



PROJECT OVERVIEW

VIEWS TO THE MOUNTAIN:

Protecting Scenic Road Corridors in Essex and Jericho

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IMPORTANT NOTE:

This project is locally driven. References to “scenic roads” do not carry any requirement for participation in any state or federal designation programs (though such participation can always be pursued at the discretion of the towns).

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Smart Growth Vermont is working with the towns of Essex and Jericho in a collaborative project to develop and implement strategies for protecting scenic views in the two towns. The primary focus of the project is on planning and zoning tools for protecting key views to Mount Mansfield, a scenic resource of unparalleled value for both towns. However, other important scenic resources – in particular, roads designated as scenic by the towns that do not include views to Mount Mansfield – will also be given consideration, as will non-regulatory tools.

The project is a two-town endeavor to take advantage of the fact that there is a good deal of overlap between the needs and priorities of the two towns relative to scenic resource conservation, which means that a joint project reduces the cost to each town. The final products will consist of an assessment of scenic resources, identification of options for protecting scenic resources, development of a Scenic Roadscape Protection Manual, and drafting of bylaw language.

Funding for the project comes from a variety of sources. Each town is contributing both cash and in-kind labor. In addition, the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization has made a grant to support the project, and the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission is providing GIS services. Finally, Smart Growth Vermont is contributing a portion of the budget using grant funds.

This project is part of part of Smart Growth Vermont’s “Roadscape Guide” initiative. For more information, please download a copy of [The Roadscape Guide](#).

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

Smart Growth Vermont is Vermont's only nonprofit organization devoted exclusively to promoting smart growth, an approach to managing land use that integrates development with conservation by using land efficiently and sensibly. Our mission is to forge growth and conservation solutions for Vermont's communities and rural countryside. To this end, we work both at the state policy level and directly with communities and other local partners to create innovative land use solutions that both preserve Vermont's unique working landscape and encourage reinvestment in traditional community centers.

One of the ways we carry out our mission is through the Community Planning Partnership, an ongoing initiative in which communities that are interested in implementing smart growth principles work with Smart Growth Vermont to turn those principles into on-the-ground solutions. We help communities move from good ideas to practical tools, crafting town plan amendments, new bylaw language, and other building blocks of effective local planning that are tailored to the particular circumstances of each

"Local planning can be very contentious, and it helps to have an organization like Smart Growth Vermont at your side as you work through the process. I can honestly say that our new Town Plan would not be as good or as complete without their help."

*Tom Wells, Chair
Planning Commission, Town of Bristol*

partner community. Our criteria for selecting partner communities are attached, and more information about the program is available at www.smartgrowthvermont.org/help/cpp/.

Another of Smart Growth Vermont's major initiatives is the Roadscape Guide, which is focused specifically on helping communities identify, assess, and protect scenic road corridors. The project was originally an initiative of the Champlain Valley Greenbelt Alliance, a nonprofit formed to create the Roadscape Guide (available on our website at <http://www.smartgrowthvermont.org/help/publications/>). Once the guide was published, the Champlain Valley Greenbelt Alliance transferred the publication and related program work to Smart Growth Vermont.

WORKPLAN

The project will proceed four distinct phases for this project, as follows:

Assessment of Scenic Roadscape Resources. The first phase will focus on a broad-brush inventory of the kinds and extent of scenic resources in Essex and Jericho. With the existing scenic inventories already conducted by the towns as a starting point, the project

team will conduct a more detailed scenic resource assessment, identifying key vantage points, describing the attributes of each in narrative and photographic form, and then scoring each using the methodology outlined in the Roadscape Guide. (Note that this is a fairly labor-intensive process that will rely on the help of trained volunteers from each town's Conservation Commission as well as other interested local residents.) *The end product of this phase will be a series of GIS layers and accompanying text that document the current status of identified scenic corridors across both towns that serves as the basis for developing proposed scenic overlay district maps.*

Identification of Preferred Strategies. The second phase will shift the focus from assessment and mapping of scenic resources to the development of a draft overview of preferred strategies for protecting scenic roadscapes in the two towns. Strategies will be divided into three major categories: proposed boundaries of and standards for the scenic overlay districts, proposed changes to bylaws that would apply town-wide (not just in the overlay districts), and non-regulatory tools for protecting scenic resources. Strategies would be presented in the form of a series of tables and selected maps that laid out a broad range of options for review and comment by the two planning commissions. *The end product of this phase will be a refined and prioritized list of strategies for each town, including both regulatory and non-regulatory tools for protecting scenic resources.*

Preparation of a Scenic Roadscape Protection Manual. The third phase will bring all the pieces together, combining scenic resource maps and data with proposed strategies and recommended actions in a single document. The plan will also include an implementation plan for each town, with a step-by-step overview of the specific actions each town should take and in what order to implement the plan smoothly and efficiently. Finally, the plan will include a section specifically on opportunities for collaboration between the two towns. Once completed, the plan will be submitted to each town's Planning Commission and Select Board for approval and adoption. *The end product of this phase will be a detailed plan that provided both a justification and a blueprint for taking action to protect scenic resources in each town.*

Drafting of Plan and Bylaw Language. The final phase of this project will focus on preparing bylaw language for each town that will serve to incorporate the overlay district boundaries and accompanying standards into the zoning bylaw. *The end product of this phase will be a series of updates to the Zoning Bylaw for each town that, together, initiated the process of implementing the Scenic Resources Conservation Plan.*

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Smart Growth Vermont has worked on a range of projects that require a careful assessment of the intersection of landscape attributes and community values and the development of

visual resources and standards intended to preserve and enhance those aspects of the landscape that a community values most. We have extensive experience in developing detailed but easy-to-implement workplans for complex projects and possess in-depth knowledge of a range of regulatory and non-regulatory tools for scenic corridor conservation.

For example, we are in the final stages of a project with the Town of Danville to help them design zoning districts and standards that will ensure that new development in and around Danville Village is in keeping both with the area's character and with residents' preferences. We are also working with the Town of Burke to help the Planning Commission identify and implement growth management strategies that will preserve the town's rural character in the face of significant resort-generated growth. The project began with an intensive effort to assess how community residents define "rural character," what aspects of rural character are most

"Smart Growth Vermont has brought a level of skill, knowledge, passion and commitment to this project that exceeds by a substantial margin what the Planning Commission could have achieved on its own. They have added significant value to our efforts to plan for our town's future in ways that protect what makes Danville such a great place to live."

*Jeff Frampton
Planning Commission Chair
Town of Danville, VT*

important to them, and which strategies for preserving rural character are most acceptable. In a different vein, we are working with the Town of Bristol as a technical advisor in a complete rewrite of their Town Plan, with a focus on incorporating smart growth principles throughout the document.

We are excited to be working with Essex and Jericho on a project to preserve scenic corridors in the two towns. We look forward to moving forward with both towns on a project that meets our respective goals and conserves a key resource in the region: the views to Mount Mansfield that both towns still enjoy.