walkable and bikeable place.
2. **Public Transit.** There is a recognized need to expand public transit service within the city, but additional city funding would likely be needed to improve public transit service. City residents and workers are currently limited in their transportation choices by public transit service location and frequency, and commuting destinations and distances. Through changes in land use, urban design, street design, and public transit services, our city can improve the viability of public transit service while also becoming more walkable and bikeable. Improving our public transit service by studying the impacts of rail service between Barre City and Montpelier would particularly benefit lower-income residents who are more heavily burdened by transportation costs and could expand their access to employment opportunities.

3. **Aging Infrastructure.** The City of Barre, like municipalities around the state and country, faces the challenge of aging infrastructure. With declining federal and state dollars available, the city will have to finance a larger share of the upgrade, replacement and repair costs. The cost-per-mile of repaving, other road repairs and regular road maintenance are significantly affected by rising energy costs. Unlike many communities, Barre City has recognized the need to address the issue of aging infrastructure. For more than two decades, the city has been engaged in an on-going street reconstruction program. The challenge in future years will be finding the funding needed to keep that program going at the level needed to keep the city's transportation infrastructure in adequate condition.
-

strengths & opportunities

Barre City has already acted to address transportation issues, and there remain many strengths and opportunities we can build upon to continue those efforts as we strive to achieve our vision for a healthy future:

1. **Proximity and Quality of Interstate Access.** Route 62, a five-mile long, four-lane, limited-access state highway, provides a direct link between downtown Barre City and Interstate 89 at Exit 7. Route 63 is 3 ½ mile long three-lane, limited access state highway that also provides a direct link to Barre City from Exit 6.
2. **Highways.** Routes 14 and 302 bring many travelers into Barre City and bring many potential customers into our downtown. Traveling between downtown Barre City and Montpelier via Route 302 is a 20-minute trip, which made by more than 12,000 vehicles per day.
3. **Traffic.** While there is considerable traffic on North Main Street, downtown Barre City is less congested than most urban areas in Vermont. Vehicles flow with limited delay into and out of the city. Transportation studies have determined that none of our intersections will fail to meet level of service standards, even after City Place was constructed and approximately two hundred more people are working downtown. Except for the intersection in front of the library (Route 302, Route 14 and Elm Street), all other intersections in the city have a level of service of C or better, which is outstanding for an urban area.
4. **Public Parking.** There are more than 500 public parking spaces available downtown. The availability of public parking has allowed the city to eliminate on-site parking requirements for downtown businesses.
5. **Rail.** With rising fuel costs, the ability to ship and receive freight via rail is again becoming a competitive advantage and a factor that businesses will consider when selecting where to locate. Many of Barre City's industrial areas have direct rail access. In 2019, a grant was awarded to the City of Montpelier to study the use of the rail service between them and Barre City. This may conflict with the "granite train" that runs in Barre City delivering grout.
6. **Airport.** Downtown Barre City is four miles from a regional airport, the Edward F. Knapp State Airport just across the city line in Berlin.

goals & strategies

Barre City has established the following transportation goals and strategies in order to achieve our vision for a healthy future:

- 1. For Barre City to optimize and maintain its transportation infrastructure as needed to support economic vitality and quality of life in the city.**
 - A. Invest in improvements to transportation infrastructure needed to attract and retain businesses in the city.
 - B. Improve the appearance and function of existing arterial roads in the city.
- 2. For Barre City to accommodate future transportation needs primarily by improving the quality and use of existing infrastructure rather than by building additional infrastructure.**
 - A. Optimize existing traffic configurations and traffic lighting to provide for the efficient movement of existing and future vehicular traffic.
 - B. Promote and improve safe vehicular access with new development and redevelopment.
 - C. Incorporate Complete Street elements such as sidewalks, crosswalks and curb ramps into street reconstruction and repair projects.
- 3. For Barre City residents and workers to have viable alternatives to driving a personal vehicle to destinations within the city and region.**
 - A. Maintain current public transit service, and expand that service as warranted by demand and as can be sustained financially.
 - B. Maintain and improve the city's sidewalk network so more city residents can safely walk from their homes to jobs, schools, parks, shopping and services.
 - C. Complete construction of the planned bike path through the city.
- 4. For Barre City to provide a pedestrian- and bicyclist-friendly environment.**
 - A. Maintain and construct new sidewalks that serve areas of existing or anticipated high volumes of pedestrian use.
 - B. Maintain neighborhood sidewalks within the financial constraints approved by the city voters.
 - C. Make improvements when streets are being repainted, repaired or reconstructed to better accommodate safe walking and biking throughout the city (ex. narrowing travel lanes/widening shoulders, bike lanes, sharrows (road marking in the bike lane), sidewalks, cross-walks, curb ramps, traffic calming, signage, etc.).

- D. Improve the connectivity of existing walking and biking routes.
-

next steps

Barre City should pursue the following actions in order to achieve our vision for a healthy future:

1. Develop and adopt a Complete Streets policy.

Status: No action has been taken to date.

Timing: 2024

Partners: City Planner, City Engineer, Planning Commission, City Engineer, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Council, Paths, Routes & Trails Committee

Notes: The website of the National Complete Streets Coalition provides information about developing a local Complete Streets policy and links to policies adopted by municipalities around the country. In Vermont, Montpelier, the City of Rutland and the City of Burlington have developed Complete Streets policies.

2. Investigate demand for and establish additional scheduled stops as needed along the City Route, City Commuter and Hospital Hill bus routes.

Status: Action has begun in 2018.

Timing: discussions and changes by GMTA have had them reviewing polices on off-route pickups, larger busses and added stops with additional shelters.

Partners: CVRPC, City Planner, Planning Commission, City Engineer, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Council, GMTA

Notes: Opportunities to provide bus service to the high school should be explored, which could reduce downtown traffic generated by students driving or being driven to/from school. Attention should be given to the changes that GMTA is making, and the City should participate in their work.

3. Encourage and support Barre City Elementary and Middle School's (BCEMS) involvement in the Safe Routes to School program.

Status: No action has been taken to date.

Timing: 2022.

Partners: BCEMS, City Planning Commission, City Planner, City Engineer, City Council

Notes: This state/federal program helps to generate enthusiasm around biking/walking to school and can provide financial resources to improve city infrastructure. More information is available online at <http://saferoutes.vermont.gov>.

4. Identify and take appropriate action with regard to paper streets, particularly those that are limiting the use and development of otherwise suitable lots.

Status: No action has been taken to date.

Timing: 2022

Partners: City Planner, City Engineer, City Attorney, City Council, Paths, Routes & Trails Committee

Notes: Paper streets are strips of land that were designated for use as a street when a subdivision was initially laid out, but the street was never constructed as planned. The ownership of some of these strips has become uncertain over time. This limits the ability of adjoining land to be developed because the city cannot grant the right to install a street or infrastructure on the strip of land (as originally intended) without the approval of the owner. The city would need to identify the owners of paper streets or institute a legal process to municipal ownership of these strips if no owner can be determined to facilitate development of the adjoining land.

5. Develop and adopt road standards.

Status: The city has a set of road standards, but have not been formally adopted and are very old.

Timing: 2024

Partners: City Engineer, City Planner, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Council

Notes: Having an adopted set of road standards would enable the city to qualify for transportation grants. The existing set of road standards should be reviewed to assure that new roads will be accessible to emergency vehicles and that they will incorporate appropriate stormwater infrastructure before being formally adopted. All street segments in Barre City should be classified as arterial, connector or neighborhood streets, and adopted standards for each classification should reflect the appropriate planned usage as described in Section 3. This will also entail revisiting the Streets and Sidewalks Ordinance. **This project should take into consideration National Association of City Transportation Officials design guides.**

6. Complete a citywide Pedestrian Environment Quality Index (PEQI) and Complete Streets assessment.

Status: No action has been taken to date.

Timing: 2021

Partners: City Planner, Planning Commission, City Engineer, Transportation Advisory Committee, Paths, Routes & Trails Committee, City Council

Notes: More information about conducting a PEQI assessment is available from the UCLA Center for Occupational and Environmental Health at www.peqiwalkability.appspot.com . There are a number of Complete Streets assessment tools available and examples of assessments completed in communities around the country. Trained volunteers can conduct these assessments, which examine both the physical infrastructure available to pedestrians and whether the overall environment is safe and pedestrian-friendly.

7. Review access management¹ provisions in the city’s land use regulations and update as needed.

Status: No action has been taken to date.

Timing: 2022

Partners: City Planner, Planning Commission, City Engineer, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Council

Notes: Vermont Agency of Transportation has published an Access Management Guidebook and Best Practices document that include recommended access management provisions. This could be incorporated into the revision of the city’s commercial and industrial zoning districts recommended in the land use chapter.

8. Develop a citywide long-range bicycle and pedestrian plan.

Status: No action has been taken to date.

Timing: 2024

Partners: City Planner, Planning Commission, Paths, Routes & Trails Committee, City Engineer, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Council

Notes: This could build upon the bike path planning work already completed, as well as the PEQI and Complete Streets assessments recommended above. The plan would be tool to help the city prioritize bike and pedestrian improvements, and to coordinate small sidewalk or path projects into an interconnected system that would be completed over time.

9. Complete construction of the bike path through the city.

Status: Final engineering for the path is on-going.

Timing: 2022

Partners: City Engineer, City Planner, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Council

Notes: Supported by the Semprebon funding, the city should come up with a schedule to complete the Depot-to-Museum segment and the Depot-to-Barre Town segment by 2022.

¹ Access Management is utilizing tools and techniques to manage vehicular access to businesses, homes and other land uses without sacrificing safety and efficiency.

10. Re-engineer the railroad trestle on Vanetti Place to mitigate flood hazards.

Status: No action has been taken to date.

Timing: 2022

Partners: City Engineer, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Planner, VTrans, City Council

Notes: This project falls to the responsibility of VTrans. The railroad is using this bridge for the use by the granite train, and city departments have made arrangements to regularly inspect the trestle for debris buildup.

11. Construct Barre's first traffic circle.

Status: No action has been taken to date

Timing: 2022

Partners: City Engineer, Transportation Advisory Committee, City Planner, VTrans

Notes: This project will be considered a text for replacing further uncontrolled or signaled intersections with traffic circles. Candidate locations include Washington and Hill Streets, or North Main and Berlin Streets. Traffic circles should always be considered as a lower maintenance alternative to a signaled intersection.

benchmarks

Barre City should measure progress towards achieving our vision for a healthy future against the following benchmarks:

1. **Miles of sidewalk in Barre City.** Walking contributes to minimum requirements for physical activity, does not contribute to noise or air pollution emissions, and reduces transportation energy consumption and costs. A vibrant pedestrian environment contributes to economic vitality and social interaction within the community. *Source: Barre City GIS Mapping*

In 2010: 22

Target for 2024: 25

2. **Miles of multi-use paths in Barre City.** A multi-use path network can help encourage people to increase their daily activity by providing a convenient and appealing place to walk or bike that is separated from vehicles and that can provide a safer, quieter and more relaxing environment. *Source: Barre City GIS Mapping*

In 2010: <1

In 2019: 0.3 miles

Target for 2023: 4

- 3. Percentage of Barre City residents who walk, bike or take transit to work.** Environments that support walking, biking and transit trips as an alternative to driving have multiple potential positive health impacts. Studies have shown that around 30% of people using transit to get to work meet their daily requirements for physical activity from walking between destinations and transit stops. *Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey*

In 2010: 5%
In 2017: 13%
Target for 2023: 20%