

Letter of Collaboration

Resilient Rights of Way: Urban Assessments

Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program
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This letter summarizes the collaborative work to be completed by the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program (VT UCF) located at 1 National Life Drive, Davis 2, Montpelier, VT 05620-3801 and the City/Town of _____ with offices at _____. VT UCF will work with the City/Town of _____ to assess existing landscape, zoning, and development bylaws and explore opportunities for integrating language and processes into these bylaws that will support functional green stormwater infrastructure for water quality improvement. VT UCF will also work with the City/Town of _____ to develop a suite of photo simulations of potential green stormwater infrastructure at various locations in the municipality. This work will be part of the Resilient Rights-of-Way Project funded by the USDA Forest Service.

1. Issue Presented

Vermont towns are facing water pollution challenges associated with increased development pressures. While the updated Vermont Stormwater Management Manual provides a baseline standard for treatment of runoff from impervious surfaces larger than one acre, it does not address smaller developments nor does it explore management strategies that provide multiple benefits. Local bylaws can ensure that new developments use best practices for stormwater management that will offer long-term environmental, economic, and social benefits to a town. Green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) reduces runoff to community-managed stormwater infrastructure, putting less stress on aging and costly maintenance and replacement. Prioritizing infiltration over surface runoff recharges groundwater aquifers and reduces flooding risk while providing more green space for public use and improved water quality in local streams. A study by the University of New Hampshire Stormwater Center found that by updating municipal regulations to prioritize the use of green infrastructure, towns could reduce the average pollutant load from new development by 70%. These reductions could provide water quality improvement credits from the state for MS4-permitted communities without any additional cost to the town.

Barriers to GSI implementation are often buried in municipal regulations that inadvertently discourage the preservation of a site's natural hydrology. Some simple amendments to a town's bylaws can provide improved stormwater treatment and flood resiliency with no additional cost to the applicant or the town.

We seek to build greater understanding and capacity at the local level to plan, build, and maintain functional GSI projects in both new development and redevelopment projects with a focus in downtowns and village centers. Municipal staff and volunteer boards may benefit from support in their planning and implementation efforts, as well as assistance in understanding and communicating the many benefits of GSI for their communities to secure support and funding for these projects.

While communities statewide will benefit, this project will focus on 10 Vermont municipalities within the Lake Champlain Basin. Selected communities have existing landscape bylaws and a demonstrated interest in engaging in a process aimed at expanding the use of GSI in new development and redevelopment projects. This work prioritizes assessments and strategies that focus on enhancing local bylaws, promoting GSI practices, and increasing capacity for management that will support resilient rights-of-way.

2. *Project Description*

VT UCF will support 10 Vermont municipalities within the Lake Champlain Basin to assess existing and potential local regulations and capacity to promote the use of GSI to achieve water quality improvement, as well as support aesthetic and cultural values. The project will focus on providing customized assessment and assistance related to barriers to GSI implementation and long-term success. Based on each municipality's needs, potential project elements may include:

- Assessment of existing bylaws related to landscaping in new development and redevelopment projects in downtowns and village centers;
- Presentation of potential bylaw revision language or interpretation to support GSI to enhance the landscaping function for water quality protection; and
- Visual renderings of various GSI projects that could be incentivized through proposed bylaw revisions or that are supported by existing bylaw language.

3. *Representatives*

The project team comprises the following representatives:

- Elise Schadler, *VT UCF*
- Milly Archer, *Vermont League of Cities and Towns*
- Holly Greenleaf, University of Vermont graduate student

Elise Schadler will be the primary point of contact from the project team. _____ will be the primary points of contact for the City/Town of _____.

4. *Project Phases*

Phase I: Initiation

Meet with primary municipal contacts in _____ to achieve partnership objectives and to develop a tentative schedule for the project.

Phase II: Assessment

Based on agreed-upon focus areas, the project team will conduct an assessment and propose strategic direction to municipal partner.

