

Addison County Regional Planning Commission

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December 7, 2018

Mr. Joseph Flynn, Secretary
Vermont Agency of Transportation
1 National Life Drive
Montpelier, Vermont 05601

Reconstruction of Triangle Park and Printer's Alley associated with the Middlebury Rail Tunnel

Dear Secretary Flynn:

I write this concerning the final restoration plans for Triangle Park and Printer's Alley after attending the joint Middlebury Planning Commission/Design Advisory Committee meeting on November 29th and a second public meeting on the subject on December 5th. Both meetings left me feeling disheartened. VTrans and Middlebury are about to miss a significant opportunity to enhance the vibrant nature of downtown Middlebury. From our conversation at the "Capital for a Day" visit this summer, I know you recognize the importance of the tunnel project as a signature project for VTrans. I write to ask you to intervene and re-emphasize the multi-modal transportation opportunities this project brings and to embrace the ties to community planning and economic development this project has the opportunity to create.

Please also read this letter in context. VTans has been a good partner to Middlebury. The tunnel itself constitutes a significant improvement to Middlebury's downtown and VTrans has recognized and included the value of a number of other improvements during the course of designing the tunnel. VTrans and Middlebury have also worked hard on the logistics of construction to build the project in a manner that attempts to minimize impacts to the downtown. That cooperation is one of the reasons VTrans' stumbling near the finish line is both disheartening and perplexing. Restoring the public spaces in downtown Middlebury is the final phase, the most public phase, of this project. It constitutes the most important phase of the project to the people of Middlebury. If there is a heart in downtown Middlebury, I expect most people would locate it in Triangle Park, near the major institutions in Middlebury like the bank, the post office, Merchants Row, Middlebury's churches and the existing town green.

The people of Middlebury are excited about the extra space the tunnel will provide in this area. At the public hearings they expressed a clear desire to use this space to create an animated, useful area. A space designed to put a vibrant beat into the heart of downtown Middlebury; a place that will welcome all people to congregate for social interaction, commerce, recreation, and political debate.

Sadly, for this portion of the project, VTrans' project team has failed to embrace Middlebury's call for a greater planning vision. VTrans' team provided plans that address some of the community's concerns. They have listened respectfully and have made small changes that will be easy to implement and that nibble at the edge of Middlebury's vision. However, "Sorry Sir, Sorry Ma'am, we have a tunnel to build." is the distinct feeling they have conveyed at the public hearings.

This letter requests that you act to redirect your team's focus to free them to embrace Middlebury's vision, harmonizing the transportation infrastructure with the enhancement of the heart of our downtown.

I expect we have the same goal. I would articulate it as follows:

Rebuild the public areas of Middlebury's downtown impacted by this project to create a vibrant community space Middlebury can animate to serve its citizens interests and finish spaces in a manner that preserves opportunities for Middlebury to build out amenities in the future.

In support of this goal, I would advance the following criteria (many taken from VTrans new project prioritization schedule):

1. How does the project improve the Town's sense of community?
 - a. Provide Functionality - Rebuild the parks as space that enhances opportunity for all Middlebury's citizens to use it.
 - i Level – Create a public gathering place that can accommodate small groups and large events.
 - ii Hardscaped – for year-round use (We cannot stop here, this describes a parking lot, not a park).
 - iii Accessible -- ease of access for people and vehicles carrying equipment or wares for events.
 - iv Utilities - Provides easy access to utilities to serve functions (electric, water, sewer).
 - v Flexible Spaces/Outdoor Rooms - Includes Inviting smaller spaces that can contribute to larger public gathering areas Use the railroad blocks and plantings creatively to create intimate places and places for color.

b. Improve Connectivity

- i Transportation Modes- Provide Transportation connectivity for all modes of transportation including walking, biking, a safe bus stop in the downtown and connections to the future rail platform.
- ii Part of a whole- Provide connectivity to other portions of the green, Merchants Row, Main Street and the Marbleworks that supports all people, including children and the elderly.

c. Aesthetics

- i Historic Features - Respect historic features, but provide design flexibility to create attractive, imaginative functionality. (Keep the fountain, but provide for flexibility concerning its location in the park and the size of its pool. Embrace the creative use of the Ashlar Blocks to design interesting features, planters and sub-spaces; Transportation (the Tunnel) has added significantly to the size of the park; re-consider whether a portion of it can be used to allow event support access and parking on Merchants Row.
- ii Lighting/Safety. Incorporate lighting for safety and aesthetics
- iii Trees and Plantings: Create the infrastructure to soften the hardscape for events with trees and plantings. Middlebury has wonderful plantings and will maintain the space in the future. Give it an interesting canvas with which it can work
- iv. Children's features. Can you think of any happier sound than a child laughing in a park? Make the history of the fountain matter by considering fountain pool designs that will animate an area. Create a small space within the whole that will attract the whimsy of children.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I fully expect that if your team embraces these design criteria and works with Middlebury to implement them to serve the community goal articulated above, we can create a signature project that fulfills VTrans' multi-modal transportation mission and enhances the vitality of Middlebury's downtown.

Very truly yours,

Adam Lougee, Director