

Agency of Commerce and Community Development
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PLANNING & ZONING

March 29, 2016

Sarah Hadd, Planning Director
Town of Colchester
PO Box 55
Colchester, VT 05446

RE: Downtown Board Guidance for New Town Center Civic and Public Buildings Requirement

Dear Sarah,

On behalf of the Downtown Development Board, I want to thank you for your efforts and patience as we work to assure the next New Town Center renewal is predictable and efficient. As you know, at its November 2015 Board meeting, the Town of Colchester submitted a one-year progress report as required by the renewal approval from December 1, 2014. The progress report included an executed April 2015 lease agreement for a new public information center and information about staffing, hours of operation, and the activities and uses in the building. While the Board recognized and appreciated the town's work to meet its expectations, they continued to express concern regarding the town's ability to meet the public and civic buildings as required in 24 V.S.A § 2793b (F).

(F) Evidence that civic and public buildings do exist, or will exist in the center, as shown by the capital improvement plan or the capital budget and program, and the official map.

Therefore, in addition to the visitor center, the Board required that Colchester show evidence that at least one additional civic building and at least one public building will be established within the New Town Center before its next renewal, due November 2019. In an effort to establish clear expectations for future staff and board members, the Board requested the department draft a guidance letter to clarify the types of buildings in the New Town Center that would meet the statutory requirement.

At its January 25, 2016 meeting, the Board discussed the draft guidance letter to Colchester. After a lengthy debate, the Board asked that the department meet with the town to identify a range of options that meet the "civic and public buildings" requirement for the New Town Center.

Below is a summary of our February, 12, 2016 meeting with you and Town Manager, Dawn Francis. At the meeting, we agreed that a community center is the preferred option to meet



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the civic building requirement. However, Manager Francis noted that the community was considering multiple locations for this building and the decision regarding where, when or if the community center is built ultimately rests with the citizens of Colchester.

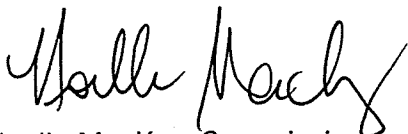
We then considered other options that would meet this civic building requirement, including a state or federal office with outdoor areas for the public to gather. We noted the fact that federal, state and local governments often lease space and concluded that a long-term lease (at least 10 years) would demonstrate a meaningful commitment to maintaining the civic purposes of the space. We also considered other ways the town could attract the public to the New Town Center with municipally controlled recreational amenities like a basketball court or baseball fields or a public green or community gardens that could be used for a farmers' market.

Finally, we noted that state statute also requires a public building within the New Town Center. Possibilities that meet this requirement include business or institutional buildings that are open to the public like a movie theater, medical facility, a private school, or day care center.

The options listed in this letter to meet the requirements of 24 V.S.A § 2793b (F) are not exhaustive and serve to clarify the Downtown Boards expectations of Colchester's plans to renew its New Town Center designation. There may be other combinations of buildings and public spaces that can meet the requirement.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have additional questions. We look forward to working with the town to help make its New Town Center a vibrant place and focus of community life.

Sincerely,



Noelle MacKay, Commissioner
Department of Housing & Community Development

CC: Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

