

For Immediate Release
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Vermont Planners Association Announces 2017 Planning Awards

Montpelier, VT: The Vermont Planners Association is pleased to announce the recipients of its 2017 planning awards. For over 20 years, these awards continue to recognize outstanding achievement in community planning in Vermont. Nominees come from all corners of Vermont and represent the best in local, regional, and state planning by citizen and professional planners over the last year.

According to Vermont Planners Association's President Mark Kane, "This year's award recipients are exemplary of the important and ongoing efforts of planners to support a better and more vibrant Vermont." The awards will be presented at a reception in the Vermont Statehouse's Cedar Creek Room on April 20th at 4:00 p.m.

With the catchphrase "We love Bethel. Let's make it better. In one weekend," the award for the **2017 Project of the Year** goes to the **Bethel Better Block**. For one weekend last fall the Bethel Better Block project utilized a variety of creative, simple, and inexpensive solutions to temporarily transform downtown Bethel into a more vibrant, livable, active, and appealing destination. The project impacts however, extend far beyond that one weekend. The demonstration provided the community the opportunity to experiment with a wide range of longer-term smart growth and placemaking techniques, experience the full potential of its historic downtown, and build community enthusiasm and the volunteer base needed for the implementation of these longer-term improvements. The project created a noticeable buzz and positive spirit around town that wasn't present before. Over the course of just one weekend Bethel Better Block addressed an array of issues including blighted and underutilized buildings, vacant lots, graffiti, a lack of public amenities and gathering space, and bicycle and pedestrian safety issues. "Now, four months later, the impacts keep multiplying," says Rebecca Sanborn Stone of the Bethel Revitalization Initiative. "Buildings have been sold and vacant spaces are filling. New projects are bubbling up, and a new cadre of community volunteers are already planning the next steps in making Bethel a better place to live, work and play." This was the first time the national Better Block model was used in Vermont, and it demonstrates the potential for applying this tactical urbanism model in other small towns throughout the state in the hopes of jumpstarting quick, inexpensive, and impactful revitalization. "Bethel is no longer viewed as a place that has seen better days," says Rebecca Sanborn. "It's now seen as a place where the best days lie ahead, and where the community is ready and able to make great things happen."

The **Plan of the Year** award recognizes plans that exemplify a visionary approach and expand the envelope of planning principles and this year's award recipient is the reimagined **Hubbardton Vermont Town Plan 2016**. The updated plan clearly articulates the community's vision for the town's future with a concise narrative, accessible layout, and engaging graphics. The Plan was written by the Hubbardton Planning Commission with technical assistance from the Rutland Regional Planning Commission (RRPC) through the Municipal Planning Grant program. "It was written to be digestible and understandable – something that everyone from planning commission members to prospective residents would be interested in reading," says RRPC planner Elysa Smigielski. The Plan exudes creativity and fresh thinking, which was made possible through the community engagement process – Planning Commissioners went door to door to promote a town-wide community forum! Themes that came out of the forum, which was attended by over 90 residents, formed the basis for the Plan's action items. The Hubbardton Plan is much shorter and more concise than previous plans; scraping away layers of boiler plate language, and allowing Hubbardton to speak for itself about how the town will maintain and enhance the character of the town through a concise, actionable, and realistic implementation plan. The action items are specifically tailored to the unique characteristics of this small, rural, lakeside community and are organized within each chapter by topic and year. Elysa Smigielski adds: "The new format exemplifies how a small, rural Vermont town can create and implement a fresh, modern town plan that focuses on sharing the town's voice and vision while also implementing an action plan that is relevant to a small lakeside town and that upholds statutory planning principles."

Pamela Loranger, of Colchester, Vermont, is recognized as the **2017 Citizen Planner of the Year**, for her commitment to the Town of Colchester over the past 20 years. Described by Sarah Hadd, Colchester's Director of Planning and Zoning, as "the best Planning Commission Chair in the State of Vermont," Pam also serves on numerous boards and committees within the Town of Colchester including the Cemetery Commission, Conservation Commission, Governance Committee, Community Center Initiative, Historic Society, Colchester Blooms, and as a Justice of the Peace. Under Pam's direction the Planning Commission has tackled a Town Plan update and drafted an array of zoning amendments addressing water quality issues, green infrastructure requirements in environmentally sensitive areas, and stormwater management within Malletts Bay, all of which have changed the planning landscape in Colchester for the better. "Pam's primary goal as the Chair of the Planning Commission has been to give a platform to the voices in our community, whether they represent our residents, business owners, property owners, town staff, or others," says Colchester Planner Karen Purinton. Pam has been a tireless leader advocating for effective land use regulations

with respect to the development and conservation of Colchester's land and water resource areas. Sarah Hadd says of Pam, "Her impact is far ranging and lasting but her work is often behind the scenes and her modesty will make her demur to the work of her other Commissioners or staff any successes."

The **2017 Citizen Board of the Year** award goes to the **Town of Bolton Planning Commission** for the outstanding community engagement process it led in connection with the 2017 Bolton Town Plan update. In the fall of 2015 the five commissioners, who collectively have over 100 years of service on the Bolton Planning Commission, began a rigorous community engagement process to solicit input for the Town Plan update. This process included numerous neighborhood meetings, a pizza party, a business forum, a senior forum, a children's art contest, and a community survey. A neighborhood meeting was even held in a horse barn on Duxbury Road. Through these efforts, which have been highlighted several times on Vermont Public Radio and in local newspapers, the Commission was able to engage over ten percent of town residents and develop a vision statement, which was presented at Town Meeting Day and further revised based on community feedback. The Planning Commission spent the next eight months developing goals, objectives and action steps based on community input and invited community members back to prioritize a total of 60 objectives. "The Planning Commission's tireless efforts and commitment to public service, volunteerism, and community are certainly worthy of recognition," says Bolton Zoning Administrator Sarah McShane. "Without the support of full-time professional staff, the Planning Commission has actively engaged countless residents and highlighted the importance of community planning."

Steve Lotspeich, RLA, Community Planner with the Town and Village of Waterbury, is the recipient of the **2017 Mark Blucher Planner of the Year Award** for professional planners. Steve has worked as a professional planner in Vermont for over 25 years and his leadership, dedication, and tremendous track record of successful project development and implementation serve as a shining example of planning in the state. In addition to leading the day-to-day activities of the Waterbury Planning and Zoning Office and participating in numerous local community organizations and events, Steve has been integral in Waterbury's resiliency planning. "Prior to August 28, 2011, Steve was known to be among the most competent and dedicated planners in the state," says Paul Conner Director of Planning and Zoning for the City of South Burlington. "After that date, the day that Hurricane Irene hit, Steve took this to a new level and set a new bar for all of us." Waterbury is THE recovery success story of Vermont thanks in part to Steve's work on recovery projects including the relocation and construction of the municipal offices, the relocation and expansion of

Hunger Mountain Childcare, and local permitting of the Waterbury State Office Complex. His coworkers and other municipal staff recognize him for his technical expertise, versatility, generosity, and musical talents. In addition to traditional planning duties, such as numerous municipal plan updates and zoning bylaw amendments, Steve has filled a variety of roles in Waterbury from interim zoning administrator to Waterbury's Long-Term Communitate Recovery Grants Manager. Ken Belliveau, Vice-Chair of the Waterbury Planning Commission, and Director of Planning & Zoning the Town of Williston adds, "Steve brings people along. He is imbedded in the community and is connected to all of the committees and groups working there. He does this and knows you need to do this to get things done."

For more information about the Vermont Planners Association Awards, you can visit their web site at <https://www.vermontplanners.org/awards-recognition/>. You can also follow up on twitter @VT_Planning. The Vermont Planners Association is a statewide, non-profit, membership-based organization of professional and citizen planners, and other related professionals, dedicated to advancing the art and science of planning in Vermont. The Vermont Planners Association supports the planning profession through outreach, professional development opportunities and encourages all members to maintain an open dialogue on contemporary planning issues. The organization would like to thank the New Hampshire Planners Association for its help in judging the Vermont Planners Association Awards.