Newport becomes first in Vermont to adopt form-based code for zoning

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Tue Dec 7 2010

At the December 6, 2010 Newport City Council meeting, Newport became the first municipality in the state of Vermont to adopt form-based code into its zoning by-law. Form-based code is graphic form standards that regulate form of building rather than use of building. It has a positive approach illustrated by its language of 'build to lines' rather than 'set backs'. Form-based code defines desired development patterns.

"Form-based code is a three-pronged approach to zoning," stated Paul Dreher, Newport City Zoning Administrator. "It benefits the city with increased tax base, business benefits from expedited predictable permitting and it benefits the community with better public realm."

Newport accomplished this in only eight months because of partnership. Newport City Renaissance Corporation, a nonprofit organization that acts as a catalyst for community and economic development for downtown Newport, the Newport City Planning Commission and the Newport City Council worked together bringing resources and commitment to the process.

"Adoption of form based code in record time through the hard work of numerous people and really proves that grass roots efforts pay off," stated Paul Monette, Newport City Mayor. "This type of zoning greatly improves the ability for the city to attract development while maintaining our historic downtown. While change does not happen overnight this zoning will help initiate change and much needed growth."

"I am elated with the formal passage of the new Forms Based Code by the Newport City Council," said Monette. "Newport City is the first in the State of Vermont and one of the few in the country to pass this type of code into its zoning bylaws."

In 2009, Newport was the first municipality in Vermont to receive the American Institute of Architects (AIA) grant for a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT). The team held community meetings and focus groups with community members and produced a report of recommendations for the City to pursue in planning development and re-development of its downtown and waterfront on Lake Memphremagog. One of its recommendations was to adopt form based code. If the downtown buildings fell down under the old zoning by-law it could not be built to replace the fabric of building forms. Form based code does.

Source: Newport City Renaissance Corporation. 12.7.2010

"Form based code is efficient because it takes away the variance process which slows things down when a project is being developed," said Patricia M Sears, Executive Director of Newport City Renaissance Corporation. "Form based code allows for long term vision for the city's downtown."

Because form based code promotes mixed use for buildings, with retail on ground floor, offices on second floor and housing on the top floors, Newport is looking forward to form based code refreshing neighborhoods and promoting entrepreneurs.

"Newport can truly say it is 'Open for Business'," declared Charlie Elliott, chairman of Newport City Planning Commission.

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