



Town of Benson, Vermont
2760 Stage Road · Benson VT 05743
802-537-2611

March 29, 2023

Richard Amore
richardamore@vermont.gov
State of Vermont
Department of Housing and Community Development

RE: Renewal of Village Center Designation for Benson Village Center

To Richard Amore and the Downtown Board:

We are hereby submitting the Application for Renewal for the Village Center Designation for Benson Village Center (Benson, Vermont).

In the eight years since our last renewal of the Village Center Designation, the historic village of Benson has taken some hard hits to not just our infrastructure, but to the core of the center of our daily lives here.

On October 28, 2018, an historic apartment building which used to be the Grange (and was still known as such) on our main village street, Stage Road, burned down from a kitchen fire. The fire displaced three families and left a hole in the landscape, two doors up from the venerated Benson Village Store.

Then on April 30, 2019, another fire, electrical in origin, burned our treasured village store down. It was the center of our village since it was built in 1862. It was where we got gas, it housed our Post Office, it had a table and chairs and a well-used bench on the front porch. The owner was able to escape out of an upstairs window, thanks to neighbors who helped him. Seven fire departments fought valiantly but it couldn't be saved. We are left with a grassy area and two gas pumps to remind us of what was. The store is sorely missed.

Late on Christmas night of 2020, another historic home located in the Village Center also burned. Situated almost directly across from our church, this remains an area of concern for the select board.

So, we have endured three devastating fires of structures that were on the National Register of Historic Places, in three consecutive years. Despite these setbacks, Benson's village center and our community members who care about and for it, have worked to move forward and keep the spirit of our community alive and strong.

Benson Village does not have municipal water, but we do have a water treatment plant for sewage, which is maintained for village residents, and located just to the south and west of the Kellogg Family Farm.

Since our last renewal, the following revitalization efforts have occurred:

- Continued work on storm drains on the east side of Stage Road heading north.
- Painted the "Creamery" building on the southeast corner of the village center.
- Updates to the Community Hall include partial new siding, insulation and painting of an exterior section.



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- Benson Village Library (which is housed in the lower front section of the Community Hall) just received all new flooring in 2023.
- Several new windows were installed in the Town Offices, and the building was painted.
- The town playground was updated with new fall zones and unsafe (old style) equipment was removed and/or rebuilt, with some of the funds raised by a committee of community members who held (among other things), a hot wing cook-off on the grounds of the playground which is between the Town Offices and the Community Hall.

The United Church of Benson, while struggling with limited funds and rapidly increasing construction costs in the last several years, has managed to have a new roof put on the main part of the building, as well as the front entry, side entry, and the small roof over the chapel, some of which was volunteer labor from community members. Additionally, the front entry porch and steps were rebuilt and painted, with safety railings added to the ends of the porch to bring it up to code. Approximately five years ago, the steeple was repainted with some minor moldings repaired. The steeple is in poor condition with a lot of rotted wood and will need major repairs within the next 15-20 years.

As far as future infrastructure in the village center, we envision continuing to upgrade the children's playground, would like to see our way to rebuilding the village sidewalks which are in very poor condition, and continue upgrades to the Town Offices (finish the windows) and Community Hall.

Although it is located just outside (northeast) of the Village Center, the select board has been trying to build a new town garage to store trucks and equipment. This has been a major challenge, and the effort continues.

After many years of varied failed attempts to maintain a town website with volunteer effort, the select board voted last year to hire a local community member to design and implement an official .gov website, which is now up and running. It is located at www.bensonvermont.gov and the hope is that it will become a resource for information to the residents and visitors of Benson. The Benson Bulletin continues as a community newsletter also, with perhaps some changes to delivery in the future.

We are happy to report that the Wheel Inn (located in the village at the intersection of Lake Road and Stage Road) made it through the covid-19 crisis with flying colors, thanks to the residents not just of Benson, but also surrounding communities who supported them with take-out orders and outdoor dining. The owner of the Wheel Inn also purchased the historic building next door (known as the jewelry store) when that business moved elsewhere. She also is now the owner of the empty lot where the Benson Village Store once stood. There is a small group of community members who have done some grant writing and are looking at the possibility of either building a replica of the store, or perhaps moving the jewelry store onto the location where the village store was.

The tradition of the Benson Burdock Festival and Family Day has continued unabated. This is a much-loved day in August where townspeople gather in the village for a themed parade, vendors, children's games, and a barbecue lunch. The event is partially funded by the town and also supported by many fundraisers in the months leading up to it every year. A recent addition is a "Block Dance Party" which takes place on the Friday night before Family Day, next to the Town Offices. Here is a link to the Burdock Festival page on our new website: [Benson Burdock Festival & Family Day - bensonvermont.gov](http://BensonBurdockFestival&FamilyDay-bensonvermont.gov).



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Included with our application are the following documents:

- A Municipal Resolution authorizing this application, signed by our select board (separate email 4/4/23).
- A letter from the Executive Director of the Rutland Regional Planning Commission, confirming Benson's planning process under V.S.A. § 4350.
- An updated Village Center Designation Boundary map which shows:
 - Streets identified by name
 - Significant buildings and all businesses indicated by number with a key
 - Land/building use identified with colors
 - North arrow, scale and current date
 - Property lines

The following excerpts from our latest Town Plan, adopted in December 2017, discuss how the Village Center designation furthers the goals of the Town Plan:

"Benson received state Village Center Designation in 2004 to support village revitalization efforts. Authorized by 24 V.S.A. §2793a, Village Center designation recognizes and encourages local efforts to revitalize Vermont's traditional village centers. In accord with the land use goals of the State of Vermont, the designation encourages compact village centers surrounded by working rural lands. Village Center designation is an important tool used to protect and enhance the characteristics of the areas that are valued by the community. The designations can improve Benson's vitality and livability by supporting the goals of this plan, including those regarding land use. The benefits of village center designation include tax-incentives to maintain and enhance buildings as well as priority consideration for various state grants and programs such as Municipal Planning Grants and the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG). (Page 62).

A Village Center designation can be used to protect and enhance the characteristics of areas valued by the community. Benson can use the designation as a means of managing economic growth to ensure the future of its tax base and quality of life. (Page 66)"

The primary contact for this application is:

Cheryl Murray, Chair
Town of Benson Planning Commission
2000 Stage Rd. Benson VT 05743
802-855-3798
cookinvt9@gmail.com

Please feel free to contact either Cheryl Murray or myself with questions regarding this application.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linda Peltier".

Linda Peltier, Chair
Town of Benson Select Board