

Implementation Plan Outline White Paper
In support of the development of the Montpelier City Plan
2020

Prepared by Mike Miller, AICP CFM Director of Planning & Community Development
and Kevin Casey, Community Development Specialist

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There are a number of ways to organize implementation plans and some are more effective than others at bringing about real change. Add to that the fact that cities always operate with limited funds and we can understand why the organization and structure of this plan is critical. Our principles when it comes to implementation are to identify tools and actions that will be **effective** at accomplishing our goals and to be **cost effective** in their impact on our budgets and of the success of the intended goal. Our actions therefore should be deliberate and measured.

Our first task for each topic is to identify our aspiration for the topic- A long term vision or ideal that we are shooting for. For some topics it may be necessary to have an aspiration that is a few sentences long to capture the various aspects. Each word should be carefully chosen as they are important clues to what we may later use as a measure to determine how effective we are at accomplishing the goal. These aspirations are generally the focus of each element's chapter.

The next step in the development of the implementation plan is goal setting. We have grand visions for tomorrow and those will usually be accomplished through many smaller pieces. If housing is going to be "safe and affordable", for example, then you will likely have one goal to find out how to be safe and a second goal on being affordable. Each one of those goals will be achieved using different strategies so we need separate goals for each.

Finally we have the strategies. This is, after all, the implementation plan and these strategies are the key to implementing the goals and ultimately the aspirations. What we proposed to do here in the 2019 City Plan was to break our strategies into five boxes to help guide the conversations. The categories include:

- Plans
- Programs
- Projects
- Permits
- Policies

The best way to explain how this implementation plan works is through a hypothetical example. We then will apply this process for all of the City Plan elements.

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE

So we will break our analysis into Aspirations (Visions), Goals, and Strategies.

Aspirations:

Let's say, for example, that the public has decided that one of Montpelier's visions for tomorrow is:

"A City filled with butterflies, rainbows and unicorns."

Now we understand that is a somewhat silly idea but this aspiration will give up the opportunity to think through how we might go about accomplishing such an aspiration if we were charged with its implementation.

In this case our vision statement is clear and establishes a desired future condition. More complex topics will have longer aspirational statements and may require multiple statements.

Goals:

There are a couple rules to guide the creation of goals. First, the ***Goals should be directly parsed from the aspiration***. If there is a goal that is identified that is not clearly connected to the vision then it should be reviewed as to whether it should be kept or if the aspiration needs to be amended to reflect this goal. Our goals are meant to help achieve the vision. Make sure they are connected.

Second, ***Goals should be discrete pieces***. Visions may be long but the goals are where we will make very specific implementation decisions. The same implementation tool may be used on multiple goals but we need to look at each goal separately to identify the best tool to reach the goal.

Finally, ***Goals must also include one of three statuses Maintain, Evolve, or Transform***. We have borrowed these three classifications from the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development. We felt they are an excellent way to frame discussions and they are easy to understand:

(M) Maintain is trying to keep something the same. In our example we may find, after some study, that our goal is to “Maintain butterfly populations”.

(E) Evolve is altering, enhancing, or making smaller changes to something. As we don’t have enough rainbows, “increasing the number of rainbows” is an evolution goal.

(T) Transformative is adding something new or making radical change. “Reintroduction of unicorns to the city landscape” is transformative as we don’t currently have any.

Goals may also have a benchmark if one is identified.

So using the example above:

Goal A. Maintain butterfly populations at 2010 levels.

Benchmark: (2010 Parks Commission butterfly census) 50,000 butterflies.

Goal B. Increase (*Evolve*) the annual number of rainbows.

Goal C. Reintroduce (*Transformative*) unicorns to City’s landscape.

Strategies:

Strategies are very specific action steps which we will apply to each goal individually. Just as goals need to be connected to aspirations, the ***strategies need to be logically connected to the goals***.

The second rule for strategies is that ***they must fall into one of five types- Plans, Programs, Projects, Permits or Policies***. A single goal may have multiple strategies needed to accomplish it but must have at least one strategy (or else how would we accomplish our goal).

Plans: When it is unclear what the action step should be, many times the best strategy is to plan or study the issue. This will usually identify a next step that will fall into one of the following action steps.

Programs: These are initiatives that are ongoing and usually require staff and /or resources. Capital improvement plans, community development program, snow plowing, first time home buyer, Community Rating System (FEMA for floodplains) and recreation programs are examples. The City does a great number of things already and many times we need to make sure they are structured to achieve goals in the plan.

Projects: Special projects are one-time items. Build a solar project or bike path, One Taylor Street, and District Heat were projects. Keep in mind that projects in year one general need maintenance programs in future years. Sometimes that is an addition to an existing program and sometimes it requires a new program (like District heat).

Permits: Regulations are one of the most common ways communities achieve goals. Zoning bylaws, subdivision regulations, building permits, health codes, and sprinkler requirements are all permits used to achieve goals. Permit strategies have their own rules. ***They must be clear whether they are trying to require; incentivize; allow; penalize; or prohibit.***

- ‘Requiring’ and ‘prohibiting’ are clear definitive declarations- You must do this; you cannot do that. For example: Development is prohibited in the wetlands; New structures in the flood hazard area must be elevated above the base flood elevation.
- ‘Incentivize’ and ‘penalize’ are looking to provide or take away something to gain compliance. Maybe it’s a density bonus or conversely a penalty of some kind. In these instances the activity is not prohibited or required but the city assigns some value to encourage a behavior change.
- Sometimes all the City can do or needs to do is allow something. For example, zoning districts should allow for a mix of housing types in each neighborhood. There is no requirement or incentive to do so but the first step to having a mix of housing types is to allow it to happen on its own. In some cases, that is all that is needed as the free market will provide the encouragement. “Allowing” is many times the first step to “removing barriers”.

Policies: These statements describe community values or define how we use our lands, funds, or other government resources. So we may have a policy that all property acquired for conservation will be on a “willing seller/willing buyer basis”. We may have an investment policy that the City’s capital reserve should be invested only in socially responsible funds. In order to achieve Net Zero we may have a policy that all new city vehicles purchased will be electric or bio-diesel ready. Usually these policies will inform certain strategies but occasionally they apply broadly across many. These can sometimes be tricky to apply in an eight year plan as Councils change from time to time

but these policies should reflect community values that should outlast the life time of the plan.

Similar to goals, **each strategy must have a description of the action. Nothing fancy just “continue”, “amend”, or “new” strategy.** This is important to educate the reader to what is already being done, what needs to be changed to be more effective, and what is being recommended as a new idea.

As a rule, **the strategies proposed should also be items that are likely to appear on the eight year work plan for the committees.** We can add other long term tasks in the text or in white papers but, in order to make the plan strategic, we are focusing on the next eight to ten years.

In the strategies step we do not need to describe the entire program. There will be a summary in the back of the plan we would have a more complete description of the entire program including which department and staff are responsible, which committee has oversight, timelines (if appropriate), and any associated or needed costs. A hyperlink from the chapter descriptions to summary will provide additional detailed information on the strategy. Also, some strategies apply in many chapters, like zoning.

So continuing our example above:

Aspiration: “A City filled with butterflies, rainbows and unicorns.”

Goal A. Maintain butterfly populations at 2015 levels.

Benchmark: (2015 butterfly census) 50,000 butterflies.

- a. Continue **milkweed conservation program** on city parkland. [Note the description of action ‘continue’ and the hyperlink to the full program description. This of course assumes we have a milkweed program and that it is going well. This could also work as a policy as it involves only city owned land. The difference probably depends on the amount of resources needed for the program. An intensive effort or time and resources would probably require a program while a simple policy of not mowing certain open spaces in the park until after the milkweed season could be a policy.]
- b. Adjust **zoning regulations** to incorporate butterfly habitat map and to prohibit development in these areas. [Note the action ‘adjust’. Presumably we have zoning but should add regulation of butterfly habitat. Also note the key “prohibit”. As zoning is a regulation we must also say what is desired. Are we suggesting to provide an incentive to protect habitat or simply prohibiting development?]
- c. Create a new **butterfly education program** for private landowners of butterfly habitat. [Just because they can’t build on habitat does not mean they will maintain that habitat. This

would be a new program (as opposed to plan, permit, or project) so in the back of the plan we would need to discuss staffing and budgets.]

Goal B. Increase the annual number of rainbows.

- a. Build a *giant fountain on Gould Hill* such that rainbows will appear over Montpelier on sunny days. [This is a one-time project. This assumes some study was done that found Gould Hill was a suitable location for such a fountain and that it would actually work.]

Goal C. Reintroduce unicorns to City's landscape.

- a. Study how to *capture and reintroduce unicorns* to the city landscape. [This is a plan (the fourth "P"). The Conservation Commission has not yet found out how to achieve the city goal of "a city full of unicorns" so they are recommending a study to identify how to accomplish the goal.]

So a complete look at the full picture, we have an aspiration which we broke into separate elements (goals) and then established strategies to achieve them. The final test is if we accomplish our strategies, would we accomplish our goals and aspirations? Is there a logical connection between them? I think yes, assuming an eventual plan and a special project and/or program regarding introduction of unicorns.

Now I throw in Unicorns to make a point. Just because we aspire to something; just because we plan for something; does not actually mean we can accomplish something. As public servants though, if we are asked to plan for reintroduction of unicorns then it is our obligation to develop the best plan to do so.

Prioritizing:

There are two final clean up steps to the process once a well-rounded strategy is developed – prioritizing and bike-racking. The first of these steps is to establish some basic information on each strategy such as priority (low, medium, or high), the cost (low, medium or high), and who is responsible for accomplishing the strategy. These are common in most strategic planning efforts. These would only be applied to new and amended strategies as continuing strategies don't need to be prioritized.

The Low/Medium/High priority are self-assigned. The only requirement would be that everything cannot be a high priority unless only a few changes are proposed to a current plan. The expectation is that the higher priorities will be worked on first.

The cost rankings were based on an arbitrary set of figures so we can have an idea of the overall impact on budgets. Low costs are less than \$1,000; Medium costs are up to \$100,000; and High costs are more than \$100,000. These are based on direct impacts to the budget and not any cost/benefit analysis. Many projects, particularly those that generate savings, like energy efficiency, may pay for themselves over time but that would not make them low cost (as we are framing the issue).

The final matter is who will do the work. This is almost always staff but occasionally committees or a consultant will do the work (understanding that staff will be required for project management). We avoided saying committees and commissions would do most work because, in general, they make policy

decisions and staff are doing the actual work of developing the project, program, or regulation. We want to ensure we have enough staff to meet any new demands that the plan will create so tapping an individual to be the point person who already has a full workload may indicate a need for additional staff.

“Bike racking”:

In ranking strategies for some of the earliest plans it was found that sometimes there were simply too many new strategies that could be addressed in the eight year window. We first suggested that we should cut some of them out (otherwise the plan is not being strategic) while others suggested there was value in keeping the ideas somewhere. We decided upon creating a “parking lot” for these ideas at the end of the implementation plan but in the spirit of our alternative transportation goals we have decided to “bike rack” good ideas instead.

CONCLUSIONS

The Planning Department and Planning Commission developed this structure to help guide committees in the development of their individual implementation strategies. As this is the first time it is being used it may be necessary to modify to address situations that have not been contemplated. The point is to have an implementation plan that creates an effective strategy for reaching our collective goals. Once created we may reorganize to better communicate the implementation plan to the public but these steps will be follow to create the plan.

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