

27 November 2018

To: Town of Middlebury
Selectboard
Planning Commission
Design Advisory Committee

From: Faith Terry
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I am writing in enthusiastic response to the good efforts of our Middlebury community to date working in concert with VHB Landscape Architect, Mark Hamelin, to fashion an appropriate post-construction landscape design for Middlebury's Triangle Park and Printer's Alley.

I realize that I am a "*Jane Come Lately*" to this discussion although I have followed the process and observed your progress through the eyes of my husband, Stephen Terry, a longtime member of your Planning Commission.

For the past thirty years my concerted efforts have been directed, alongside a myriad of dedicated citizens, toward the historic preservation and revitalization of the City of Vergennes where I resided and still own property in the Historic District. I served as design Co-Chair of the Downtown Revitalization Committee and coordinated the day-long charette, "Finding Vergennes," whereby an enlightened body of preservationists, architects, landscape and urban planners, economic development professionals, and community and state government leaders, fashioned a strategy for the revitalization of Vergennes. Many of the resulting recommendations have become reality and the document serves as blueprint for ongoing improvements to the community. I served as Chair of the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House during its restoration. I was specifically involved in the design and development of the Main Street streetscape and the City Park landscape, and served as clerk of the works for the restoration of numerous Main Street commercial properties.

I continue my involvement in Vermont community development and oversight by serving on the Vermont State Transportation Board, a quasi-judicial regulatory board guided by Legislative mandate. One meaningful function of this Board is to conduct a periodic survey, statewide, of the public's perception of its most critical transportation issues. The most recent survey involved rail and truck issues. As a result, I view Middlebury's current transportation travail, in a broad statewide context.

I mention all this only to preface my well-intended observations and remarks regarding the two most recently received concept designs by Mr. Hamelin for the post construction of Middlebury's Triangle Park and Printer's Alley and with the clear understanding that the Vermont Agency of Transportation anticipates Middlebury to commit to a final design by December 11, 2018.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following narrative is in response to aforementioned stated public consensus as to best use of the properties and intended to accompany and inform my attached overlay of Mr. Hamelin's most recent concept drawings for Triangle Park and Printer's Alley:

I wholeheartedly support the view that Triangle Park should serve as a central, tranquil, town square (triangle!) in which to gather, to socialize, or to contemplate, as well as a fully accessible public space for year-round events and gatherings. Naturally, this will support the stated objective of encouraging

economic development downtown. That said, I would go further to argue that *every* well-considered physical and cultural improvement to the municipal landscape has the potential to promote economic development. For this reason, I will include references to related Town locations and items of interest in acknowledgement of this established objective.

TRIANGLE PARK

My overlay indicates an enlarged plaza (or *piazza*), an entirely level, easily maintainable, hardscape surface made aesthetically pleasing by well-defined spaces with variation in color and texture of the hardscape treatments. As a result, I have eliminated the implied areas of grass (as difficult and costly to maintain in heavy traffic) and its accompanying, but unnecessary, walkways. I have maintained the ring and encourage the planting of mid-sized deciduous trees to be chosen for their street-side durability, as well as for their textural interest and seasonal color. These would provide definition to the courtyard and shade in the summer. The trees bordering St. Stephen's property are well-placed as there is adequate soil beneath for growth by contrast to the foreground which sits atop the railroad tunnel and will have little subsoil. These border trees could be interplanted with ornamental crabapples, and/or a narrow, low hedge alongside the iron railing of espaliered crabapples to provide spring and fall color variation and to provide further definition between the two properties.

To encourage public use, I suggest placement of historically appropriate benches, tables and chairs, placed throughout the plaza and affixed to the hardscape. I reference the attractive, durable, and comfortable "*Charleston Battery Benches*" situated throughout the Vergennes City Park for over 30 years, and made of ornamental iron and painted wood. Each bench was sponsored by individuals in support of the community revitalization of the park.

As a focal point for Triangle Park, I propose the repositioning of the City Bandstand/Gazebo. Its current location does nothing to enhance the Town Green nor provide easy, nor ongoing, utilization. By contrast, I envision continual use – scheduled summer-long bandstand and other concerts, Memorial Day speeches, community forums, and public gatherings of all variations. I can think of no stronger, more positive, welcoming visual and visible message, nor a better use for this central public space.

As an aside, I can envision the move of the Bandstand from the Town Green to its new home in Triangle Park as the consummate public relations event signaling the successful completion of the downtown transformation. Particularly, if on the day of its relocation, the structure was moved onto its new site by an entourage of draft horses in the presence of the entire cheering community!

With little level ground, vulnerable to the elements, the Town Green has been well, but only occasionally, utilized for musical and other community events. To encourage its expanded utilization, I would advocate for the leveling of two discreet areas of the park and of infill with hardscape.

There has been much discussion about and enthusiasm for locating a more central, visibly prominent, home for the Middlebury Farmer's seasonal market. Certainly, levelled and improved areas within the Town Green could provide such a base for our growing agricultural community.

Additionally, and to encourage the expansion of successful programs such as the superb Middlebury Festival on the Green, I would recommend creation of an amphitheater in one (or both) of the designated areas to promote larger scale public events. This would be a perfect place to incorporate the ashlar stones as terraced seating. Clearing of the land and construction could take place effectively in concert with the completion of the rail project and the restoration of the Town's center.

Much discussion of the historic fountain has taken place. Careful positioning of the fountain in the new landscape will be essential to its preservation and appreciation by the public. I would observe that the new, expanded, Triangle Park requires a larger focal structure than the fountain can provide. I would put forth two possible options with preference for the latter. Indeed, the fountain could be placed at the head of Triangle Park in the newly created bulb-out on the corner of Main Street and Merchant's Row. The scale of the fountain would work well in this public space. That said, other, equally persuasive, options for this highly visible corner should be considered: an inground artwork made of enduring metal or tile which might portray an aspect of Middlebury history or other significant subject determined through community deliberation with a competition conducted to award the artistic commission through public process; or perhaps an ever-changing seasonally planted, array of bulbs and flowers, or decorated displays to highlight public events.

The other appealing location for the fountain would be at the head of the newly created Lazarus Park, highly visible to passersby and to those crossing Main Street from Triangle Park on route to the Marbleworks or to Falls Park. *The scale would be perfect, the fountain better protected, yet accessible.*

I should also mention a potential secondary location of merit for the Gazebo/Bandstand (indicated in the overlay) could also be at the introduction to Lazarus Park, accessible to the Marbleworks, and with the same proposed season-long concerts and other public events of merit. Either location would provide a vast improvement in the use of the Gazebo/Bandstand to the benefit of the community and would encourage greater public participation.

PRINTER'S ALLEY/LAZARUS PARK

I have referenced Printer's Alley/Lazarus Park. I would like to elaborate on its proposed function as an attractive and highly functional gateway, tying together the upper and lower downtown areas. This geographic area needs serve several functions: the walking public needs safe, handicapped accessible access, and the driving public needs a clearly defined, well-signed, adequate roadway. All to the Public Good if the functions were accomplished with an aesthetic vision. Here is where I put my hat into the ring. The overlay indicates my preference for the roadway to be widened and located adjacent to the bank building by eliminating the proposed second walkway and green space. There is no need for two walkways so close to one another and whatever verdant landscape would be proposed would have no chance of survival. The proposed Lazarus Park has sufficient room to incorporate an aesthetically pleasing and functional promenade, as well as attractive plantings along its length. As suggested, the Fountain would provide a lovely introduction to the park. Additionally, an overarching, aesthetic gateway of ornamental iron could serve to introduce the newly proposed Lazarus Park to the passing public and perhaps to identify Printer's Alley, the Marbleworks, and/or Falls Park.

Lastly, but with great enthusiasm, I propose that the bank be approached to consider allowing the creation of a full-size wall mural on the entire side of its building, facing the proposed Lazarus Park, and visible to all oncoming visitors to Middlebury from the East. I have viewed two such murals created for and placed in the center of historic Quebec City for the pleasure of the public. Another excellent example is the street level mural in Burlington adjacent to Church Street. They are a highly acclaimed and visited attractions. *Excellent examples of the cultural economy at its best.*

The mural could be created in any of a variety of manner: It could be painted directly on the building in weather impervious paint; it could be painted off-site on treated canvas and then grommited to the building; it could be a painted original photographed and then enlarged as a mural application; or finally, it could be a digitally produced image that is then transmitted onto the side of the building, but only visible in darkness. All options are available and have an excellent track record around the world as public art. The cultural economy at work, once again.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS OF RELEVANCE TO THE DISCUSSION

CROSSWALKS/PARKING

You will notice that I have realigned several of the crosswalks: The painted crosswalks at the intersection of Main Street and Merchants Row were not aligned with the sidewalks, instead at angles to the sidewalks for no particular reason. (I have left the existing crosswalks in the diagram as reference with the proposed version as overlay). Aligning the streetscape, where possible, is calming to the walking and driving public.

For traffic calming and aesthetics, I support the proposed planting of a row of street trees along Merchants Row.

For the same reasons, I support the creation of expanded bulb-outs at the corners of Main Street and Merchants Row and as an enhanced introduction to Triangle Park. I note that by slightly decreasing the size of the proposed bulb-out on the facing corner (in front of the Edgewater Gallery) I was able to restore two parking spaces for public use.

I propose the relocation and expansion of the crosswalk connecting Triangle Park and Printer's Alley/Lazarus Park to function as a continuing promenade, and to provide a clear indication of the connectivity of the two areas to the travelling public. Once again, this would serve to calm traffic and enhance public safety as this crossing will be heavily used by the public in the future.

Of note: As a result of these recommendations one existing parking space would be eliminated due to the expanded crosswalk, one additional parking space would be added in front of St. Stephens, and two spaces would be provided adjacent to the bulb-out on Merchant's Row.

LIGHTING/WATERING

Although not indicated in the proposed concept drawings at this time, I can presume that a well-considered lighting plan and landscape watering diagram for both parks will be part and parcel with the final solution.

A VERDANT COMMUNITY

In closing, I am a long-standing enthusiast of a community built upon its green spaces. For aesthetic, cultural, spiritual, and economic reasons, it makes eminently good sense. Any new municipal development, such as those being considered here, provide unique and meaningful opportunities to nurture and enhance its verdant landscape, resulting in an increasingly vibrant, desirable urban community.



align crosswalks

signage to gateway
"Lay over Park"

MAIN STREET

MERCHANTS ROW

Sylvia Boardwalk

expanded crosswalk

fountain widen sidewalk

40' +/- level multiuse public gathering space Potentially ashlar stone amphitheatre section