

Revitalizing WATERBURY

A TOWN ACTS TO PRESERVE THE OLD AND PROMOTE THE NEW



Waterbury has been a proud part of Vermont since its charter in 1763. It's named for the first European settlers, who came largely from Waterbury, Connecticut. Before then, Native Americans enjoyed the region for the plentiful water, timber, and soil. James Marsh is credited as the city's first permanent settler in 1783. Now, the town of Waterbury

is making great strides to promote its economic, social, and historic vitality.

A DESIGNATED DOWNTOWN AREA

Today, the Vermont Downtown Program, a group dedicated to supporting growth and strength in the state's historic downtown areas, has named Waterbury one out of twenty-three "Designated Downtowns"

and has partnered with the local nonprofit Revitalizing Waterbury, which is coordinating some of the initiatives.

So far, Waterbury's revitalization has focused largely on the downtown area, but the revitalization efforts are already visible in the broader community: A new skate park is opening up in town, thanks to a community initiative.

Right: Community-supported artwork *Phoenix Rising* pays tribute to Waterbury's resilient spirit in the wake of Tropical Storm Irene in 2011. Below: Revitalizing Waterbury sponsors the midsummer Waterbury Arts Fest to promote and celebrate the work of over a hundred artists, artisans, and food producers.

Roger Clapp, executive director of Revitalizing Waterbury, says the group is planning to expand its efforts to include Waterbury Center and other surrounding communities.

Roger and his wife have lived in Waterbury since 2000 and raised their two boys there. He served as president of the Waterbury Winterfest Committee for several years. When he retired from his position at a civic engagement nonprofit called PH International, he took over Revitalizing Waterbury.

WATERBURY CENTER STATE PARK

Roger describes Waterbury Center as the “gateway to the Waterbury Reservoir” and an “absolute jewel” of a recreational area, featuring picnicking, camping, a swimming beach, a nature trail, and boat rentals.

“Access to the Waterbury Reservoir is a key feature for a lot of residents who like to go kayaking or paddle boarding in the summer,” Roger says. “It’s a really picturesque state park; a nice spot for swimming and ice fishing and skating in the winter.” Also, Waterbury Center has direct access to the mountains, which makes it attractive to cross-country and backcountry skiers, as well as mountain bikers and snowshoers.

LIFE IS GOOD IN WATERBURY

“Waterbury Center is fairly well known to the traveling public,” Roger says, “but it’s also a great place to live.” It’s also a safe place for families because it has no rowdy nightlife scene.

Roger points to a few new things in the area, like Zenbarn on Guptil Road, which has musical entertainment a few nights a week, the Hope Davy Park disk golf area, and a couple of marijuana dispensaries.

At the same time, Waterbury Center is trying to preserve its historical heritage.

“What is interesting about the Center is that it’s at the quieter end of Waterbury, with the potential of redefining how it functions as a village center,” Roger says. “I think there is a lot of interest in creating more of a hub of activity, with residents taking more control of their future.”

BETTER CONNECTIONS

The town filed for a grant with the Vermont Department of Transportation to make Waterbury Center more walkable, safer, and more connected, so that it can be a more vital community. Roger says it’ll be a year-long planning process, but it will result in the development of pedestrian walkways and other ways to better connect the village.

“The village is a bit disjointed right now because there’s the historical center facing the Grange Hall Cultural Center,” Roger explains, “and then there’s the commercial center with Cold Hollow Cider Mill along Route 100.”





Above and right: Waterbury Reservoir provides 860 acres of serene aquatic beauty and adventure, tucked between the Green Mountains and the Worcester Range.

So the question is, how to better connect those, as well as develop walkable access to the recreation area at Waterbury Reservoir.

The Better Connections Grant is bringing in different community organizations and businesses to help with the planning. So far, it's been largely a grassroots effort. Owen Sette Ducati, the economic development director of Revitalizing Waterbury, has played a major role. Waterbury Center residents Duncan McDougall and Kati Gallagher have been spearheading community involvement.

The Grange Hall Cultural Center, for instance, holds theatrical performances throughout the year and participates in the planning process. Roger says Artisan Coffee and Tea just established a new roasting facility and café a little north of the center, adjacent to Evergreen Gardens, a popular landscaping and garden center. They're also contributing to the plans to connect the community.





HISTORIC WATERBURY

Waterbury's rich history is one of its major points of pride, and the Grange Hall is one of its hubs. The building was constructed in the 1850s and now serves as an emerging cultural center for the village.

A Methodist church built in 1833 that anchors Waterbury Center is on the National Register of Historic Places. Twenty years ago, Revitalizing Waterbury led the restoration of the Waterbury Railroad Station, built in 1875, which is now home to Black Cap Coffee and Bakery, which hosts thousands of travelers each year. They also refreshed the Visitors Center at the Waterbury Train Station, which now has artifacts and vintage décor on display, along with some newly crafted features.

A local nonprofit called MakerSphere established a studio in the Green Mountain Seminary, which dates back to 1869, and now offers art and trade classes for all ages. They're also remodeling an old ambulance facility to serve as a workshop in Waterbury Center.

"There are some distinctive historical elements that anchor Waterbury Center as a picturesque New England village," Roger says. "At the same time, it's got a definite twenty-first-century vibe with fresh community interest."

REVITALIZING WATERBURY

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