



FINDING VERGENNES

A DAY OF COMMUNITY DISCOVERY

MAY 8, 1998



VERGENNES

DOWNTOWN VERGENNES REVITALIZATION PROJECT
P.O. BOX 35, VERGENNES, VERMONT 05491

October 16, 1998

Memorandum to: Bill Benton, Chair
Plan and Oversight Committee

From: Tim Cowan, Chair
Terry Faith Weihs, Vice-Chair
Design Committee

*By Paul R. Vachon
Committee Staff*

Subject: Transmittal of Design Recommendations for
incorporation into Revitalization Plan

On October 12, 1998, the Design Committee reviewed the enclosed Report, "Finding Vergennes, A Day of Community Discovery". The Committee made several amendments to the enclosed report. These amendments, taken together with the design day report findings and recommendations are provided to the Plan and Oversight Committee as a contribution to the final downtown revitalization plan. We stand ready to continue working on this effort and will be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the enclosed materials.

Amendments to design day report:

Design Day Report Amendments:

1. Brick sidewalks. The Committee feels that brick should be used for visual emphasis at crosswalks, in "neckdowns", or other pedestrian safety areas. Interlocking block paving bricks should also be used in utility strips along granite curbs in newly constructed areas. Brick, in combination with conventional concrete, would make an attractive, smooth, and long-lasting sidewalk on Main Street between the street and the buildings. The Committee agreed to develop a sidewalk "typical" section that can be reviewed by City officials and developers and used to establish uniformity of design for future street improvement projects.

2. Pedestrian safety access lights to stop traffic at the approaches to Otter Creek Bridge. The Committee wishes to add pedestrian activated lights at each end of the Otter Creek Bridge to enable safe crossing of Main Street to and from the buildings on the islands.

3. The Committee feels that improved sidewalk lighting, sidewalk repair, and brush cutting, and vegetative plantings should occur on MacDonough Drive from the City Dock to Main Street. These improvements help to link the boating public to Main Street more effectively.

4. The Committee recommends that the lot on West Main Street adjacent to Otter Creek be acquired by the City of Vergennes from Leonard Duffy as soon as practicable so that gateway improvements can occur there.

5. The Committee does not favor closing off Green Street at School Street and developing a small pedestrian mall. Rather, the committee favors creation of a gateway through pedestrian amenities, landscaping, neckdowns, etc. to restrict through truck traffic, but allow local vehicular traffic at this location.

6. The Committee strongly recommends that a trial "round-about" be installed at the intersection of Green Street Extension, King Street and New Haven Road. Care must be taken to plan the device to provide safe children's crossing over two existing roads. Plans should be coordinated with the Vergennes Union Elementary School administrators responsible for the safety crossings.

VERGENNES

DOWNTOWN VERGENNES REVITALIZATION PROJECT
P.O. BOX 35, VERGENNES, VERMONT 05491



October 7, 1998

Dear Vergennes Revitalization Supporter:

On behalf of the Design Committee of the Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project, I am very pleased to provide you with the enclosed report, "Finding Vergennes, A Day of Community Discovery". The report records the collective ideas and design recommendations of over 120 community leaders, citizens, and dedicated professionals who came together at the Vergennes Opera House on May 8, 1998. Concerns about historic preservation, community spirit and priority for people over vehicles, economic and business development, and environmental quality are evident throughout this document.

Local Vergennes business owners, the City of Vergennes, enthusiastic citizens, and civic groups have already implemented some of the low cost solutions contained in this report. There is of course much more to do. Vergennes is on the rise, and with your continued support many good things can happen.

Don't hesitate to contact the Revitalization office at any time (877-1158) to discuss your specific ideas and plans.

Sincerely,

Paul R. Vachon
Program Director

Enclosure: As Stated

30 September 1998

Bill Benton, Chair
Plan and Oversight Committee
Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project
Vergennes, Vermont 05491



Dear Bill:

On 8 May 1998, at the Vergennes Opera House, over one hundred and twenty enlightened community people from the Vergennes area, throughout Vermont, and New England convened for one purpose – to create a vision together and to document that vision for the renewal of downtown Vergennes.

Several overriding themes surfaced throughout the day's deliberations:

the small size and residential nature of the city with its community spirit, the historic and naturally beautiful Otter Creek Basin, and the architectural and cultural landmarks in Vergennes are among its greatest assets;

growth should serve the local community first and support small scale development without sprawl;

government, business and the community-at-large should celebrate the people and the environment that is Vergennes, and start now to enhance its "sense of place."

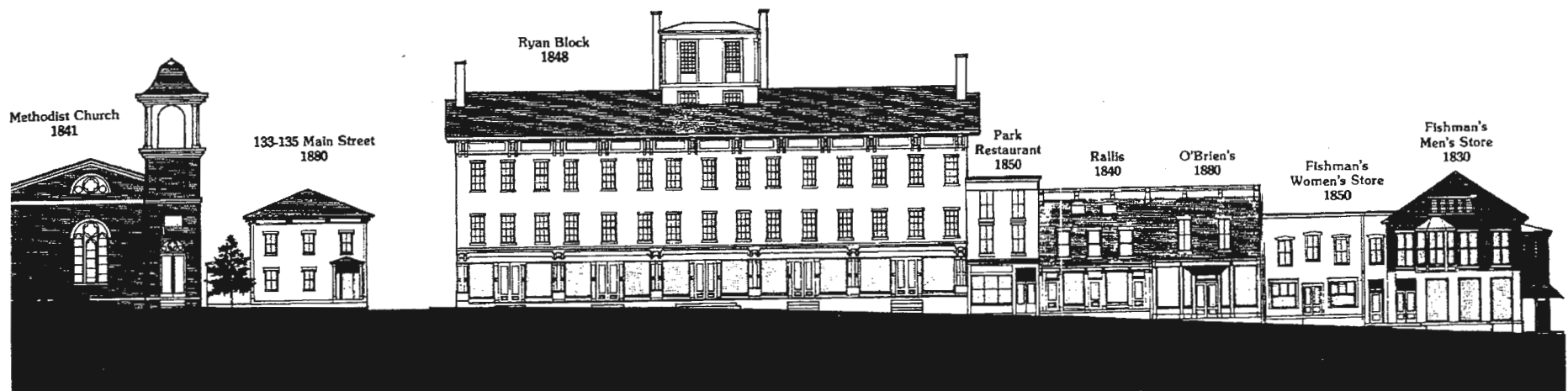
On behalf of the Design Committee of the Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project, I am proud to be able to provide you and members of the Plan and Oversight Committee with this report which documents the substance of their efforts and, hopefully, captures some of the magic of the day.

"Finding Vergennes, A Day of Community Discovery," would not have been possible without the dedication and spirit of committee members like Jeff Glassberg, Janet Kennedy, Norman LeBoeuf, Ken Oboz, David Raphael and, in particular, Paul Vachon, Director of the Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project. Each is an individual who believes strongly in the renewal process and who gave his/her time, energy, and expertise to make the design day a tremendous success.

I trust you will find this report to be thoughtful and respectful of the 8 May event itself. The Plan and Oversight Committee is encouraged to integrate these findings and recommendations into a blueprint for change in our little city that will focus on our assets; renew our streets, our economy, and our community; and enhance the quality of life for area residents.

Sincerely,

Terry Faith Anderson Weihs
Vice-Chair Design Committee
Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project



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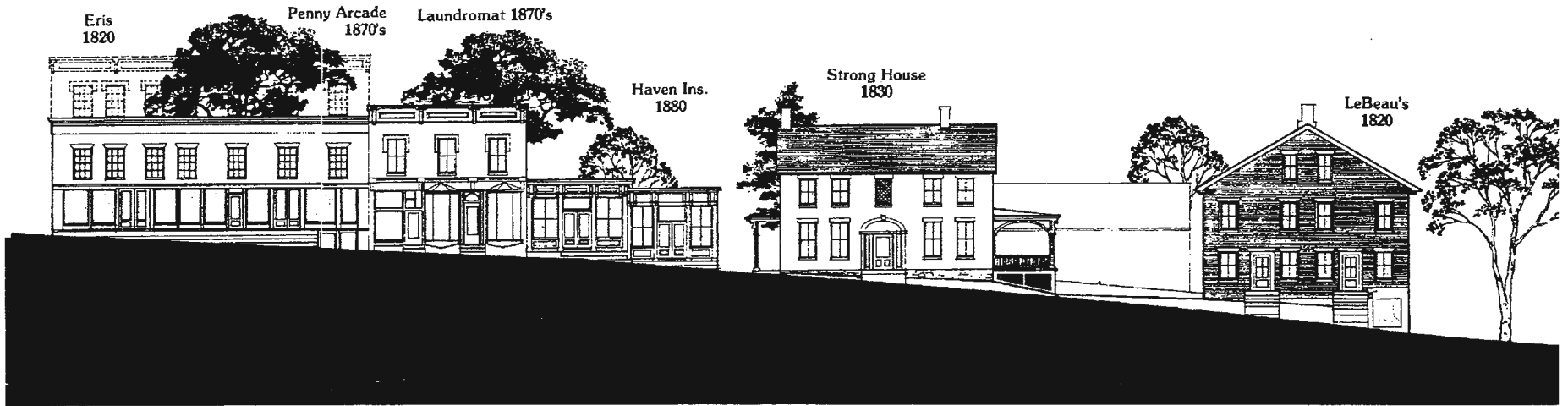
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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

“Finding Vergennes” was conceived and sponsored by the Design Committee of the Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project.

On 8 May 1998, the City of Vergennes, Vermont hosted “Finding Vergennes - A Day of Community Discovery.” Forty-nine professional architects, city planners, landscape architects, downtown specialists, preservationists, developers, and community leaders were asked to donate their time and considerable talents to share their ideas and their vision for Vergennes, to prepare design sketches, and to make recommendations for preserving and revitalizing three target areas in downtown Vergennes.

The event and this comprehensive report of the event is intended to serve as an inspiration and working document for use by members of the Plan and Oversight Committee of the Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project and by city officials and their working committees.

FINDING VERGENNES

A DAY OF COMMUNITY DISCOVERY

SUMMARY

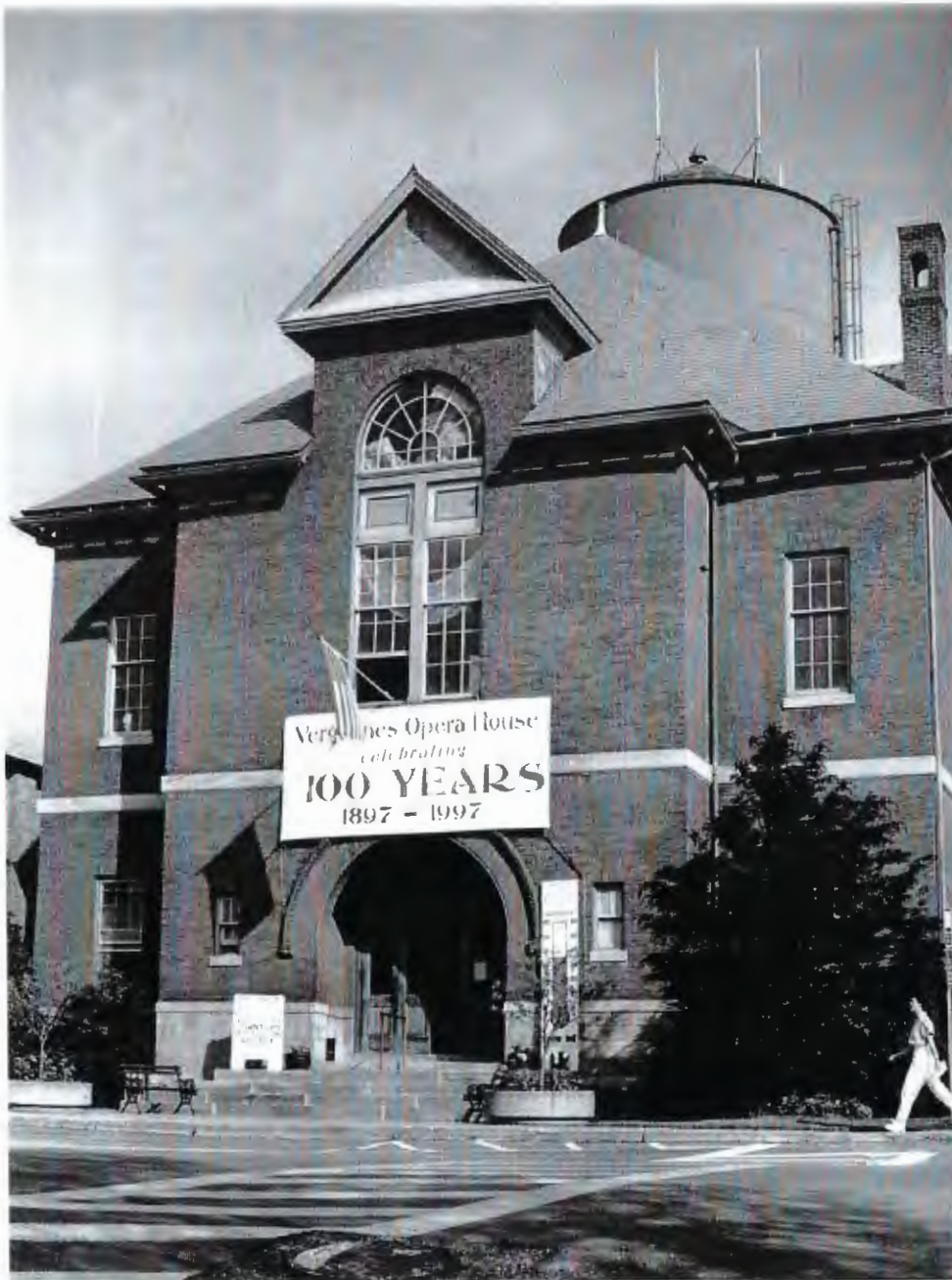
Sunlight filled the Vergennes Opera House auditorium on a warm May 8th morning, setting the stage for a day of community discovery. The design committee of the Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project conceived and hosted the twelve-hour working session, "Finding Vergennes." This report summarizes the findings, recommendations, and design concepts developed during that incredible day.

The day began early for the forty-nine professional architects, city planners, landscape architects, traffic engineers, historic preservationists, downtown specialists, and community leaders who came without compensation from all over Vermont and New England. Old friends and strangers alike quickly joined forces and dedicated

their considerable talents, ideas, vision, and inspired designs to help in the preservation and renewal of three target areas in downtown Vergennes, Vermont.

Terry Faith Weihs, Vice-Chair of the Design Committee and event coordinator, welcomed the group, provided a historical perspective, and described the schedule and tasks for the day. Three teams of professionals and community members were formed to study three areas: the Main Street Business District; the Otter Creek Bridge and Basin; and the Green Street – School Street Gateway. Each team was assigned a recorder and two facilitators to document the discussions and provide local expertise.



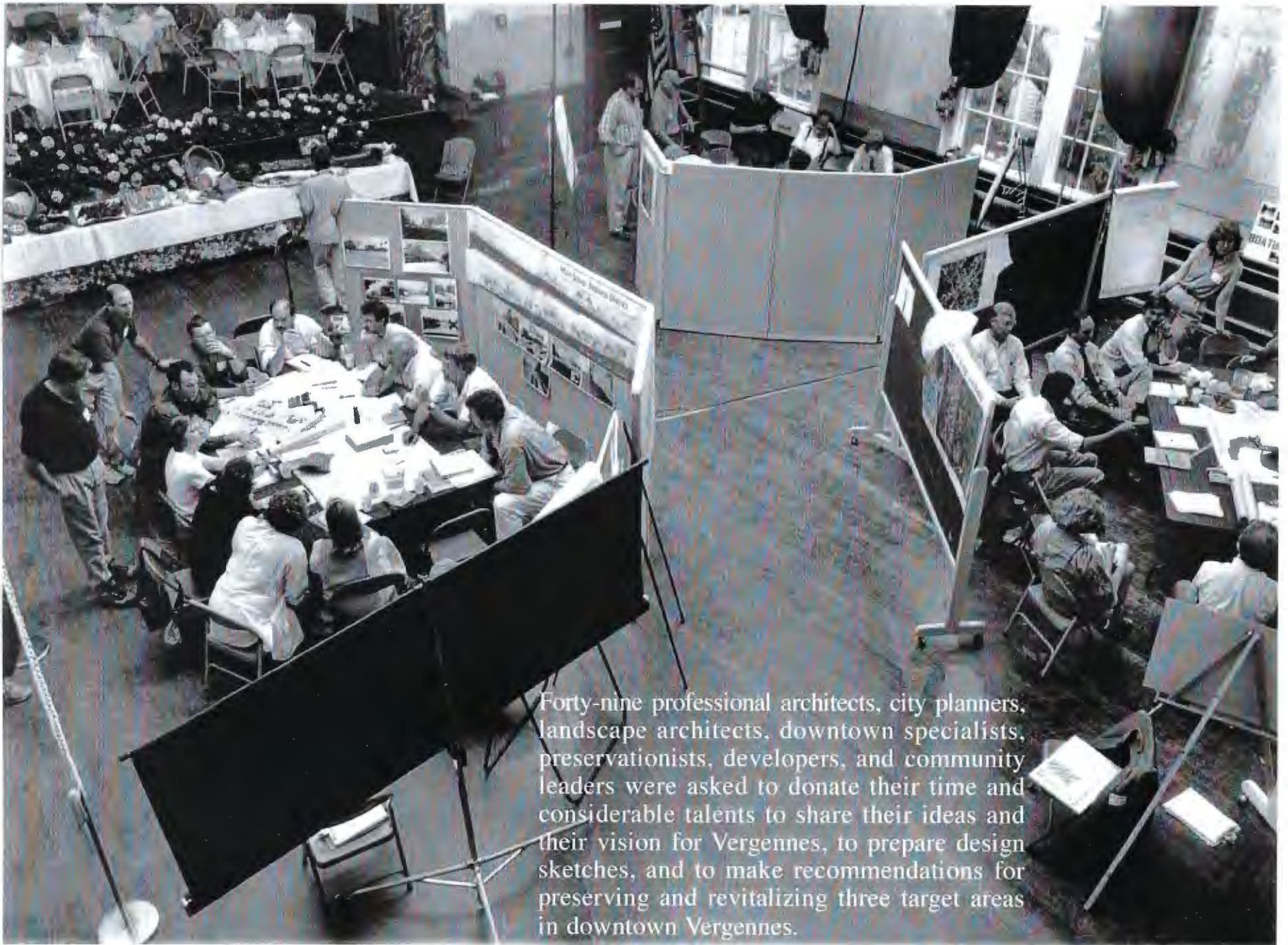


The Design Day took place over a twelve-hour period, with the Vergennes Opera House aptly serving as “design central.”

Each design team was assigned a single area of study. In addition, each individual was asked during the morning session to become familiar with all the problem areas so that each team could see and understand the environmental, architectural, pedestrian, and transportation characteristics that physically interconnect the areas. The teams spent all morning “on the streets” observing and learning about the opportunities and challenges facing Vergennes.

The afternoon session began with a brief “visioning” discussion, and then the work of forming and documenting recommendations and preparing design concepts got underway. Within three hours, the walls and tables of the Opera House were filled with the collective ideas of this inspired group of people. They were now ready to share their visions with the citizens of the Vergennes community.

Dr. Daniel Schodek and Steve Brittan, keynote speakers, set the tone for the evening session by introducing planning and design techniques that could be helpful to the City in its restoration efforts. Mr. Brittan focused particularly on the need for leadership, funding support, and creativity of government, private business, and the public in the fight for community revitalization.



Forty-nine professional architects, city planners, landscape architects, downtown specialists, preservationists, developers, and community leaders were asked to donate their time and considerable talents to share their ideas and their vision for Vergennes, to prepare design sketches, and to make recommendations for preserving and revitalizing three target areas in downtown Vergennes.



Over seventy area citizens joined the teams of professionals as they shared their findings with one another. The audience was encouraged to review the maps and design sketches up close. As a result, new ideas came from the public in response to the designs.

Bill Benton, Chair of the Vergennes Revitalization Plan and Oversight Committee, closed the session by expressing the entire community's gratitude to the team members, the public participants, and the sponsors of this hugely successful event. He stated that the results of the day's efforts would be carefully studied and incorporated into a plan for the renewal of downtown Vergennes.

Upon reading the report, we invite you to imagine the look and feel of a renewed Vergennes community streetscape based upon good design. The event, "Finding Vergennes," with this culminating reporting, was a strong step in the right direction.



Bill Benton, Chair, Plan and Oversight Committee
Downtown Vergennes Revitalization Project



Left: Over seventy area citizens joined the teams of professionals as they shared their findings with one another. The audience was encouraged to review the maps and design sketches up close. As a result, new ideas came from the public in response to the designs.



Above: Townsend Anderson, Facilitator, and Steve Brittan, Keynote Speaker address the audience.
Right: Jim Foster presents the Green Street/School Street Design Team recommendations.



MAIN STREET BUSINESS DISTRICT



Yesterday

The Main Street business district has prominent and diverse architectural styles, with a wide street and sidewalk on the south side. The contiguous facades of the three blocks on the south side of Main Street are in direct contrast to the narrow sidewalk, and the individual placement of buildings and their resultant open spaces on the north side of Main Street, which is highlighted by the City Park. This creates a visually dynamic downtown, whose composition provides numerous vantage points where building facades can be viewed to the fullest. The Bixby Library and the Opera House are architectural and cultural landmarks that serve as anchors for the district. But vacant storefronts; inadequately maintained and pedestrian unfriendly sidewalks and streets; excessive, unregulated, and oftentimes potentially hazardous truck traffic; a tangle of overhead utility lines; a lack of a distinctive, consistent lighting, signage, and landscaping; and poor outward condition of several buildings are also evident.

The Main Street team concluded that nearly all of the individual Main Street buildings and facades are in original or near original condition, with only three non-historic buildings and storefronts at the Marbleworks/Togos building, Fishman's Women's Storefront, and O'Brien's building. About one half of the Main Street building facades are in good condition, with the remainder found to be in fair to poor condition. Owner commitment and a stable occupancy rate may account for the facades in good condition, while indifferent or absentee ownership, diminished financial resources, and unstable occupancy history are common factors for those buildings in poor condition.

MAIN STREET

Design Team:

Steven J. Brittan

Keynote speaker, Asst. Director of Design Construction and Open Space, Boston, Massachusetts

Christina Craighead, Board Member, Friends of the Vergennes Opera House, Ferrisburgh

Gregory A. Edwards, P.E., Transportation Engineer, Webster-Martin Inc.

Gregory Gossens, Architect, Montpelier, Vermont

Jane Lendway, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, Vermont Downtown Program, Vermont Certified Local Govt. Program

Peter Morris, Architect and Planner, Vergennes Main Street business owner, Ferrisburgh

Patty Paul, Co-Owner, Homeworks & More, Green Street business owner, Ferrisburgh

Tim Ryan, P.E., Principal, J.W. and D.E. Ryan, Plumbing and Heating, Main Street business owner, Waltham

Paul Tippett, Former Chairman, American Motors Corp. and Springs Industries, retired, Panton

Keith H. Wagner, Landscape Architect, Colchester, Vermont

Gerald A. Weihs, Attorney, private practice Main Street, Vergennes, Founding member, Friends of the Vergennes Opera House

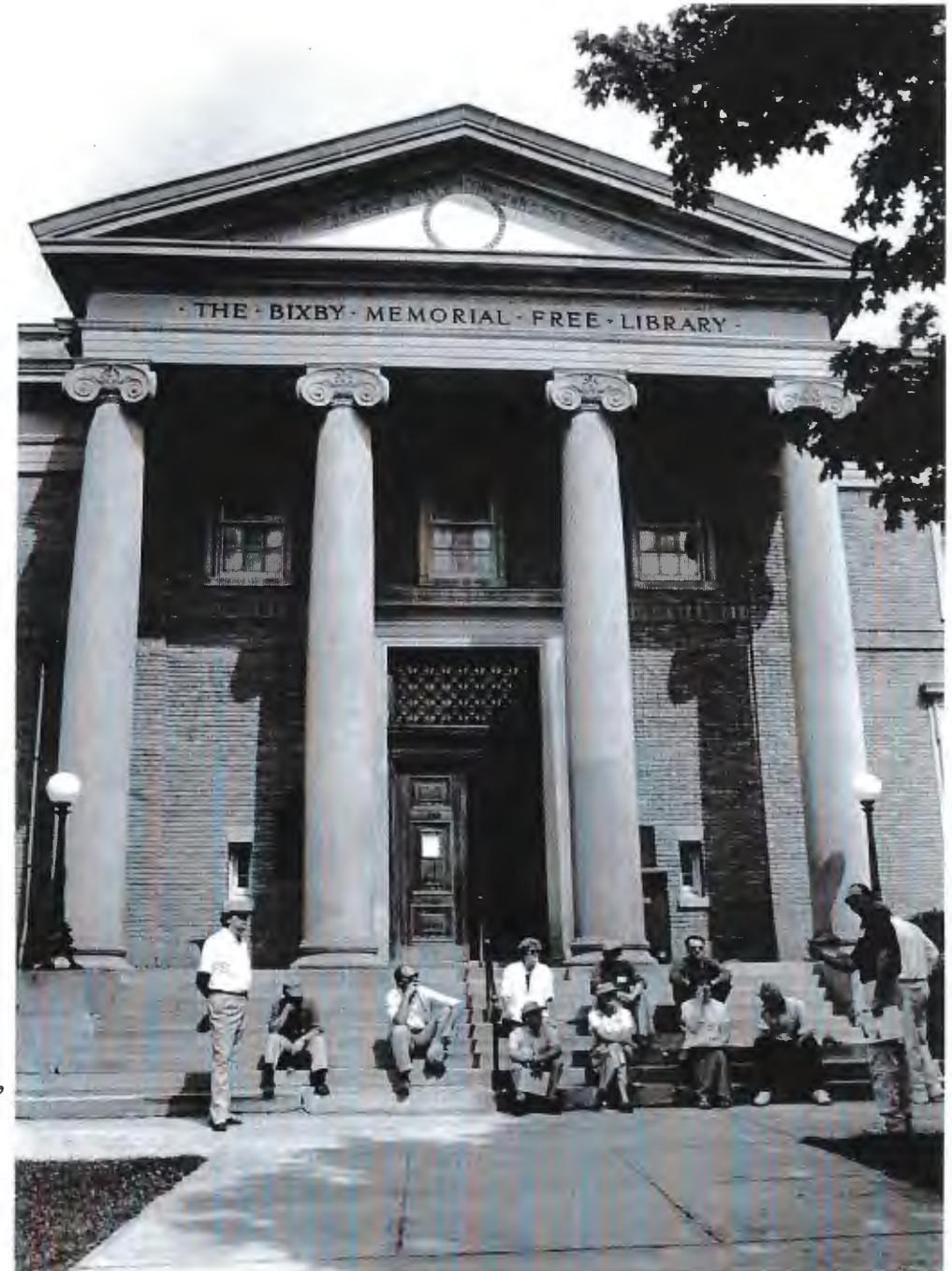
Facilitators:

Norman LeBoeuf, Owner/Operator, H.J. LeBoeuf & Son, Inc. Main Street, Vergennes

Jeffrey Glassberg, Owner, Renaissance Development Company, Capital Ideas, Inc., Waltham

Recorder:

Kevin Behm, Cartographic Specialist and Planner, Addison County Regional Planning Commission





STREET TREES
 • CREATE SENSE OF SCALE
 • CREATE VISUAL IMAGE

ELIMINATE SPACES FOR GREEN

INFILL



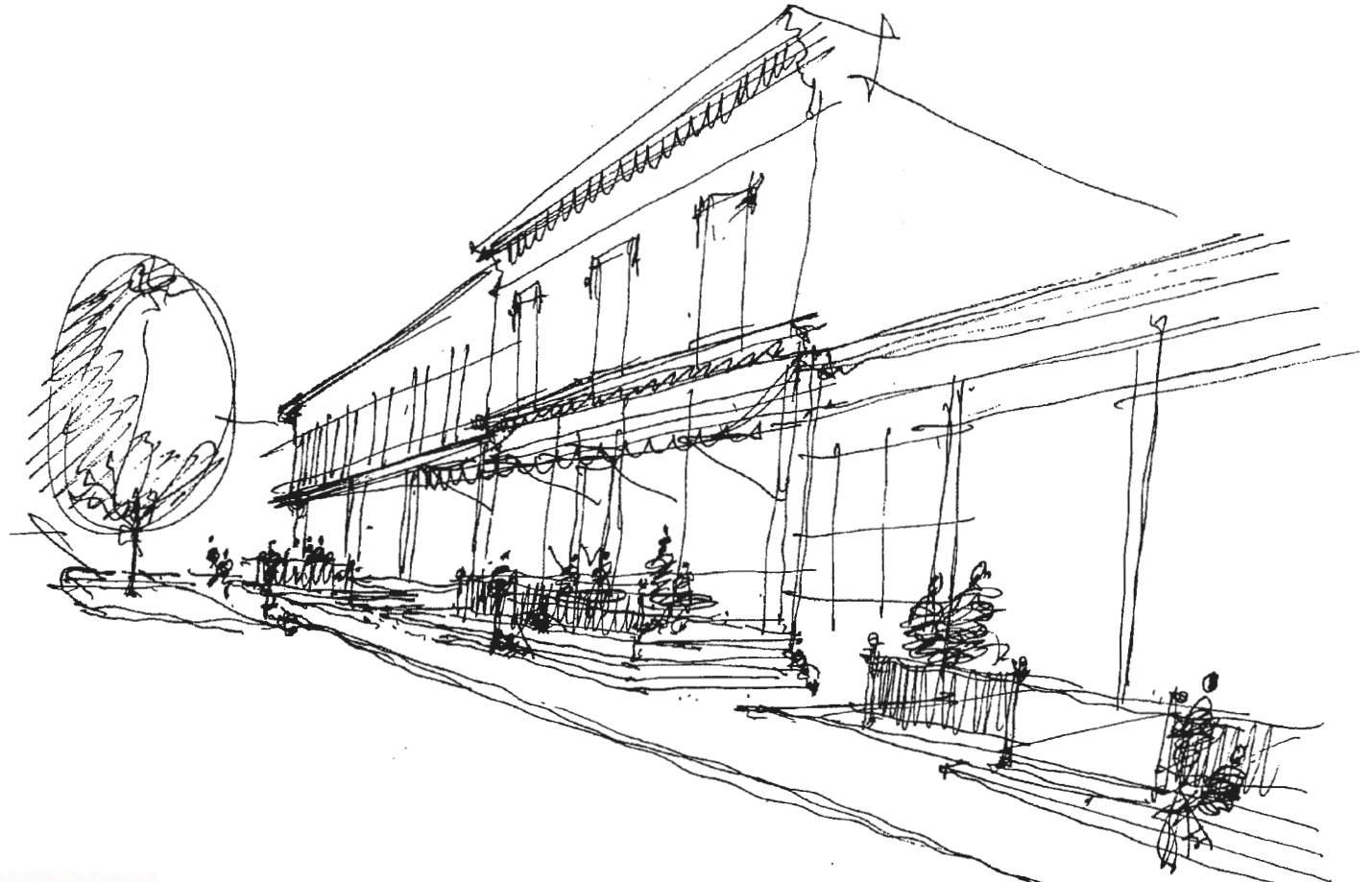
TRAFFIC CALMING

SPECIAL PAVEMENT, CELEBRATES HEART OF DOWNTOWN

Broad Themes:

The Main Street team identified several major themes that reflect a vision for the district.

- Establish Main Street as the vibrant commercial and cultural center of the greater Vergennes area.
- Create an environment for the entire community that supports the residential and pedestrian nature of the community.
- Provide a climate that invites and supports private investment.
- Insist that public improvements be of high quality to enhance the quality of life for area residents and to set the tone for further private investment. Adopt a unified design vocabulary so that the improvements are consistent throughout the community.
- Create visual links between Main Street and the Otter Creek Bridge and Basin.
- Create a sense of arrival as you enter the Main Street District.



Paul Vachon, Facilitator, demonstrates the challenges of providing handicapped access to some businesses.

LOW COST IDEAS THAT CAN BE DONE RIGHT AWAY:

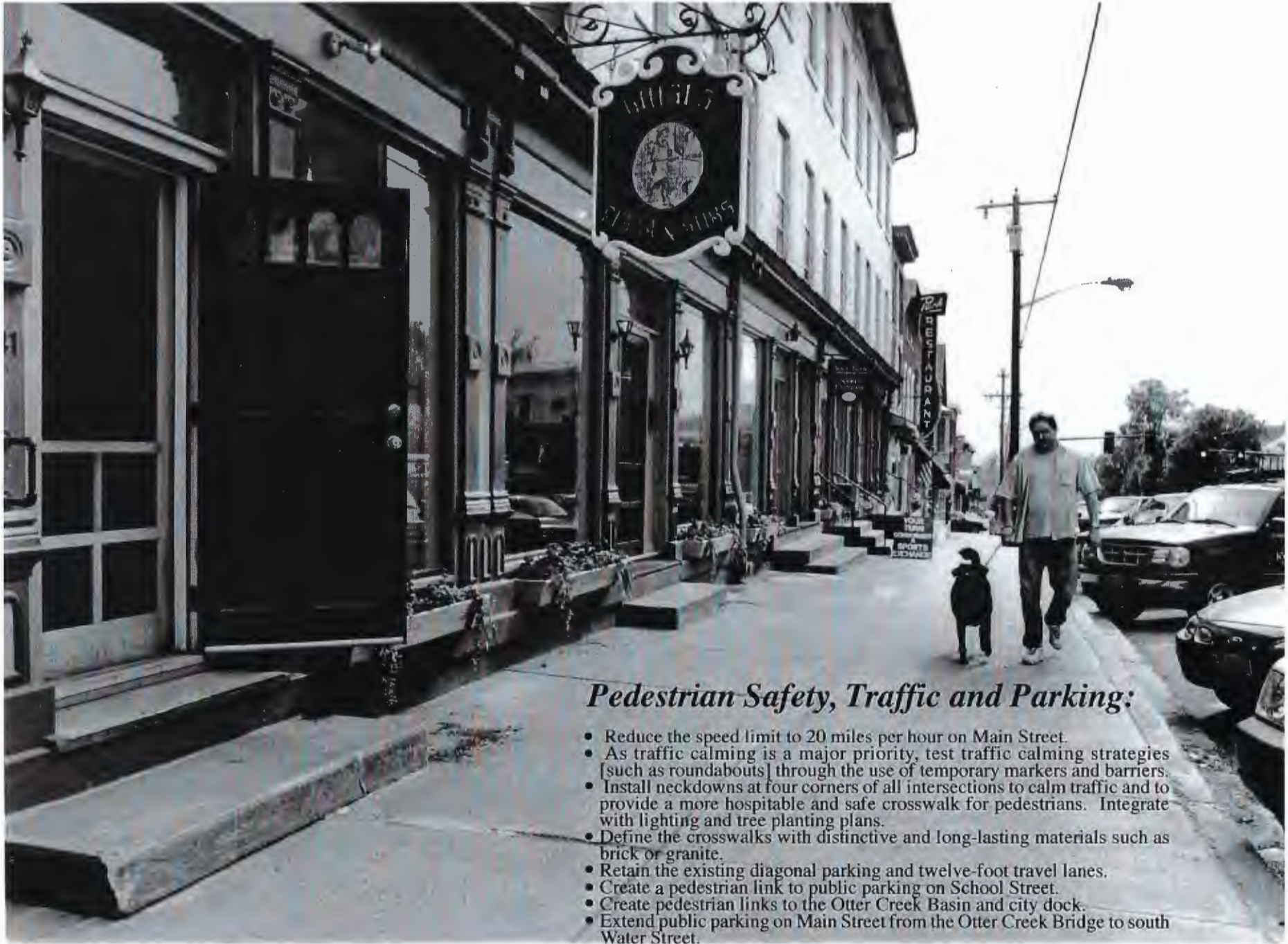
- Reduce the speed limit to 20 mph on Main Street, Green Street and Monkton Road.
- Test various traffic calming strategies and record the results.
- Encourage City pride and enhance maintenance by coordinating weekly street cleaning days among municipal employees and property owners.
- Coordinate with property owners for a semi-annual “pruning day”.
- Limb the appropriate trees in the City Park to create a canopy.
- Enact design review to ensure property values are enhanced through planning and design controls.
- Enact minimum maintenance standards to promote stewardship of property.
- Expand public parking by painting lines and placing signs along Main street towards the bridge.

Design Team Recommendations:

Infrastructure, Utilities and Landscaping:

- As an identifying and unifying feature as you enter the city center, create defining allees of trees approaching Main Street from the Otter Creek bridge to the South and from the underpass to the North.
- Repair sidewalk surfaces and utilize brick, granite, and other materials that are easily maintained and of high quality.
- Integrate handicapped (ADA) access to Main Street buildings on the south side with a unified design. An architecturally attractive concrete and/or wrought iron ramp, step, and railing system in front of each appropriate commercial property would create a strong link to each of the City blocks.
- Simplify and relocate overhead utility lines.
- Install appropriate and attractive period lighting fixtures on both sides of the street. Lighting should be downcast to provide security and warmth.
- Develop and implement an integrated signage plan, possibly utilizing a Vergennes logo, providing clear directions to attractions, information and parking.
- Install honey locust, ginko, tree lilacs, and other large caliper street trees in neck downs at each intersection and in pedestrian safety islands.
- Limb up appropriate trees in the park to make a canopy over people.
- Create and keep planters planted, watered, and well tended.
- If the city chooses to retain the water tower, maintain the municipal water tower, as is. The tower defines the city skyline, but there is no need to call undue attention to it. The structure's surface patina is handsome. Only the roof needs retreatment. Also, a possible use for the interior of the water tower includes use of the structure as a "café" for the Opera House to support Opera House events with the 2nd and 3rd floors created as storage space for theatrical props.
- As an architectural and practical feature, improve the appearance of the city park bandstand by constructing well-designed and inviting benches, railings, and a roof.





Pedestrian Safety, Traffic and Parking:

- Reduce the speed limit to 20 miles per hour on Main Street.
- As traffic calming is a major priority, test traffic calming strategies [such as roundabouts] through the use of temporary markers and barriers.
- Install neckdowns at four corners of all intersections to calm traffic and to provide a more hospitable and safe crosswalk for pedestrians. Integrate with lighting and tree planting plans.
- Define the crosswalks with distinctive and long-lasting materials such as brick or granite.
- Retain the existing diagonal parking and twelve-foot travel lanes.
- Create a pedestrian link to public parking on School Street.
- Create pedestrian links to the Otter Creek Basin and city dock.
- Extend public parking on Main Street from the Otter Creek Bridge to south Water Street.

OTTER CREEK BRIDGE AND BASIN



Yesterday

The Otter Creek Basin and Falls area is rich in historic and recreational qualities, and when taken as a whole, offers great possibilities to serve as the city's southern gateway. Historically, the Otter Creek Falls served numerous industrial uses. Currently the falls are regulated by Green Mountain Power (GMP) through two electric generating stations. Below the falls, the City owns and maintains two public parks with complimentary recreational and boat docking facilities. The city also leases much of the private land in the floodplain between the falls and the municipal dock at MacDonough Park, and makes it available for public use. The river is a navigable waterway to Lake Champlain, allowing Vergennes to serve as the county's only substantial commercial area with direct lake access.

In recent history, the area has suffered from "benign neglect." In its present state it is completely unappreciated, unseen, and under utilized. The whole district is in disrepair as the buildings are boarded up, overgrown, and fenced off so as to be completely inaccessible. People feel at risk walking in the area. They are not invited to stop or linger and enjoy the spectacular panorama and intersection of industrial history and natural beauty. On the positive side, the current landowners have indicated a willingness to make a commitment to revitalize the area. The underutilized historic buildings are in basically good condition, capable of being renovated, and there is land available for parking at both ends of the bridge.

Although Vergennes is primarily a residential community, the Agency of Transportation for the State of Vermont currently utilizes Route 22A (Main Street) as a major state highway that serves the north-south trucking corridor for the western part of Vermont. As a result, the bridge over Otter Creek on Route 22A has the character of a highway overpass despite the fact that it serves as the main southern corridor and gateway to the city center. The bridge is in good condition, but lacks aesthetic character, pedestrian amenities, and does not provide any access to the historic structures and sights along the bridge itself.

Challenges:

- Sights and structures are undefined. Currently, there is no comprehensive vision or development plan for the area.
- Two significant buildings on the falls are owned by GMP and are underutilized and inadequately maintained.
- Lack of pedestrian access from the falls area to the Downtown.
- Lack of visual reinforcement from the falls to the Downtown.
- The bridge lacks aesthetic character and clarity of purpose.
- High traffic volumes resulting in noise, speed, pollution, and poor pedestrian crossing opportunities.
- Lack of direct access from the City Dock to the falls area and downtown.
- Limited existing water and sewer infrastructure.

Opportunities:

- Potentially a significant cultural, recreational, and economic resource for the community.
- A unique natural setting.
- Historic buildings with individual historic significance.
- Substantial parking available.
- Cooperative landowners.
- Direct access to the lake.
- Potential for a strong visual link between the falls and the city center.



Terry Faith Weihs, Event Coordinator, shares community visions with Ernie Pomerleau, Otter Creek Design Team member.

OTTER CREEK BRIDGE AND BASIN

Design Team:

Eloise Beil

Special Projects Coordinator, Lake Champlain Maritime Museum, Ferrisburgh

Bill Benton

Chair, Vergennes Revitalization Plan & Oversight Committee, Owner, W. D. Benton Appraisers Inc.

Vaughn T. Collins

Executive Director, Vermont Council on Rural Development Specialist in affordable housing.

John Craighead MD, University of Vermont, Horticulturist, Ferrisburgh

Kevin Hooper, Transportation Planner and Engineer, Falmouth, Maine

Terry Krinsky, Landscape Architect, TK Landscape Architects, Colchester

James Drummond, Architect, Peter Morris Architects, Vergennes, Vermont

William Maclay, Architect & Planner, Warren, Vt.

Ernie Pomerleau, Pomerleau Real Estate, Burlington, Vt.

Mike Scarzello, Hydroengineer, representing Green Mountain Power Corporation

Daniel L. Schodek, PhD, Keynote speaker, Partner in World Wellness Environments Inc., Professor, Harvard Graduate School of Design

William Truex, Architect, Principal, Truex, Cullins, and Partners, Burlington, Vt.

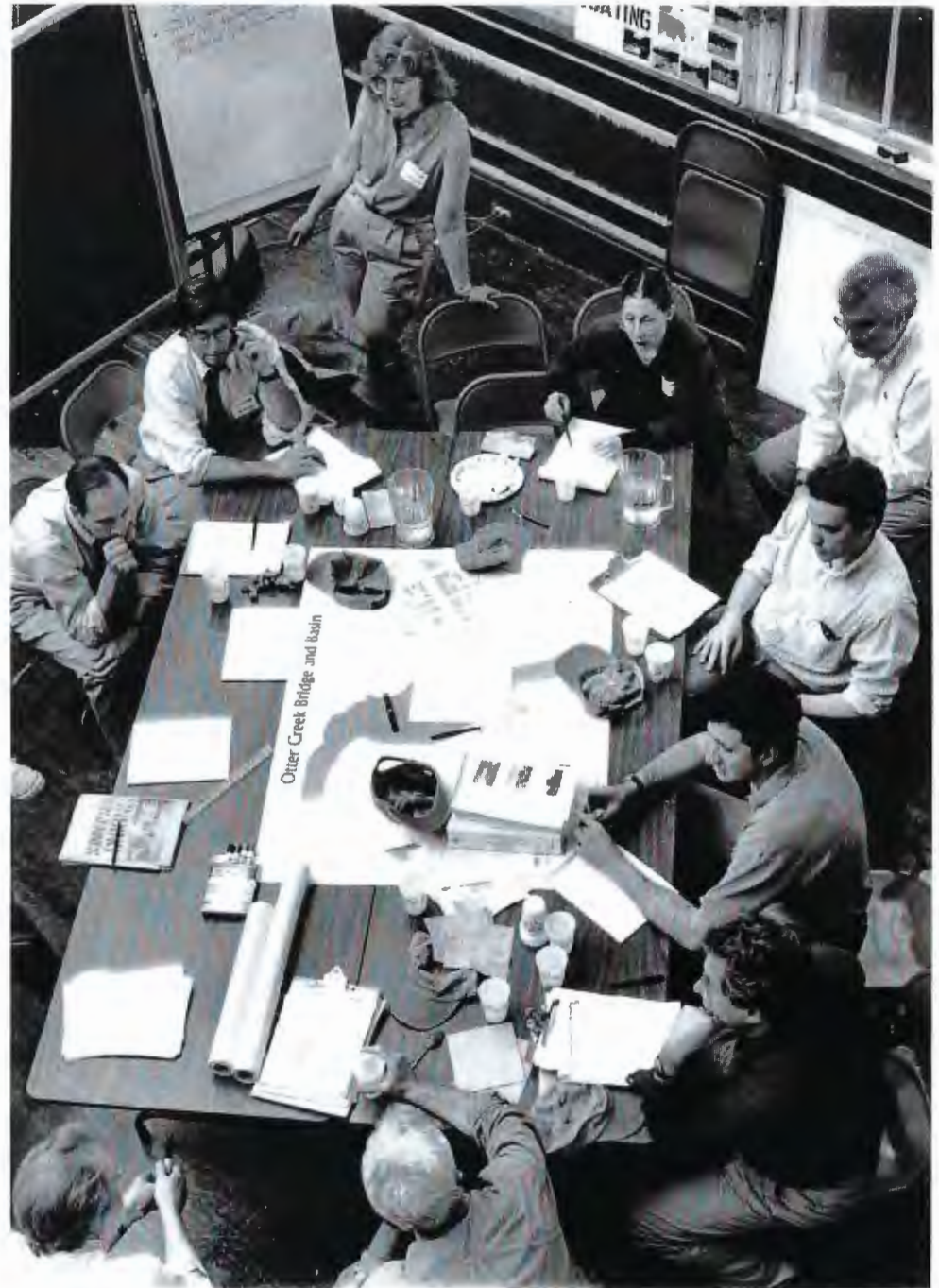
Facilitators:

David Raphael, Landscape Architect and Planner; LandWorks Inc. Middlebury, Vt.

Paul R. Vachon, Downtown Project Coordinator and Planner, Vergennes

Recorder:

Janet Kennedy, Landscape Architect, Principal, Kennedy-Yager Associates, Waltham.



Broad Themes:

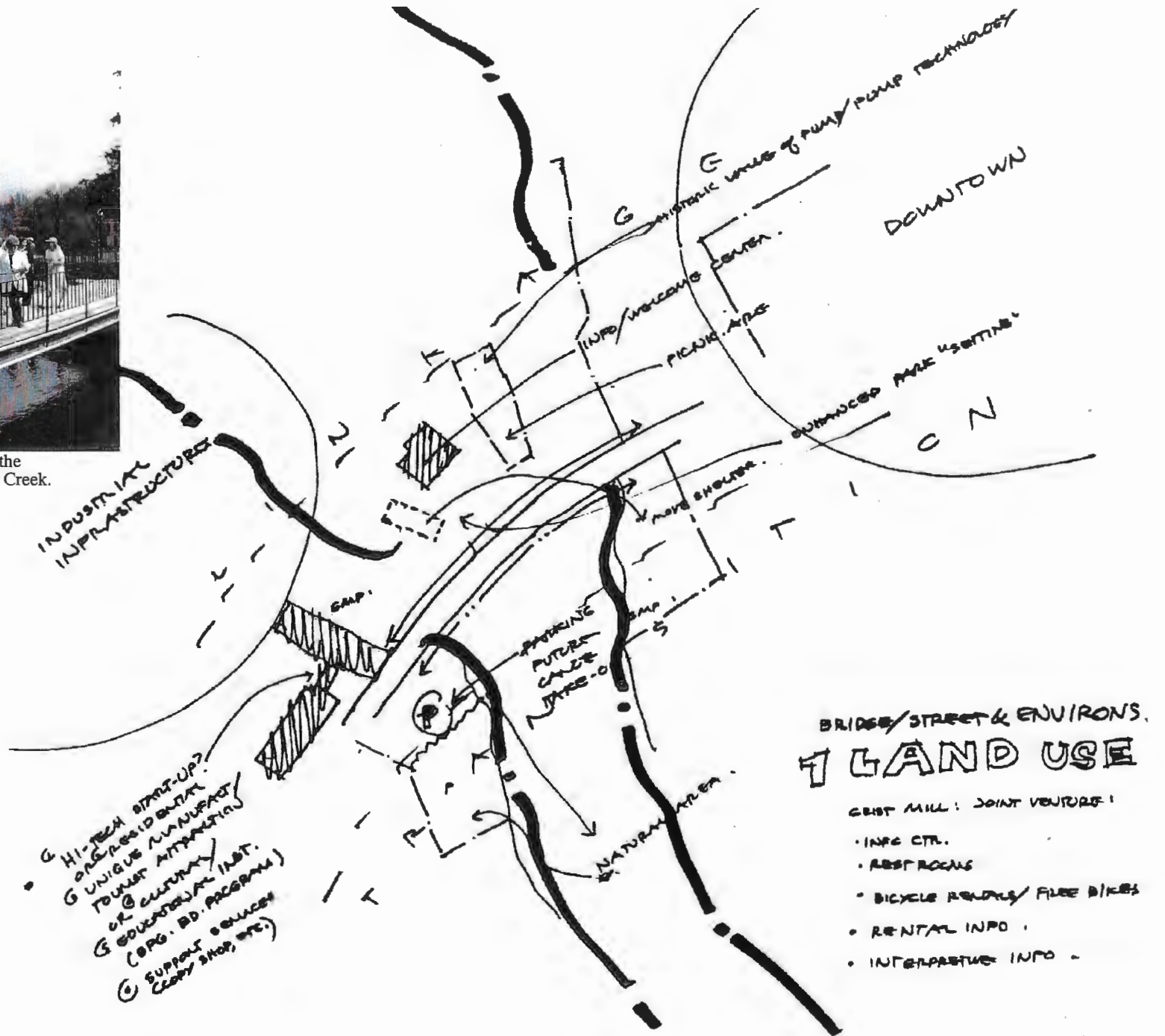
- The Basin area should serve as a “Gateway” to the City of Vergennes – slowing traffic and offering visitor services. Its unique qualities can serve as a symbol of the community.
- Create a not-for-profit structure to negotiate with GMP to acquire the buildings on the falls.
- The long-term vision for the area is to emphasize the historical and current relationship between the buildings and river by developing the buildings for multi-purpose public use, creating walkways and bicycle paths with direct access to the falls, and boating access.
- Pursue opportunities to enable Vergennes to interpret the historical layers of the Otter Creek Basin and the City’s contribution to growth and development of the United States. The area has significant industrial and marine archaeological resources that can be linked to today’s industrial trends.
- Transform the bridge from its strictly utilitarian purpose to include aesthetic qualities and provide a physical and visual link from the Basin to downtown.
- Do some immediate activities to clean up the area, clear brush, and enhance views to the river.
- Work with GMP and other landowners to improve access and parking for the area.
- Improve the City Dock amenities and link to the other parts of Vergennes.
- Define a vision and plan for the area before spending money on restoration.



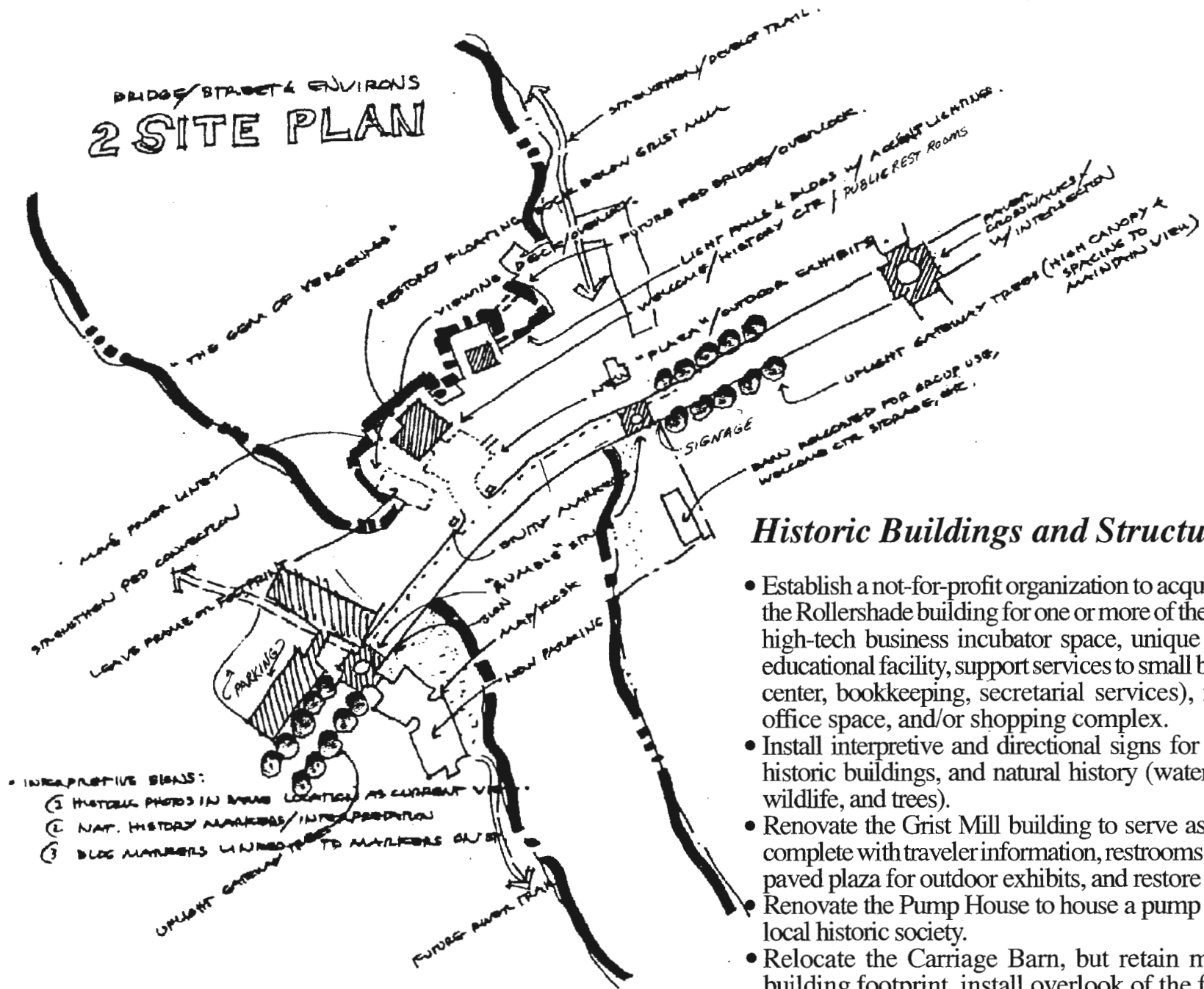
Members of the design teams continue discussions during an afternoon break.



Main Street Design Team visits the Vergennes Pumphouse on Otter Creek.

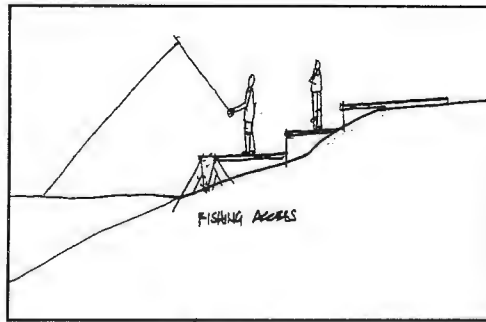
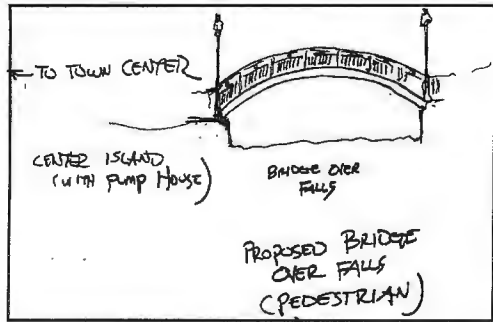


BRIDGE/STREET & ENVIRONS 2 SITE PLAN

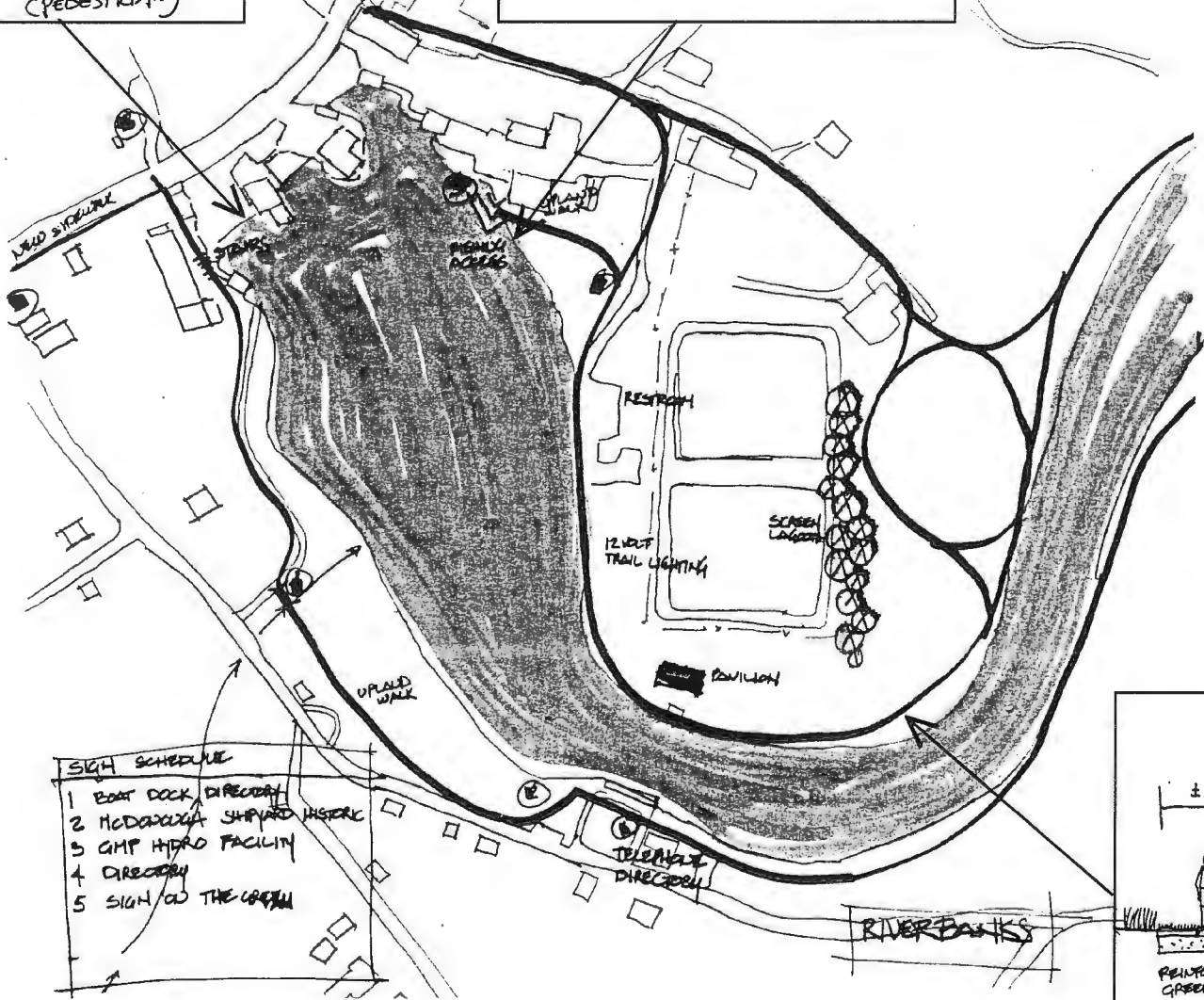


Historic Buildings and Structures:

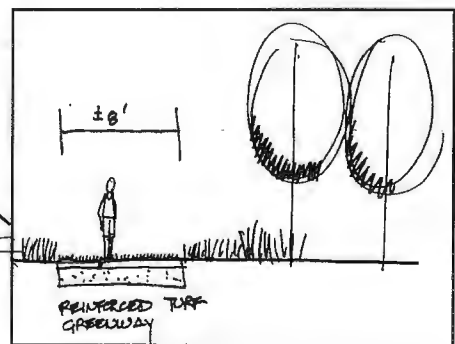
- Establish a not-for-profit organization to acquire and renovate the Rollershade building for one or more of the following uses: high-tech business incubator space, unique manufacturing, educational facility, support services to small businesses (copy center, bookkeeping, secretarial services), restaurant, inn, office space, and/or shopping complex.
- Install interpretive and directional signs for historic photos, historic buildings, and natural history (water, geology, falls, wildlife, and trees).
- Renovate the Grist Mill building to serve as a visitor center complete with traveler information, restrooms, museum space, paved plaza for outdoor exhibits, and restore floating dock.
- Renovate the Pump House to house a pump museum and/or local historic society.
- Relocate the Carriage Barn, but retain markings of the building footprint, install overlook of the falls area.



REINFORCED TURF GREENWAY



- SIGN SCHEDULE**
- 1 BOAT DOCK DIRECTORY
 - 2 MCDONALD'S SHIPYARD HISTORIC
 - 3 GMP HYDRO FACILITY
 - 4 DIRECTORY
 - 5 SIGN ON THE GRASS



Design Team Recommendations:

The Otter Creek Bridge and Basin Study Group broke the design area into four segments and made the following recommendations:

Riverbank and Watercourse:

- Construct trails with a reinforced turf surface and gravel base along both sides of the river, connecting to Main and Canal Streets as well as to B F Goodrich.
- On the north side of the river, provide stairs to allow access up to the Benton property on Main Street and canoe portage around the falls.
- Construct a stepped fishing access along the south side of the river with low voltage lighting for evening fishing.
- Along the south side of the river, provide restrooms and relocate (or replicate) the carriage shed on Main Street for an open shelter.
- Screen the lagoons from the river with evergreen plantings.
- Install signage along the trails interpreting the hydroelectric plant, the Rollershade building, horseshoe nail factory, shipyard, and the old mills and foundry.
- Install amenities at the dock for visitors – pay phone, restrooms, and directory of businesses and restaurants



Things that Can Be Done Now:

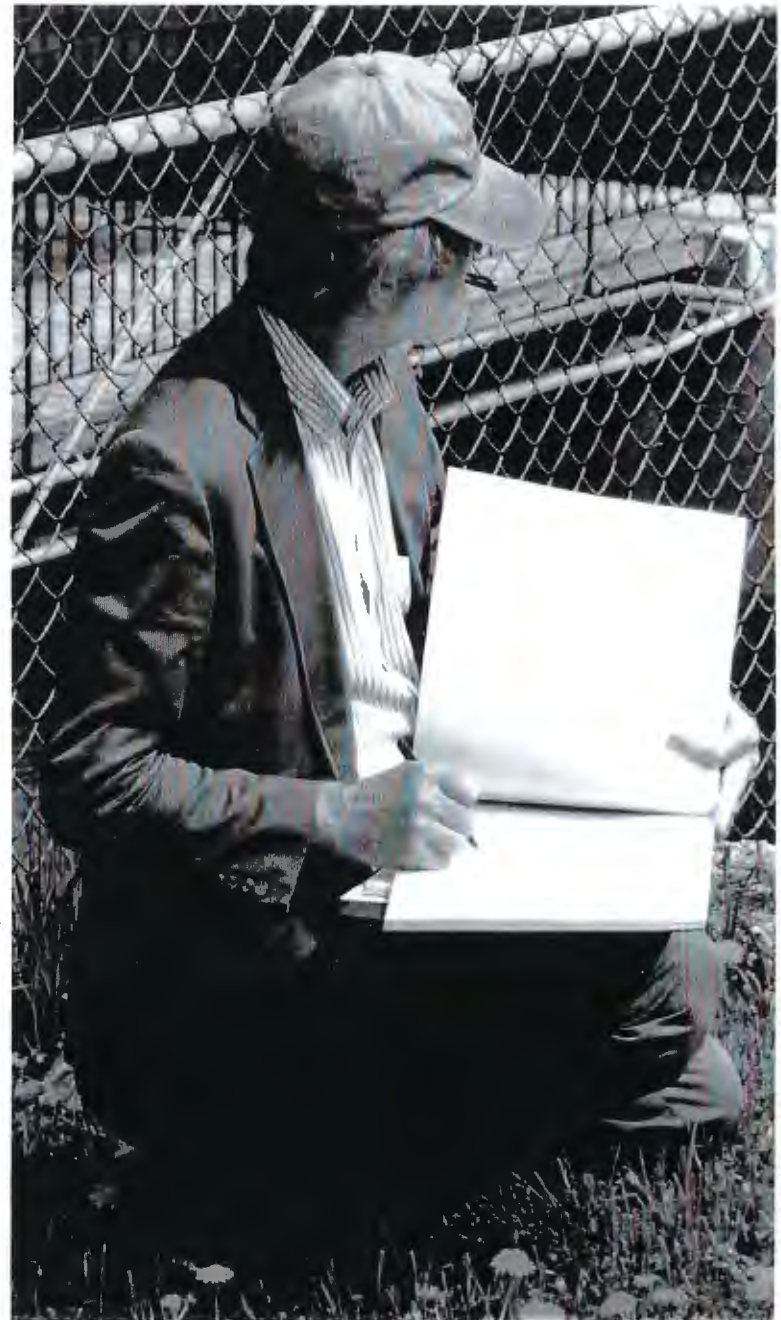
- Remove brush and fencing, trim trees, install new plantings and flower beds, open access to the Pump House, provide public restrooms in the Benton building, paint “windows” on the Grist Mill, power-wash and regularly maintain the bridge.

Street Environs:

- Develop the Otter Creek Basin as a significant destination attractive to Vergennes area residents and to travelers to our community.
- Through bridge enhancement (appropriate lighting, pedestrian walkways, plantings, and building revitalization) provide a visual and social link and transition from the Otter Creek Basin to the city center.
- Strengthen the recreational connection to the dock and Canal Street, provide portage connection for canoes around the falls.
- Establish an allee of street trees to create canopies approaching the bridge both from the easterly and westerly directions along Route 22A as a strong visual statement and to calm traffic.
- Provide pedestrian crossings at the street intersections and at the north end of the bridge.
- Provide parking at the southeastern lot of the bridge, include map and kiosk.
- Create accent lighting of the buildings and of tree canopies near the bridge.
- Relocate and consolidate the power lines.
- Provide pedestrian facilities along the western side of the bridge, and sidewalks along the west side of Main Street.
- Relocate carriage barn on the northwestern lot of the bridge for shelter and group use.

Bridge Structure:

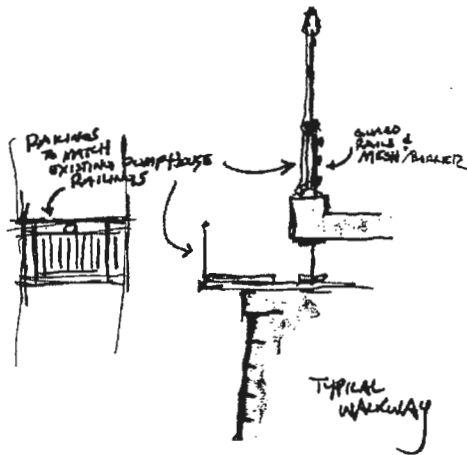
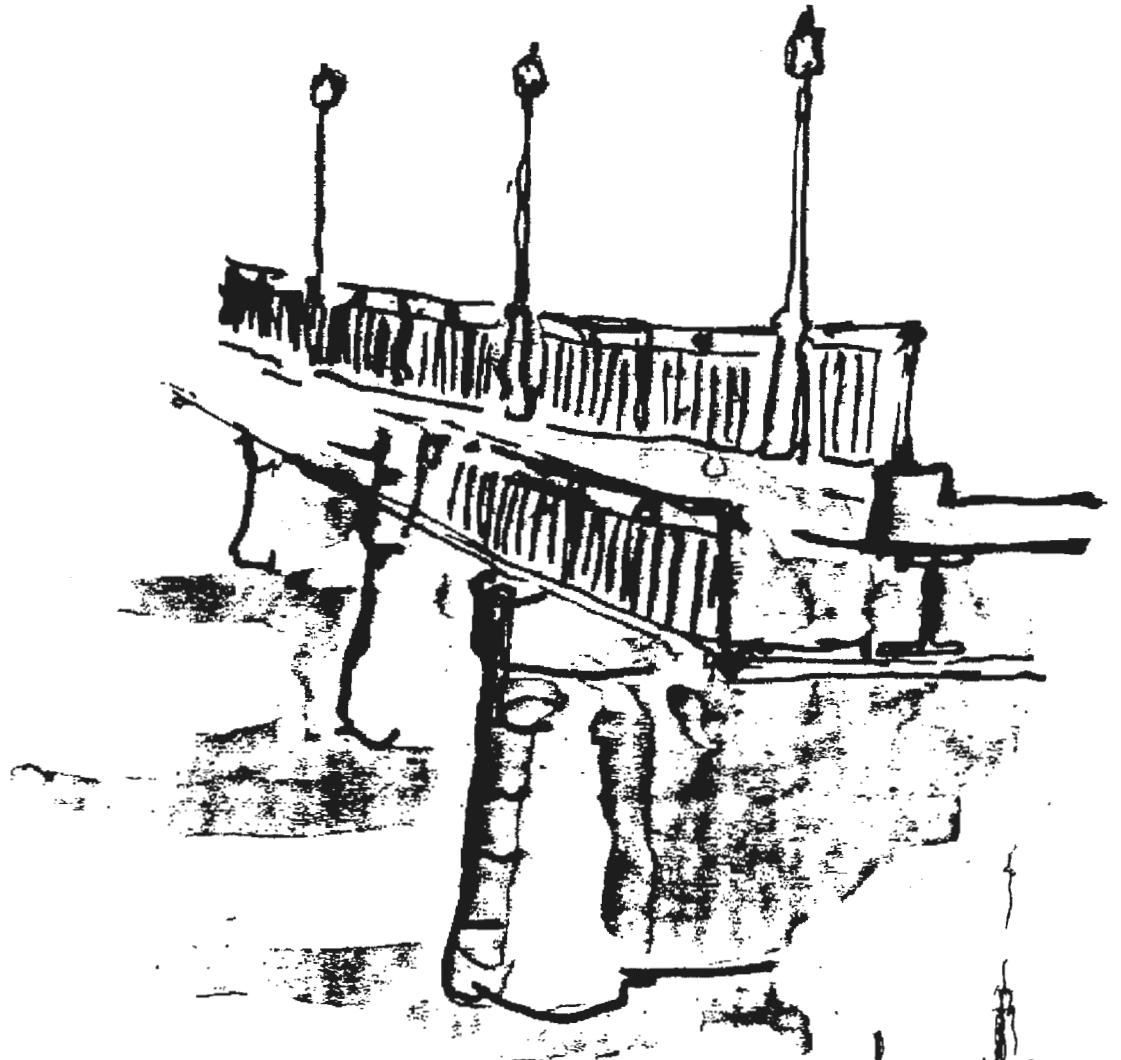
- The bridge appears to be in basically good condition and it is assumed that the structure will remain.
- Traffic noise is due to grade, road surface, and building echo. Traffic speed and high volume are due to the current use of Route 22A as a primary trucking corridor. Reductions in traffic noise and speed may be accomplished by creating a more “user-friendly” approach to the bridge:
 - Provide alternative paving and pedestrian crossings at gateway intersections at each end of the bridge, extensive tree and other ornamental plantings, and informational signage,
 - Modify the bridge structure to accommodate an east-side multipurpose walkway (bike and pedestrian),
 - Modify the existing bridge structure to accommodate a cantilevered pedestrian sidewalk along the west side of the bridge on existing piers,
 - Improve railings and install functional and ornamental lighting to accentuate both sides of the bridge and to create a “gateway” into the city,
- Run distribution power lines within a sleeve beneath the bridge,
- Reroute transmission lines by Rollershade building,



Dr. Dan Schodek, Keynote Speaker, sketches bridge improvement designs.

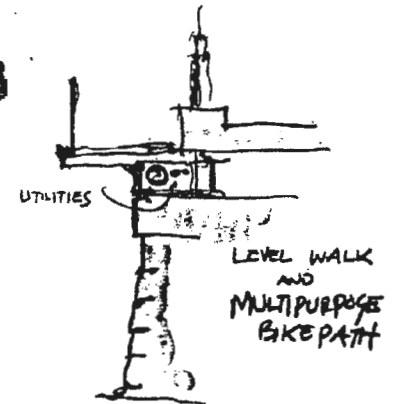


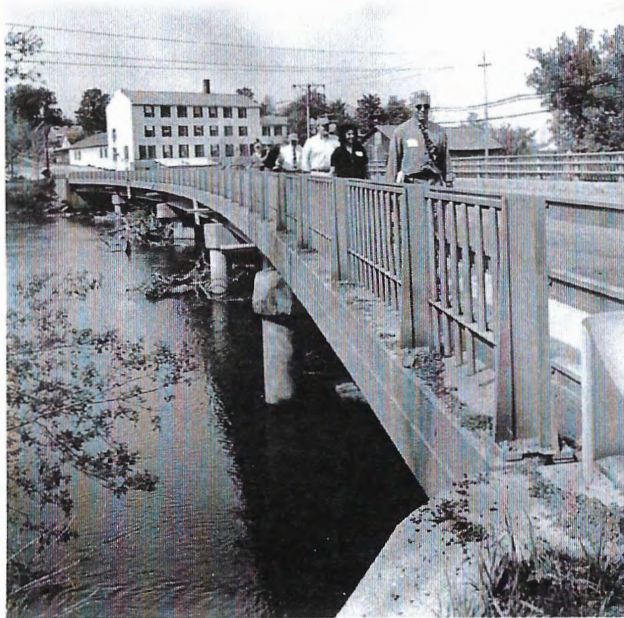
The Otter Creek Design Team at work.



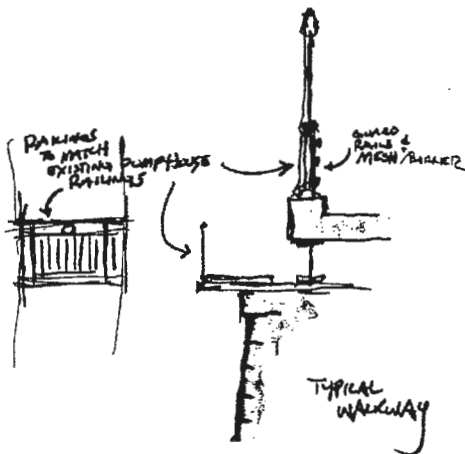
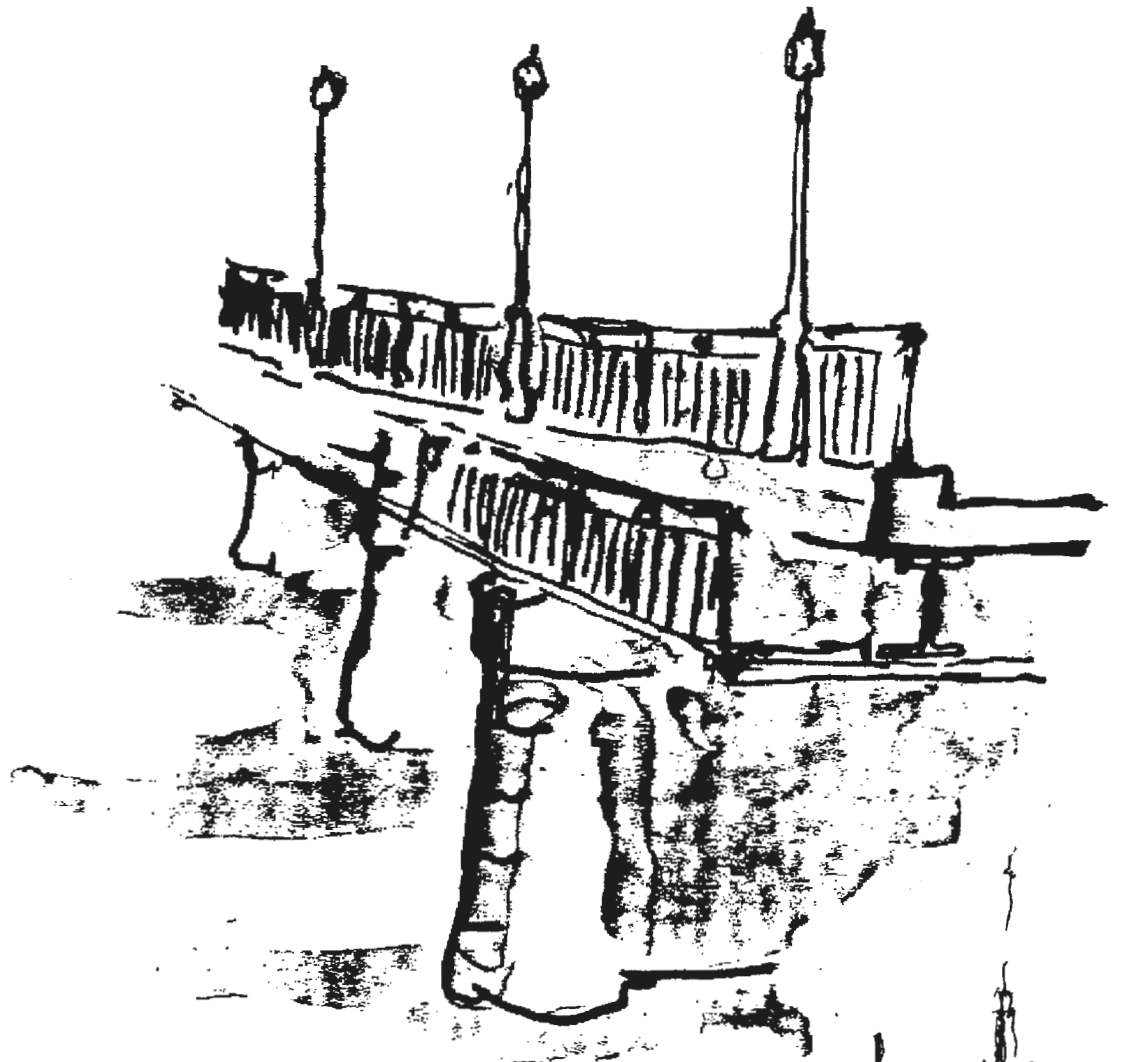
**WALKWAYS ON BOTH SIDES
ONE SIDE A MULTIUSE WALKWAY
(PEDESTRIANS, BICYCLES)**

← **ALTERNATIVES** →



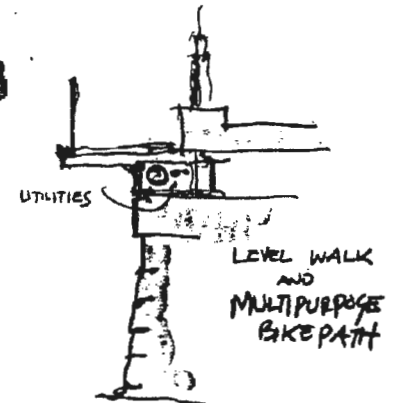


The Otter Creek Design Team at work.



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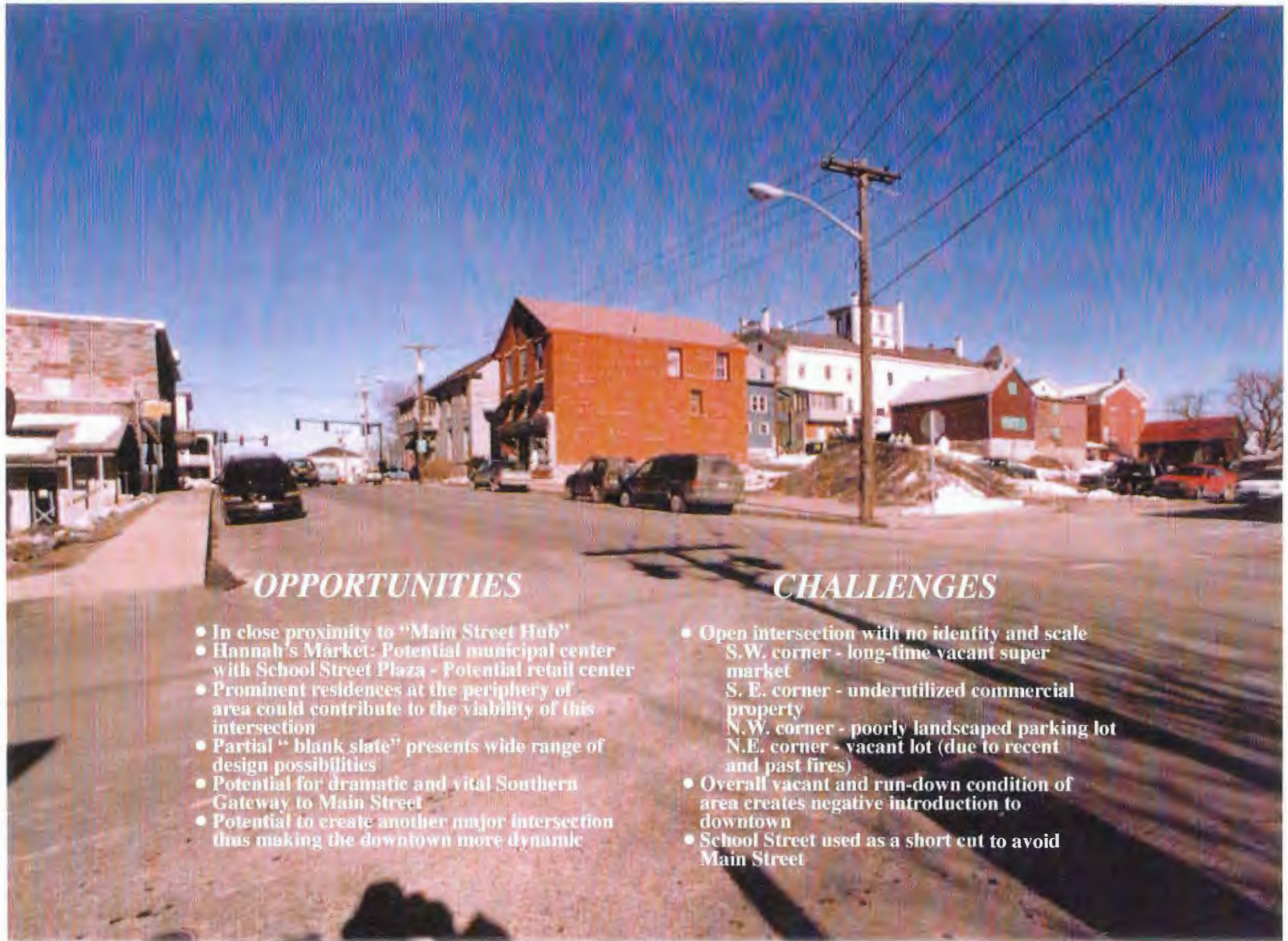
GREEN & SCHOOL STREET GATEWAY



Yesterday

The Green Street & School Street area has lost numerous historic structures to fire and demolition which have been replaced with buildings that do not conform to the surrounding architecture and with empty lots. Green Street, although historically a primarily residential street, has become a major traffic artery that brings traffic from Route 7 into the center of downtown Vergennes. School Street parallels Main Street and includes both commercial and residential properties. School Street is often used by local residents as a thoroughfare to avoid the heavier through traffic and the traffic light on Main Street. For many years this intersection was the site of the Vergennes High School that was replaced in the 1950's by a 6,500 square foot "supermarket". The former IGA, now known as Hannah's Market, has been unoccupied for seven years, and has become a symbol of absentee ownership, neglect, and deterioration of Vergennes' southern gateway to downtown.

The intersection is wide open with little identity or scale. While the area's problems are apparent, Green Street presents many opportunities—a blank slate with a wide range of use and design options.



OPPORTUNITIES

- In close proximity to "Main Street Hub"
- Hannah's Market: Potential municipal center with School Street Plaza - Potential retail center
- Prominent residences at the periphery of area could contribute to the viability of this intersection
- Partial "blank slate" presents wide range of design possibilities
- Potential for dramatic and vital Southern Gateway to Main Street
- Potential to create another major intersection thus making the downtown more dynamic

CHALLENGES

- Open intersection with no identity and scale
 - S.W. corner - long-time vacant super market
 - S. E. corner - underutilized commercial property
 - N.W. corner - poorly landscaped parking lot
 - N.E. corner - vacant lot (due to recent and past fires)
- Overall vacant and run-down condition of area creates negative introduction to downtown
- School Street used as a short cut to avoid Main Street



GREEN STREET GATEWAY

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Townsend H. Anderson, Former Vermont State Historic Preservation Officer; President, Preservation Investments Ltd., Middlebury, Vt.

Kenneth Oboz, Vice-Chairman, Global Healthcare Collaborative, founding member Otter Creek Investment Fund, Vergennes

Recorder:

Diane Meyerhoff, Consultant to Addison County Regional Planning Commission, Lake Champlain Byways Program.



Broad Themes:

- The Green Street & School Street intersection should serve as a “gateway” to the downtown center, one which presents a visually attractive, business-friendly atmosphere that complements through good design the transition from residential properties to the commercial district along the Green Street corridor from Route 7.
- Some of the vacant space in this area should be used to meet an immediate need – lack of adequate parking. Parking should be signed and be located behind existing or new structures, rather than next to the sidewalks.
- New building construction should be required to be compatible with the historic character, placement, and scale of those existing structures in the vicinity which are on the national and Vermont register of historic places.
- Pursue the idea of closing off Green Street as a traffic thoroughfare between Main and School Streets. Through landscaping and pedestrian friendly walkways and seating areas establish a tranquil focal point around which new and existing businesses could develop in the city center.
- Pursue the idea of the relocation of the municipal center and civic services to the former supermarket, possibly in combination with other commercial or community functions.
- Review the ownership along Green Street: non- local owners should be encouraged to sell property or be provided with incentives to develop abandoned buildings or provide open space.





Ken Oboz, Facilitator, points out problems and opportunities on Green Street

Design Team Recommendations:

The Green Street/School Street Gateway Team consolidated their recommendations into two principal segments:

Street Environs:

- Create a southerly gateway into Vergennes at the five-corner intersection to welcome travelers into the city center and to calm traffic by incorporating an attractive landscaped roundabout.
- Utilize the existing buildings and require new buildings to visually link the area to Main Street and make it an attractive destination for shoppers and visitors. Encourage new buildings on vacant lots next to Odd Fellows Hall and Homeworks.
- Designate Green Street a “design-control district”, allowing for smaller buildings with a commercial look and coordinated design.
- Create a tranquil pedestrian mall at the junction of Main Street and Green Street to School Street. This would serve as the nucleus of stores, offices and other commercial enterprises as an extension of the Main Street commercial district away from the noise and traffic. This could be expanded into the alley in back of Main Street buildings.
- Lower the speed limit to 20 mph and incorporate traffic calming into any changes proposed for the Green Street corridor.
- Prevent tractor trailer truck traffic from using Green Street, except for local deliveries.
- Construct a two-level parking area, with stairs and extensive landscaping in the current open parking area off School Street, north of Green Street.
- Establish a strong street tree and landscaping plan along the southern side of Green Street, the southwest corner of Green and School Street, and along School Street, in order to significantly improve the visual impact of the entry corridor to downtown, softening the edges and blending into the green of the City park on Main Street. This would be accomplished in conjunction with establishing a consistent, defined, well-landscaped and maintained city right-of-way along the entire northerly side of the Green Street corridor.
- Eliminate overhead utility lines in this corridor.



The Vergennes Fire Department is located adjacent to Hannah's Market – a former grocery store and community eyesore since 1991.

Buildings and Structures:

- Newly established design controls and minimum maintenance requirements should direct development and property maintenance.
- Any new construction on Green and School Streets (ie, the proposed Lyndonville Savings Bank office) should conform with adjacent historic structures and be at least two stories high. In this location it is recommended that any new building should front the sidewalk with public parking below ground or behind the building. Coordinating the landscaping around the building with the public parking area space would enhance the appearance of the area.
- Due to its long history of unsafe and unsightly condition, the City should exercise the power of eminent domain on the Hannah's Market property. The site appears suited for a civic services complex with identity, including city administration, police, rescue squad, and a community center. The existing building should be torn down, and new buildings located with minimum setbacks to streets, allowing for parking in the rear.
- Or as an alternative, Hannah's Market could also be suitable space for relocating the Vermont National Bank offices to accommodate their need for drive-through window banking service. Under this option, city administrative offices and city council rooms could relocate to the historic Stevens House on Main Street with the Opera House occupying the entire current city hall and police department space. The police department, rescue squad and the community center could share space with a commercial establishment such as the Vermont National Bank.



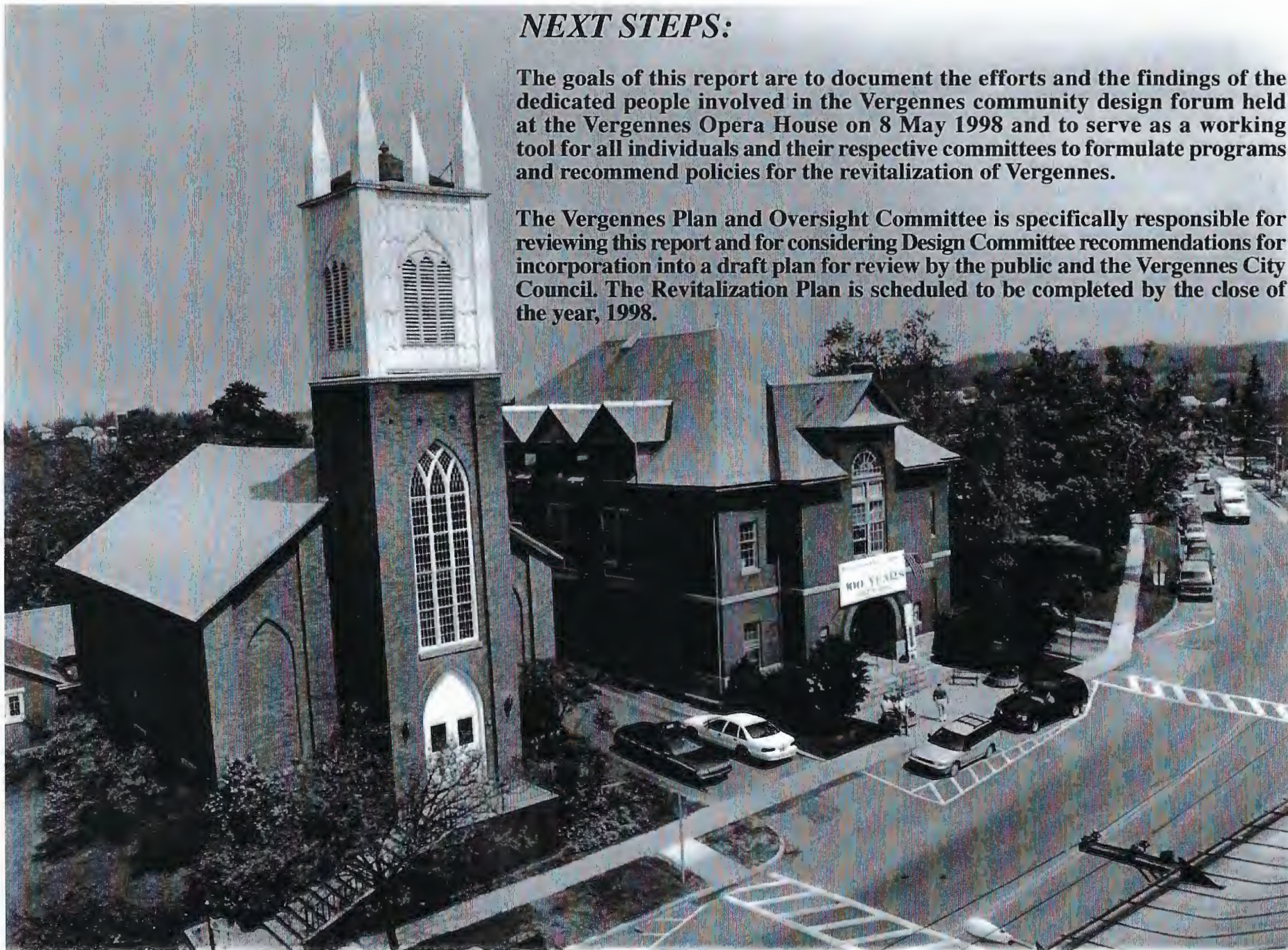
JD 198

New buildings should front the sidewalk with parking behind.

NEXT STEPS:

The goals of this report are to document the efforts and the findings of the dedicated people involved in the Vergennes community design forum held at the Vergennes Opera House on 8 May 1998 and to serve as a working tool for all individuals and their respective committees to formulate programs and recommend policies for the revitalization of Vergennes.

The Vergennes Plan and Oversight Committee is specifically responsible for reviewing this report and for considering Design Committee recommendations for incorporation into a draft plan for review by the public and the Vergennes City Council. The Revitalization Plan is scheduled to be completed by the close of the year, 1998.



— ADDISON INDEPENDENT —

EDITORIALS

City forum a winner

The recent forum on downtown revitalization in the Little City was a rousing success that justifies a follow-up session in the fall and the action necessary to initiate one of the key components to any long-term plan: a permanent downtown organization.

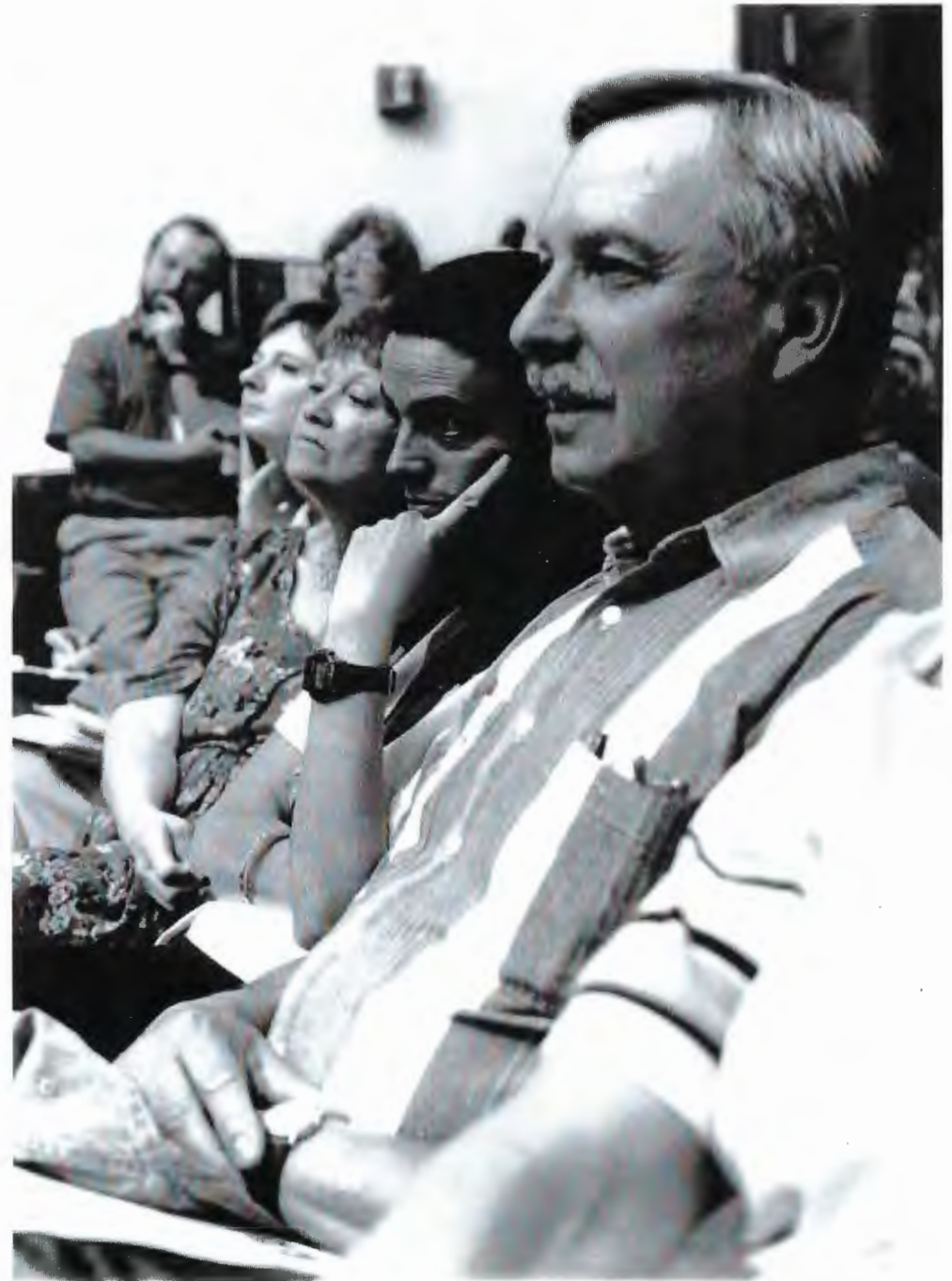
The foundations for such an organization can be found within the Vergennes Chamber of Commerce, if that group is willing to spearhead the effort, perhaps by creating a permanent committee to work specifically with the Little City's downtown arena. The chamber could create an off-shoot organization that operates more autonomously on downtown issues.

Whichever approach Vergennes' leaders choose, funding will be a prime consideration. Recent state legislation behooves downtown groups to have a solid foundation with ample community support if the group is to receive state funds to improve a community's downtown. Grants have to be written (a large source of funding for downtown projects) and a mound of paperwork goes along with each application.

To accomplish that task, Vergennes citizens can either encourage the city's administration to lend a helping hand to compete for state grants, or choose to fund a part-time director through a downtown organization. Whichever direction is chosen, Vergennes citizens and businesses can be assured by the example in other communities (including Middlebury) that the money spent for a part-time director is more than compensated by the grant money received.

Such a move could be the next step to pursue in the city's evolving — and enthusiastic — effort to revitalize its downtown. If done well, there's little doubt that several of the excellent ideas proposed at last week's forum are sure to become reality.

Angelo S. Lynn





Gerald Weihs, Main Street Design Team member, explains design proposals during the evening session at the Vergennes Opera House.

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Photo Credits:

James Blair, Robert Hardy, Norman LeBoeuf, Clemens Kalischer, Megan McKinnon



Paul Tippett and Joe Kerr share their vision for Vergennes



“Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.

Begin it now!”

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe