

**VPA 2016 Awards
Nomination for Citizen Planner,
Board, or Professional Planner**

Name of person or board: Robert Vasseur

Contact Information for the Nomination: Polly McMurtry, Town of Fayston Planning Commission, tele 802-495-2922, email: pmcmurtry@madriver.com

Contact Information for the Award (if the nominator would also be the recipient of the award if granted, please provide one additional contact person):

Check one box only:

- Serves as a volunteer on a committee, board or commission or as citizen activist
Names of board(s) Fayston Selectboard
Citizen activist or neighborhood leader _____
- Serves as a volunteer board for a municipality, region or state
Name of board _____
- Serves as a professional planner on behalf of Vermont, on the local, regional or state level or in the private sector (for example, consultant).

Please provide brief (up to one page) summary of the individual or board's qualifications:

Bob first became a volunteer for the town of Fayston in 1958, as Town Auditor. A year later, at the age of 26, he became a Selectman, and has been on the Board ever since, retiring just this year (a total of 57 years). For 40 of those years, he served as Chair. He was also a founding member of the Mad River Valley Planning District, and served on its Steering Committee for 20 years. The MRV Planning District is the only multi-town planning organization, outside the regional planning commissions, in Vermont.

Please describe how the nominee meets each of the criteria below (up to 3 pages for questions 1- 6 together):

- 1. About how many years has this individual or board committed to planning, as part of a group, program, initiative and/or cause? Give details:** He has been active in the Town and the Mad River Valley for 58 years, 57 of them serving on the Fayston Selectboard.

- 2. To what extent has the nominee's time and dedication increased his/her constituents' (including members of the public) understanding of planning principles and the planning process as well as the goals of the organization of which he/she is a part? How has this advocacy role been pursued?**

While Bob would be the last person in the world to say he is a Planner, he has had a wide influence on planning in the Town and in the Valley, and has been supportive of both the local planning commissions and the MRV Planning District. Through it all, from age 26 to age 83, he's kept the same straightforward, low-key approach to running this one-time hillside farm community, now turned ski resort town, where Mad River and Sugarbush's Mount Ellen dominate the skyline. "He's a wonderfully perceptive man in a very understated way," says fellow selectboard member Jared Cadwell. While Bob doesn't think he likes "planning" per se, he feels strongly about his community and improving its quality of life. Which is really the point of planning. He could be called an "accidental planner."

- 3. Within what sphere of influence has this effectiveness been realized (local, regional, statewide, national)?**

His sphere of influence has been beyond the town, spreading into the Mad River Valley. As a founding member of the Mad River Planning District in 1985, he was an active proponent of good planning, although he would never say as much. He would just say he was doing what needed to be done. The District was created by the Towns of Fayston, Waitsfield and Warren, the MRV Chamber of Commerce and Sugarbush Resort. Its purpose is to plan for the future of the Mad River Valley, and its planning program is directed toward the physical, social, economic, fiscal, environmental, cultural and aesthetic well-being of the member Towns and its inhabitants."

- 4. To what extent has this person or board exhibited outstanding leadership in his, her or their endeavors? To what extent is this person or board respected and emulated by peers and/or the community? List example(s)**

"Bob really does represent so much good history of the Mad River Valley and Fayston in particular," Cadwell says. He adds that Vasseur's style – "a simple, direct and honest approach" – has enabled him to move through the decades and adapt to changing times on the job.

During Vasseur's five decades on the Board, Fayston went through a growth spurt in the 60's and 70's. During this time, as the town morphed into a resort area, the town undertook a road building spree the town undertook as it morphed into a resort area in the 1960s. Bob Vasseur was in the middle of it all overseeing the effort, turning one-lane roads into two-lane highways. "That was our major thing, every road was upgraded," he says.

5. To what extent has the nominee been effective in formulating and implementing his/her/their plans and furthered the cause of planning?

Bob has a wonderful balance of “great conservative values” with common sense and understanding of how times change and you have to adapt. “Most of the time he’s pretty darn reasonable and he can be very open-minded, at maybe unexpected times,” according to Caldwell.

Bob also shows his understanding by his actions, especially with his concern about the environment and the rural character of Fayston, when he subdivided property, and his interest in sustainable farming and supporting Vermont’s maple industry in global markets. Born in 1932, he grew up on the family farm. He and his brother took over operation of the farm in 1962. Theirs was the only operating dairy farm left in Fayston in 1987, when they sold the dairy operation in the Federal Herd Buyout. Bob and his family continue their maple sugaring operation, with over 5,500 taps. The Vasseurs continue to live on the property, but have sold much of the land into a subdivision sensitive to the environment, requiring that the homes be tucked at the edge of the woods, keeping the meadowland and views open for wildlife and for one of the town’s favorite scenic areas.

Vasseur is also one of three Mad River Valley maple producers who have joined a pilot program called Tonewood — part commercial venture, part sustainability initiative. Through the Tonewood website, customers are able to “adopt” a maple tree for \$110. The business is modeled on Italian olive-tree adoption programs that give people a sense of connection to the producers they wouldn’t otherwise have when buying olive oil.

Subscribers also receive a 16-page booklet about sustainability, reflecting the educational side of Tonewood’s mission. A portion of the profits are donated to the University of Vermont’s Proctor Maple Research Center, because of the effect of climate change small farms. Besides tracking the trend, the Proctor Maple Research Center is developing tools to increase productivity. Vasseur’s farm is already benefiting from his collaboration with Tonewood: All his trees are now outfitted with check-valve spout adapters, each one resulting in higher yields than normal, and keeping the bacteria from getting back into the tree every time you put a hole in the tree. Better for the tree, better for the farmer.

6. Other – for example list involvement in public outreach and citizen engagement, or if this person or board has any publication related to planning.

Other community activities he has volunteered for: Board member of the Solid Waste Management District, supporter of the MRV Little League and Harwood Youth Hockey, surveyor of town roads, and he has helped out over the years counting ballots after elections.

Please feel free to include additional supporting material such as letters of support, related documents, reports, articles, presentations, etc.