

TOWN OF EAST MONTPELIER PLANNING COMMISSION
HOUSING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
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1. Briefly, what is Downstreet Housing and Community Development and what does it do?

Downstreet Housing and Community Development (formerly Central Vermont Community Land Trust) is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping provide safe, decent and affordable housing in Central Vermont. Downstreet develops, owns and manages affordable multi-family and senior rental housing projects, as well as owning a few mobile home parks. Downstreet also has programs to help first-time homebuyers.

In the developer role, Downstreet makes the connection between the community and available funding sources (e.g., Community Development Block Grants). Downstreet puts together the project budget (pro forma) and helps apply for grants. The budget includes a development fee for Downstreet. Downstreet helps the town through the process of bidding for a general contractor. Projects tend to take 3-5 years to complete, often longer. All of Downstreet's housing projects are for-profit, which adds to the town's grand list.

Downstreet focuses on multi-family projects (20-30 units); over the past several decades Downstreet has learned that this scale is needed to have sustainable operating budgets over time. Downstreet has not figured out how to do single family homes affordably; the cost of land drives up the costs.

2. Generally in Central Vermont villages, where are the greatest housing needs: owner-occupied housing, rental housing, senior housing, other?

There is no "typical" village, but generally towns and villages need all of these housing types.

3. How important is housing to energizing small villages?

Housing can be very important. Housing and village revitalization tend to go hand in hand. Examples are Barre, Waterbury and Northfield. From a revitalization point of view, you want people to live in the village.

4. What amenities are important to locate in conjunction with or near housing?

Sewer, water, transportation, schools, recreation, groceries are key amenities. Sewer, water and transportation are necessary to make development costs work for affordable housing. Funding for affordable housing is very competitive, so affordable housing projects with existing infrastructure are more likely to be funded.

5. What are the current trends in village housing in Central Vermont? (lot size, square footage, number of bedrooms, etc.)

Not discussed.

6. Is there an optimal mix of single family and multi-family housing for Vermont villages?

Not discussed.

7. With the infrastructure that is currently in place (roads, transit, etc.), is East Montpelier geographically located to absorb or address housing needs for adjacent activity centers such as Barre City, the City of Montpelier, or the Town of Berlin?

Not discussed.

8. East Montpelier residents have expressed interest in encouraging more families with children to settle in the community. Does the village's proximity to the elementary school make the village a desirable location for family housing?

See #4.

9. Which are more financially viable as development projects: stand-alone senior housing developments or mixed-use developments with a senior housing component? Why?

Not discussed.

10. What zoning changes are most effective in encouraging new and infill housing development in villages?

Does zoning allow for the types of projects desired? Do density, setbacks and height limits allow for the project to maximize smaller infill lots (and keep costs/unit down)?

Mike Miller (Montpelier Planning and Zoning Director) and Janet Shatney (Barre Planning and Zoning Director) might provide some additional zoning perspectives.

11. What other types of municipal actions are effective in encouraging new and infill housing development in villages?

Try to create a community sense of place, through a beloved store, event, or something to focus on. Identify the community strength and use that as a focus, so you know when you are in the community. Take a look at how other communities have done this.

12. What municipal regulatory incentives are most effective in promoting affordable and moderate-income housing in small villages? How effective are these incentives in villages without municipal sewer?

Not discussed.

13. How could a housing needs assessment assist the town in planning for housing in the village and town-wide?

Housing needs assessments help the community understand what types and how much housing is needed. Downstreet plans to prepare a regional housing needs assessment. It may be possible to the town to contribute to this project and obtain town-level information.

14. Are there programs available to help develop housing and if so, what are the eligibility requirements?

Downstreet can help identify funding sources. Not discussed further.