

# Downtown Improvements

Includes goals from these [Creative Communities Reports](#):

- Open Air Mall on Center Street
  - Organize Evening Events to Bring Activity Downtown after Dark (St. Albans)
  - Support a Strong Restaurant Culture (Bellows Falls)
  - Revitalize "The Island" (Bellows Falls)
  - Spruce Up Downtown Hardwick
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- For the Art Park mural, the **Vermont Arts Council** could provide a grant through their Opportunities Grants program. [vermontartscouncil.org](http://vermontartscouncil.org). **Robert McBride** in Bellows Falls helped commission a mural for the entrance to his town. (802) 463-3252.
  - The **Vermont Youth Conservation Corps** (<http://www.vycc.org/>) provides assistance for downtown work that involves park space or conservation (for example along the river). Call (802) 434-3969.
  - Look at other successful downtown efforts. **Bristol** is one example, and (on a larger scale) the **Main Street Project** in Johnson. A **community development coordinator** could be key to ongoing investment in the downtown – maintaining projects started through this process, gathering new ideas, and building an overall vision that ties an appealing downtown to a strong local economy. Talk to **Lea Kilvadyova** ((802) 635-2611) for a perspective from Johnson. Call **Joss Besse** at the **Vermont Downtowns Program** ([www.historicvermont.org/programs/downtown.html](http://www.historicvermont.org/programs/downtown.html) ; 802 828-5212, [joss.besse@state.vt.us](mailto:joss.besse@state.vt.us)) for other success stories.
  - **St. Albans** did extensive work on Taylor Park as a centerpiece of their downtown. Through the course of this work, they developed a list of resources for supporting green space in Vermont communities. Contact **Jeff Young** ([jeffyoung@yahoo.com](mailto:jeffyoung@yahoo.com)) for information.
  - Look to Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) or Municipal Planning Grants to support **downtown revitalization**. CDBG accepts applications every 2-3 months, but the Municipal Planning Grants are only accepted in September. Call the Agency of Commerce for more information at (802) 828-3211.
  - When towns bring in landscape architects to design the streetscape they often find funding in transportation grants. Check **VTrans** and the **NVDA** webpage [www.nvda.net/TopNavBars/grants.html](http://www.nvda.net/TopNavBars/grants.html)
  - The **Partners for Livable Communities** (<http://www.livable.com/>) offer another perspective on downtown districts, particularly cyber districts. One strategy for increasing pedestrian traffic in the downtown could be wireless hotspot zones.
  - The **Central Vermont Community Action Council** (<http://www.cvcac.org/>) is working on ways to provide a venue for their micro business participants and their products. **Mary Niebling** is at (802) 479-1053.

## *Pedestrian Marketplaces*

- Have conversations with other Vermont locations to find out about the challenges of an open air mall. The **Robert H. Gibson River Garden** in Brattleboro is a good example – talk to them about what obstacles ultimately limited the scope of their project. Visit Burlington's **Church Street Marketplace** to see what is

possible. A conversation with **Joss Besse** at the **Downtowns Program** (802 828-5212) can identify who to interview.

- While exploring what has happened in *other* towns, you should also identify where sticking points have been in your own community. The pedestrian mall may not be a new concept. A comprehensive understanding of both the vision that an open air mall is attempting to achieve *and* where this overlaps with merchants' specific goals is essential.
- Two helpful websites/organizations could be the **Project for Public Spaces** ([pps.org](http://pps.org)) and **National Main Street Program** (<http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/>).

Compiled by the **Vermont Council on Rural Development**, 802-223-6091, [www.vtrural.org](http://www.vtrural.org)