



Economic Development Plan

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Town of Berlin Economic Development Plan January 2008

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Introduction

Overview of the Economic Development Plan

In its 2005 Town Plan, the Town of Berlin expressed mixed feelings about its identity. The Goals and Objectives section of the plan opens with the following statement:

“While the Town of Berlin is now and is expected to remain a predominantly rural community, it contains a large commercial and industrial center in the area east of Interstate 89 and north of Scott Hill Road and Airport Road. The Town desires to enhance its current role as a regional economic center...”

This statement presents the town’s self-image as that of a rural place while acknowledging the large amount of automobile-oriented commercial development that has taken place within its borders. While it is true that much of Berlin, especially the areas located west of Irish Hill, is rural in appearance, the function of the town is now predominantly that of a suburban employment and residential center. As of 2000, the ratio of people employed in Berlin to working residents of the town was greater than three to one.

Despite the fact that Berlin’s function has changed, its self-identification as a rural community is obviously still very strong. With this vision in mind the Town of Berlin set out in early 2007 to undertake a townwide economic development plan. This Economic Development Plan is expected to build on the 2005 Town Plan, which lays out the following goals for economic development in Berlin:

- The town seeks to continue to grow its employment base;
- The Route 302 corridor is in need of responsible revitalization;
- Commercial strip development should be avoided in highway interchange areas;
- A true town center area is needed; and
- Industrial uses should be encouraged in appropriate locations.

The end result of this planning process will be a plan that provides a road map for the Town of Berlin to implement its economic development agenda over the next five to ten years and beyond.

Summary of the Planning Process

In early 2007 the Town of Berlin received a grant from the State of Vermont to fund an economic development plan. Through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, the Town’s Economic Development Advisory Council selected **devonomics**, a consulting firm based in Biddeford, Maine, to oversee the plan’s creation. Work on the plan began in June of 2007 when the consultant visited and toured Berlin, met with a variety of local residents, business owners and economic development stakeholders, and held an initial public hearing.

Following this initial visit, devonomics worked with the Economic Development Advisory Council to create a survey form aimed at existing businesses in the Town of Berlin. This survey, which was distributed to 200 businesses, was designed to give the Town valuable feedback regarding the business community’s perceptions of Berlin and its thoughts regarding the future direction of the Town’s economic growth.

After assembling existing reports and data to document the past, current and future economic outlook for Berlin and the Central Vermont region, the consultant produced an Inventory and Analysis Report in September 2007. The findings of this report were presented at a second public hearing on September 26, 2007. This hearing also included a discussion regarding the future vision for economic development in Berlin. A work session with the Economic Development Advisory Council was subsequently held the following evening to refine the vision and set out objectives for the plan.

Working with the EDAC, the consultant then prepared this plan document. The plan includes the following elements:

- A Vision for Economic Development in Berlin
- Economic Development Goals
- Implementation Strategy
- Planning Benchmarks

Findings from the Inventory and Analysis Report

To help establish a stronger context for the Economic Development Plan, a review of the key findings from the Inventory and Analysis Report is included here. The complete Inventory & Analysis Report is presented as an Appendix to the plan document.

Demographic and Economic Conditions

Despite slow population growth, falling household sizes in Central Vermont have driven household growth, and, by extension, housing demand. Berlin itself has not seen much housing development in the past 25 years, though there is renewed interest in Berlin for higher density developments aimed at new markets, including seniors and working families.

The Central Vermont economy has grown some since 1990, but its population has shown very little growth, and the area has fallen short of its job growth forecasts in recent years. Berlin's local economy has grown substantially, but it is not very diverse and has been driven by three industries: insurance, health care and retail. Since 2000, however, most job growth in Berlin has been in industrial sectors such as wholesale trade, transportation and construction.

Demand for new office and retail uses in Berlin has been very slow in recent years, but there is mounting pressure for both new development and redevelopment in Berlin, especially along Route 302.

Unlike the rest of Vermont, Berlin does not attract much tourist activity, though surrounding ski areas like Stowe, Mad River Glen, and Sugarbush remain very popular, as do nearby food-related attractions such as Cabot Creamery and Ben & Jerry's.

Infrastructure, Resource and Planning Issues

Berlin is fortunate to have excellent transportation infrastructure, including Interstate 89, U.S. Routes 302 and 2, State Routes 62 and 12, Edward F. Knapp State Airport, and the New England Central rail line. Secondary systems are not nearly as good, though, as many town roads are unpaved, there are few pedestrian and bicycle resources in the area, and public transportation is somewhat limited.

Existing plans for Berlin envision the town building around its existing commercial growth corridors, particularly Routes 62 and 302, but adding in a Town Center along Route 62 and encouraging new interstate-oriented commercial development around the Route 63 interchange (Exit 6 from I-89). Future growth in Berlin is limited at this time by the absence of a public water utility from most of its growth areas and by limited sewer service.

The Town of Berlin has already taken several proactive steps in planning for future development in its growth areas, and has laid out visions for both the Route 62/Town Center area and the Route 302 corridor. Only small pieces of these plans have been implemented at this time, however.

Though Berlin's taxpayers have certainly seen their property assessments and tax burdens rise in recent years Berlin's tax rate remains modest relative to the region. This is due in part to Berlin's very strong commercial tax base. Berlin's reluctance to take on debt has left it with ample capacity for future borrowing, should its citizens desire to take that path.

Business Survey Results

The survey of existing businesses in Berlin produced many interesting findings, the most important of which is the lack of loyalty of existing businesses to the community. This finding makes it imperative for the town to reach out to existing businesses, particularly home-based businesses, in the coming years.

A second key conclusion is that many business leaders feel that commercial development always lowers taxes while residential development always increases taxes. Particularly in light of Act 60, this may not always be the case. The Town of Berlin needs to spend more time studying this issue in order to understand the true impacts of new development on its fiscal situation.

Another important conclusion of this study is that, quite simply, Berlin needs to have a post office of its own, as many businesses find this to be a major hindrance to their operations. While the Town of Berlin can only do so much on this front, it must be a top priority. The town also needs to seek ways to broaden the area's business base, particularly in regard to retail, dining and manufacturing.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, businesses are drawn to Berlin for two key reasons: readily available land and space for development, and excellent road access. Businesses are not interested in having Berlin attempt to imitate the "charm" of older cities or villages in Vermont; rather they would like to see Berlin accept what it is and go from there. This finding is especially important in light of Berlin's attempts to develop a Town Center; businesses must clearly be better engaged with the Town Center planning process.

An Economic Development Vision for Berlin

Berlin, Vermont serves as an economic center for all of Central Vermont, offering a vibrant and diverse mixture of business types and locations. Its combination of superior transportation access, readily available properties for all types of development, beautiful scenery, and easy access to Vermont's most popular recreational destinations, makes Berlin an ideal place to live and conduct business.

Berlin includes several unique business districts, each of which offers different advantages to businesses and customers:

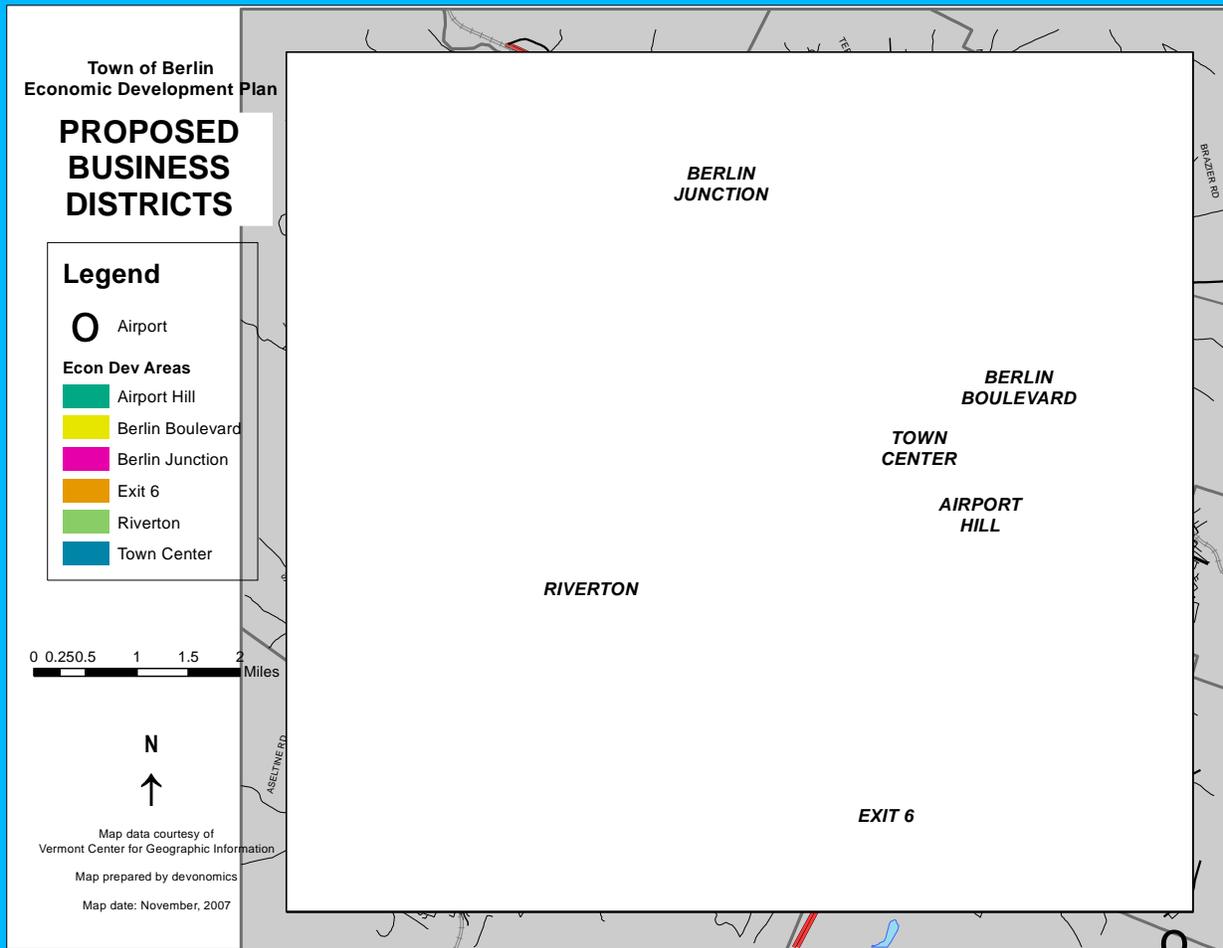
- *Berlin Town Center* is a pleasant, pedestrian-friendly district that serves as Central Vermont's premier destination for professional office businesses, specialty retailers, and medical care professionals.
- *Berlin Boulevard* is home to a broad variety of convenience and destination businesses along the multi-modal corridor between Montpelier and Barre.
- *Airport Hill* is Central Vermont's leading location for corporate offices, high tech industries, and aviation-related businesses.
- *Exit 6* is home to both small businesses and convenience amenities serving visitors to the Central Vermont region.
- *Berlin Junction* offers an ideal location for wholesale and light manufacturing businesses with excellent transportation facilities and very close proximity to downtown Montpelier.
- *Riverton* is an historic railroad hamlet that offers opportunities for small-scale commercial business activity and to home based business.

The map on the following page shows the locations of these business districts.

In addition to these specific districts, a variety of home-based entrepreneurs are located in all sections of the town.

Regardless of the type and location of business activity, the Town of Berlin believes that, in Central Vermont, "**All Roads Lead to Berlin**".

Proposed Business Districts in the Town of Berlin



Economic Development Goals

The Town of Berlin.....

1. encourages and manages business and residential growth in existing built-up areas and in areas with adequate infrastructure for such development.
2. invests in and maintains public infrastructure in identified growth areas.
3. maintains a strong relationship with the town's business community.
4. makes current information about available properties readily accessible to prospective developers and entrepreneurs and provides links to resources and guidelines for growing and developing businesses in Berlin.
5. effectively regulates growth in order to protect the town's visual, natural, historic and community character.
6. assists business growth and development with available economic incentives.
7. possesses a strong sense of community and neighborhood identity.
8. ensures that all town boards and committees work together to support the town's economic development vision.
9. is an important and emerging part of Central Vermont's tourism economy
10. provides excellent outdoor recreation opportunities for residents, employees and visitors alike.
11. offers a variety of housing options for young working people, working families, and retirees.
12. actively supports home-based businesses throughout the town.

Implementation Strategy

The implementation actions proposed for the Economic Development Plan are designed to generally support the vision and goals presented above. These actions provide exact guidance to the Town of Berlin and its partners on how to achieve the vision and goals of the plan.

Implementation actions are grouped into four general categories:

- Capacity Building
- Public Investments
- Regulatory Changes
- Marketing and Outreach

For each action, the following information is supplied:

- General description and guidance
- Responsible party
- Time frame
- Expected costs
- Related implementation actions

Capacity Building Actions

1. Increase Staff Capacity for Economic Development Activities

The Town of Berlin's professional staff is currently at capacity with its current level of administration and planning activities. In order to expand the town's ability to provide economic development functions, additional staffing will be needed.

Depending on the town's needs, staff capacity could be added in one of several ways:

- Shared Economic Development position with another municipality
- Contracted services through Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation
- Contracted services with an outside consultant

Responsible Party: Select Board, Economic Development Committee

Time Frame: Immediate

Expected Costs: Unknown

1. Develop and Maintain a Five-Year Capital Budget Program

As a growing community that faces complex and expanding infrastructure needs Berlin will need to gain a stronger understanding of its long-term capital needs. For this reason the town should enact a five-year capital planning program and update it annually. This capital plan will be a necessary prerequisite for an impact fee program.

Responsible Party: Select Board

Time Frame: Immediate, ongoing

Expected Costs: None

Related Actions: 10

1. Pursue Vermont Growth Center Application for the Berlin Town Center Area

Passed in 2006, Vermont Act 183 established a statewide Growth Center program aimed at promoting compact growth in appropriate areas. The Growth Center designation brings along a number of benefits, including: the ability to establish a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district; meeting of the Act 250 threshold for mixed-income housing and mixed-use projects; Act 250 Master Plan Permit Application; and priority consideration for a variety of state grants related to planning, transportation, infrastructure, and community development.

According to the state's *Growth Center Planning Manual*, "A growth center is a compact area planned for concentrated, mixed-use development." It goes on to state that communities without traditional downtowns may designate new "town centers" as their growth centers. The proposed Berlin Town Center most likely meets the state's definition of a growth center; it is up to the Town of Berlin to prepare an application for the official designation. This application process is intensive and requires a great deal of research and planning work, and should be coordinated with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC).

More information on the Growth Center program can be found at:

<http://www.dhca.state.vt.us/Planning/GrowthCenters.htm>

Responsible Party:	Planning Commission, Town Center Committee, Select Board
Time Frame:	1 year
Expected Costs:	Up to \$10,000

1. Take an Active Role in the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce

The Town of Berlin is not currently a member of the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce. Since the Chamber's membership includes most of the large businesses (and many small ones as well) in Berlin, it would be beneficial for the town to have a "seat at the table" with the Chamber as it looks to build an economic development program. The town and the Chamber can become more effective partners this way.

Responsible Party:	Economic Development Committee, Economic Development Staff
Time Frame:	Immediate, ongoing
Expected Costs:	\$300 (for Chamber Membership), staff time
Related Actions:	5, 23

1. Develop and Maintain a Database of Local Businesses

A starting point for improving relations between the Town of Berlin and its business community is having a stronger understanding of what businesses are present in the town and their characteristics. This inventory will provide a basis for the establishment of a Business Advisory Council (See Action 23). Helpful information would include business names, locations, number of employees, potential growth plans, customer bases, and sources of business leads.

Working with the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce, the Town can assemble this list fairly quickly. Ongoing coordination with the Chamber will be necessary to ensure that the database remains current.

In addition to Chamber members, non- member businesses should also be identified. This inventory needs to include home-based businesses as well, as such businesses represent a vital component of the economy of a community of Berlin's size.

Responsible Party: Economic Development staff, Economic Development Committee
Time Frame: 1 year, ongoing
Expected Costs: Staff time
Related Actions: 4, 23

1. Use Town Website to List Available Properties

As the Town of Berlin works towards building an Economic Development program, it will be essential to know what sites and buildings are available for acquisition or lease to prospective businesses. The town should work with local property owners to use the website to advertise their available properties. The town website should also link to property resources with Chamber of Commerce, CVEDC and other entities.

Responsible Party: Economic Development staff, Economic Development Committee
Time Frame: 1 year, ongoing
Expected Costs: Staff time
Related Actions: 7

1. Create an Economic Development Marketing Program

After assembling inventories of businesses and properties, the next step will be to create a marketing program for the Town of Berlin. Launching this program will begin with a branding exercise that seeks ways to integrate the "All Roads Lead to Berlin" concept into existing local and regional marketing efforts. The next phase will be to develop an economic development website and printed materials. Finally, marketing materials will need to be distributed to the marketplace through direct mail, press releases, advertising and presentations.

Responsible Party: Economic Development staff, Economic Development Committee
Time Frame: 2 years, ongoing
Expected Costs: Up to \$10,000 in startup, ongoing costs unknown
Related Actions: 5, 6, 23

1. Coordinate Economic Development Activities with All Town Boards and Committees

This task will involve ongoing coordination between Economic Development staff and town boards and committees to ensure that all decisions related to growth and development are consistent. The scope of activities will vary from year to year, but will start with regular written and oral presentations on economic development activities by staff to the Select Board, Economic Development Committee, Planning Commission, Development Review Board, and Conservation/ Recreation Commission.

This task should also include regular training sessions for town board and committee members. These sessions should cover local and regional economic development and planning issues, state legislative changes and boardsmanship issues.

Responsible Party: Economic Development Staff
Time Frame: Ongoing
Expected Costs: None

1. Consider Assessing Local Option Business Taxes

The State of Vermont permits municipalities to assess local option taxes of up to 1% on four different types of business activity: sales & use, meals, rooms and alcoholic beverages. These local option taxes are in addition to state taxes on these items (sales tax is 6%; meals and rooms taxes are 9%; alcoholic beverage tax is 10%). According to the Vermont Department of Taxes, the following communities already assess local option taxes: Brattleboro, Burlington, Dover, Manchester, South Burlington, Stratton, and Williston. Establishing local option taxes requires approval by the state legislature.

If a community enacts local option taxes, it directly receives 70% of the revenue generated, and the state redistributes the remaining 30% statewide. As of 2006, the Vermont Department of Taxes reported that businesses in the Town of Berlin generated about \$55 million in taxable sales and about \$6.7 million in meals purchases. (No data were reported by the state for rooms or alcohol purchases in Berlin). If 1% local option taxes were enacted on these businesses and the Town of Berlin retained 70% of the revenue, the town would receive a total of \$432,000 in additional revenue. This represents about 20 percent of the current municipal budget of \$2.1 million, and would allow the town to both increase its investments in economic development projects and, potentially, ease the burden on its residential taxpayers.

While these taxes would undoubtedly give a dramatic boost to local revenues, they would likely generate at least some opposition from the business community. For this reason, the potential implementation of local option taxes should be slow and careful. To ease the burden on local businesses, the Town may want to consider eliminating its equipment and inventory taxes, which have caused concern among existing businesses.

However, local option taxes would have their greatest effect on large national retailers, due to their sales volume. Also, the expected addition of more national retailers around the Berlin Mall and along Route 302 would add greatly to the town's tax base if local option taxes were in place.

Responsible Party: Select Board
Time Frame: 2 years
Expected Costs: None

Public Investment Actions

1. Establish a Public Water Utility in Town Center Area

Berlin's adopted Town Plan already calls for a central water utility to support development in the town's northeast quadrant, which takes in three of its business districts: Town Center, Berlin Boulevard, and Airport Hill.

The most feasible starting point for a water utility is the 12" City of Montpelier water main that already serves Central Vermont Medical Center. This line already has ample capacity to support the planned level of development in the Town Center area, but will require a new storage tank. The estimated cost of acquiring the CVMC line and building the new tank could be as much as \$1,000,000.

Extensions of a public water utility are possible, given that the Montpelier water plant currently has about 2 million gallons per day of unused capacity, though new water mains would be needed to serve Airport Hill and Berlin Boulevard. Berlin Boulevard may be better served by the Barre City water utility, however. This issue will require further study, and costs are not known.

Whatever expansions are made should be able to be at least partially recaptured through user fees. Additional study is needed on this issue as well.

Responsible Party: Select Board, Water Supply Committee
Time Frame: 2-3 years
Expected Costs: Up to \$1,000,000 (can be recaptured via user fees)
Related Actions: 12

1. Expand Municipal Sewer Service

The Berlin Town Plan envisions a similar reach of sewer service as for water service. A past study showed that Berlin's sewer mains already have enough capacity to support future development in the entirety of the Town Center, Airport Hill and Berlin Boulevard business districts, but that main extensions would be needed across Route 62 to serve Airport Hill.

Given the expected commercial growth along Airport Road and the large base of business in the Granger Road/Industrial Lane area, there should be a large base of user fees available to the town to recover an investment in sewer line extensions. Also, the expected reconstruction of the Route 62/Airport Road intersection that should occur in the next few years will offer an opportunity to place a sewer main in the right-of-way. Costs of this expansion are not known at this time.

Another area where sewer expansion is possible is the Berlin Junction business district. Montpelier's sewer treatment facility is located adjacent to this area, so the distance of a line extension would be very small. However, unless significant new development is expected in the Junction area, the cost of providing public sewer service would probably not be worthwhile.

Responsible Party: Sewer Commission, Select Board
Time Frame: 3-5 years
Expected Costs: Up to \$500,000 (can be recaptured via user fees)
Related Actions: 11

1. Improve Town Roads to Support Development in Business Districts

Most of the major roads in Berlin are state roads, and there are few town roads that are paved. The Town of Berlin has made some strategic investments in road improvements, notably the repair of Crosstown Road and Comstock Road. However, there are other town roads in and near business districts that are currently dirt roads. Attracting and retaining businesses in such areas may be

easier if town roads are paved. Choosing which town roads to improve depends largely on future development patterns and needs.

Responsible Party: Select Board
Time Frame: Ongoing
Expected Costs: Depends on need, can be funded with impact fees
Related Actions: 10

1. Construct Uniform and Attractive Gateway and Wayfinding Signage

A large part of establishing identity is alerting motorists as to where they are. Berlin currently has small wooden “Welcome to Berlin” signs in a few key areas, but these are no different from the type of roadside signs found in most small towns in Vermont. As a regional employment center Berlin should have larger and more unique and eye-catching signage at the major gateways to its business districts, which are:

- Exit 7/Route 62
- Route 62 at Barre City line
- Route 302 at Montpelier and Barre lines
- Exit 6/Route 63
- Junction Road
- Route 12 at Northfield and Montpelier lines
- Berlin Street/Paine Turnpike North

In addition there are several minor gateways that are should be marked:

- Route 2 at Montpelier and East Montpelier lines
- Berlin Street/Paine Turnpike North
- Hill Street
- Airport Road at Barre Town line
- 3 Mile Bridge Road

In the Town Center area, wayfinding signage should be installed to point motorists to key destinations, as many of the large destinations are not easily visible. These include Berlin Mall, CVMC, major office employers, and the town offices.

Responsible Party: Economic Development Committee, Select Board
Time Frame: 2-3 years
Expected Costs: Up to \$50,000

1. Improve Recreational Facilities and Programs

The Town of Berlin has very limited recreational facilities and programs for a community of its size. The presence of these resources is an important quality of life factor for many current and potential businesses, and Berlin’s competitive position would be greatly aided by having more passive and active recreational amenities.

While there are already a handful of hiking trails in town, there may be an opportunity to work with large landowners to secure access to more land and to marshal volunteer support to create and

maintain hiking trails. On the active trail side, Berlin is actively working towards creating its segment of the Central Vermont Recreation & Bike Path, but more off-road connections are needed within the town.

Berlin should enhance its park and active recreational facilities. There are no actively maintained town parks at this time and the only playgrounds, ballfields and courts in Berlin are at the Elementary School. A “town green” is likely to become part of the Town Center, but additional active facilities are needed in other sections of the town. These facilities will allow Berlin to offer more recreational programs to its residents and businesses.

Many of these improvements can be accomplished through required open space dedications/donations by property developers, partnerships with community groups, and volunteer labor.

Responsible Party: Recreation Board, Planning Commission, Town Center Committee
Time Frame: 2-3 years, ongoing
Expected Costs: Unknown

Regulatory Change Actions

1. Adjust Zoning District Boundaries to Match with Business Districts

The proposed business district map on Page 5 represents the Town of Berlin’s current understanding of where it would like to see future business development occur. On the flip side, the town does not want to see intensive business development occur in other sections of town; business activity in its rural areas is desired to be limited to low-intensity home occupations. For this reason, the current boundaries and definitions of Berlin’s zoning districts will have to be re-examined to ensure that they match with the intentions for each business district.

Responsible Party: Planning Commission
Time Frame: Immediate
Expected Costs: None

1. Offer Zoning Incentives for Housing in Key Areas

Due to high land values, low-density zoning and limited public infrastructure, it is presently very difficult to build housing in Berlin that is affordable for working families. The limited housing supply in the area is acknowledged by the Town of Berlin to be a barrier to continued economic prosperity. Also, the Town Center is envisioned to be a higher density, mixed-use area.

For these reasons, the Town of Berlin should develop zoning incentives that reward prospective developers of workforce housing in the Town Center area and other priority areas with higher densities. The exact types of incentives will need to be explored further, and the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission is able to assist with this effort.

Responsible Party: Planning Commission
Time Frame: Immediate
Expected Costs: None

1. Review Ordinances Affecting Businesses to Ensure Consistency

Municipal ordinances governing land use and business in Berlin have been written and amended over a long period of time and, by some accounts, often contradict one another. A special effort should be mounted as part of the Town’s outreach to businesses (see Action 23) to ensure that the ordinances are consistent with the goals of the Economic Development Plan and with each other. This task will be an ongoing function of the town’s economic development program.

Responsible Party: Economic Development staff, Planning Commission
Time Frame: 1 year, ongoing
Expected Costs: None
Related Actions: 23

1. Offer Property Tax Stabilization to Developers of Properties in Target Areas

Under Vermont Act 71, a municipality may enter into agreements with property owners to discount municipal property taxes on priority development sites for a period of time up to ten years. The City of Montpelier’s tax stabilization ordinance specifies that qualifying properties in Montpelier will have their taxable property value reduced by between 33-50% during the agreement term. Act 71 does permit tax stabilization on state educational taxes, but this can only be done by either making up the difference in state educational taxes or by gaining approval from the Vermont Economic Progress Council (VEPC).

The intent of this action is to direct business development to priority areas, particularly redevelopment areas such as Berlin Boulevard, Berlin Junction, and Riverton. This technique can also be used in the business districts planned for new growth: Town Center, Airport Hill and Exit 6. The exact nature of the stabilization program will need to be discussed in greater detail before it is implemented.

Responsible Party: Economic Development Committee, Select Board
Time Frame: 1 year
Expected Costs: Potential loss of additional tax revenues over time

1. Strengthen Design Standards and Signage Requirements

Berlin’s zoning ordinance current contains very limited provisions for the design of sites, buildings and signage. Improving the image of the town’s business districts will require more attractive new development and redevelopment, which will in turn require additional regulation. At a minimum these standards should address building forms and materials, the lighting and size of outdoor signage, landscaping, and temporary signs. The exact contents of these standards will need to be debated and the town should examine how other communities have addressed similar issues.

Responsible Party: Planning Commission
Time Frame: 1 year
Expected Costs: None
Related Actions: 21

1. Pursue an Access Management Initiative in the Berlin Boulevard Corridor

One of the lingering recommendations of the 2001 transportation study of Route 302 is the need for a comprehensive access management effort. As the corridor is transformed into “Berlin Boulevard” there will be many opportunities to redesign existing sites to limit curb cuts, improve vehicular safety, provide site-to-site connections, and improve pedestrian accessibility. It is critical to enact strong provisions in the zoning ordinance to ensure that redevelopment of sites along Berlin Boulevard is done in a manner that improves access and safety—these provisions will go hand-in-hand with the design standards discussed under Action 20.

Responsible Party: Planning Commission
Time Frame: 1 year, ongoing
Expected Costs: None
Related Actions: 20

1. Require Large Developments to Conduct Fiscal/Economic Impact Studies

There is a widespread perception in Berlin that commercial developments always produce positive results for the town and residential developments always produce negative results. This generalization can be a dangerous one to make: while commercial developments add a great deal to the tax base, they also can increase traffic, place new demands on public safety and harm existing business activity. On the flip side, not all residential developments result in more children in the local schools and, even if they do, they are often priced high enough to produce enough tax revenue to offset additional school costs.

For this reason, it is a responsible move for a municipality to require developers of large commercial and residential projects to analyze the fiscal and economic impacts of their proposals. This review should become part of the Development Review Board’s oversight process. There are many consultants capable of completing such studies; the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs maintains a database of consultants.

Responsible Party: Planning Commission, Development Review Board
Time Frame: 1 year
Expected Costs: None

Marketing and Outreach Actions

1. Establish a Business Advisory Council

As the Town of Berlin has emerged as a regional employment center it has struggled to build relationships with its business community. The Town has not taken an active role in the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce (though Action 4 makes this recommendation), and there has never been a local business organization.

As Berlin enters its next phase of business growth and change, the town would be well served to establish a formal outreach effort with its business community. While joining the Chamber will be helpful, the Chamber is a regional entity, and there are issues that specially affect Berlin that must be addressed locally.

The recommended Business Advisory Council would be an informal group that holds brief and regular social gatherings to discuss issues of mutual concern between the Town and the business community. No elected leadership is recommended; it should be a self-directing group that meets monthly to discuss whatever topic is appropriate.

Organizing and maintaining the Advisory Council should be the responsibility of the town's economic development staff, though the group will not be an official town board or committee.

Responsible Party: Economic Development staff
Time Frame: Immediate, ongoing
Expected Costs: Limited—marketing and meeting costs
Related Actions: 4, 5

1. Continue Efforts to Locate a Post Office in Berlin

Berlin's Post Office Committee has already spent a great deal of time and effort working with the United States Postal Service to gain a ZIP code and post office location for the community. Having a unique ZIP code would greatly help with Berlin's efforts to build identity, and having a physical post office would be a tremendous aid to existing residents and businesses that now must travel to Barre or Montpelier.

While this decision is largely out of Berlin's hands, there are some steps that the town can take to improve its case to USPS, including:

- Sharing the results of the business survey from this plan, which shows the strong desire for a post office among many business owners;
- Work with owners of retail properties to locate vacant storefronts that could be used as a post office (this model is increasingly common in suburban locations);
- Consider ways to subsidize the cost of occupying a retail space;
- Continue to involve the congressional delegation in discussions with USPS; and
- Gather written testimonials from business leaders stating the need for a post office.

Responsible Party: Post Office Committee
Time Frame: Ongoing
Expected Costs: Unknown, could be future subsidy

1. Identify Space for Public Events

At the present time there are few spaces available for arts, cultural and other special events in the Town of Berlin. Most community-wide events are held at Berlin Elementary School gymnasium, and there are no suitable outdoor venues for public events. The town does intend to include some sort of outdoor performance/gathering space as part of the Town Center development, but other options for indoor spaces are needed.

While the town is most likely not able to foot the bill itself for such space, there may be opportunities to work with a private or nonprofit entity to ensure that the town will be responsible for enough events and programs to help pay for the cost of such a space. One potential partner in this effort could be the State of Vermont, which is already willing to use the property behind the State

Library (in the Town Center area) for a housing development. There may be an opportunity to integrate a community gathering space into this project.

Responsible Party: Recreation Board, Town Center Committee
Time Frame: 2 years, ongoing
Expected Costs: Unknown, depends on partnership potential
Related Actions: 26

1. Hold Community-Oriented Special Events

As part of Berlin's efforts to build a local identity, regular community-oriented special events should be staged. These events should be aimed at families and should be unique enough to avoid competition with existing events in other communities. This action goes hand-in-hand with Action 25, as space for such events is currently a limitation.

In considering special events, the Town of Berlin should actively work to partner with existing community organizations such as the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce, Central Vermont Medical Center, and local community groups.

Responsible Party: Recreation Board
Time Frame: 2 years, ongoing
Expected Costs: Unknown, should be able to recover through event revenues
Related Actions: 25

1. Improve Awareness of Technical and Financial Assistance Programs

There are a variety of technical and financial assistance programs available to existing and prospective businesses in Berlin offered by the United States Small Business Administration, the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Development program, the Vermont Economic Development Authority, and other sources.

The Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation is well-versed in these programs, but has limited staff capacity to conduct outreach to the business community in its member towns. The Town of Berlin can play a vital role in helping CVEDC publicize these programs, particularly with the establishment of the Business Advisory Council. The town should also develop a brochure aimed at local businesses that lists these resources along with other information about starting and expanding businesses in Berlin.

Responsible Party: Economic Development staff
Time Frame: Immediate
Expected Costs: Up to \$500 for printing and distribution
Related Actions: 23

1. Work with Regional Partners to Implement Route 62 Transportation Plan

The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission is nearly complete with a comprehensive study of the Route 62/Airport Road/Fisher Road intersection. This study will hopefully produce results that fix the longstanding traffic movement and safety issues at this key intersection. Recommendations of the study are very likely to include improvements that affect town roads and

key properties in the Town Center area. The Town of Berlin will therefore need to work closely with CVRPC and VTrans to implement the plan's recommendations. The specific actions to be taken by the town will not be known until after the study's completion in early 2008.

Responsible Party:	Select Board
Time Frame:	2-3 years
Expected Costs:	Unknown
Related Actions:	10

Matrix of Implementation Strategies

No.	Action	Responsible Party	Time Frame	Expected Costs	Related Actions
CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIONS					
1.	Increase Staff Capacity for Economic Development Activities	Select Board, ED Committee	Immediate	Unknown, depends on option chosen	
2.	Develop and Maintain a Five-Year Capital Budget Program	Select Board	Immediate, ongoing	None	
3.	Pursue Vermont Growth Center Designation for the Berlin Town Center	Planning Commission, Town Center Committee, Select Board	1 year	Up to \$10,000	
4.	Take an Active Role in the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce	ED Committee, ED Staff	Immediate, ongoing	\$300 (for Chamber Membership), staff time	6, 22
5.	Develop and Maintain a Database of Local Businesses	ED staff, ED Committee	1 year, ongoing	Staff time	5, 22
6.	Use Town Website to List Available Properties	ED staff, ED Committee	1 year, ongoing	Staff time	7
7.	Create an Economic Development Marketing Program	ED staff, ED Committee	2 years, ongoing	Up to \$10,000 in startup, ongoing costs unknown	5, 6, 22
8.	Coordinate Economic Development Activities with All Town Boards and Committees	ED staff	Ongoing	None	
9.	Consider Assessing Local Option Business Taxes and Eliminating Inventory Taxes	Select Board	2 years, ongoing	None	
PUBLIC INVESTMENT ACTIONS					
10.	Establish a Public Water Utility in Town Center Area	Select Board, Water Supply Committee	2-3 years	Up to \$1,000,000 (can be recaptured via user fees)	11
11.	Expand Municipal Sewer Service	Sewer Commission, Select Board	3-5 years	Up to \$500,000 (can be recaptured via user fees)	10
12.	Improve Town Roads to Support Development in Business Districts	Select Board	Ongoing	Depends on need	
13.	Construct Uniform and Attracting Gateway and Wayfinding Signage	ED Committee, Select Board	2-3 years	Up to \$50,000	
14.	Improve Recreational Facilities and Programs	Rec. Board, Planning Commission, Town Center Committee	2-3 years, ongoing	Unknown, depends on partnerships	
REGULATORY CHANGE ACTIONS					
15.	Adjust Zoning District Boundaries to Match with Business Districts	Planning Commission	Immediate	None	
16.	Offer Zoning Incentives for Housing in Key Areas	Planning Commission	Immediate	None	
17.	Review Ordinances Affecting Businesses to Ensure Consistency	ED staff, Planning Commission	1 year, ongoing	None	22
18.	Offer Property Tax Stabilization to Developers of Properties in Key Areas	ED Committee, Select Board	1 year	Potential loss of additional tax revenues over time	
19.	Strengthen Design Standards and Signage Requirements	Planning Commission	1 year	None	20
20.	Pursue an Access Management Initiative in the Berlin Boulevard Corridor	Planning Commission	1 year, ongoing	None	19
21.	Require Large Developments to Conduct Fiscal/Economic Impact Studies	Planning Commission, Development Review Board	1 year	None	
MARKETING AND OUTREACH ACTION					
22.	Establish a Business Advisory Council	ED staff	Immediate, ongoing	Limited--marketing and meeting costs	4, 5
23.	Continue Efforts to Locate a Post Office in Berlin	Post Office Committee	Ongoing	Unknown, could be future subsidy	
24.	Identify Space for Public Events	Rec. Board, Town Center Committee	2 years, ongoing	Unknown, depends on partnership potential	25
25.	Hold Community-Oriented Special Events	Rec. Board	2 years, ongoing	Unknown, should be able to recover through event revenues	24
26.	Improve Awareness of Technical and Financial Assistance Programs	ED staff	Immediate	Up to \$500 for printing and distribution	22
27.	Work with Regional Partners to Implement Route 62 Transportation Plan	Select Board	2-3 years	Unknown	