



**Sen. Jane Kitchel, Chair
Rep. Mary Hooper, Chair
House and Senate Committees on Appropriations**

22-0443 - An act relating to the fiscal year 2023 Governor's recommended budget
Wednesday, February 9, 3-6pm

In Support of Downtown Investment

My name is Dan Groberg, and I serve as Executive Director of Montpelier Alive, Montpelier's downtown organization, in addition to serving on the leadership team of the Vermont Downtown Coalition. The Vermont Downtown Coalition is a new alliance of the 23 downtown organizations that have organized to support, grow, and strengthen Vermont's historic downtowns. I am here to support Vermont's downtowns and to encourage your continued and increased investment in our downtowns.

Vermont's Downtown organizations are the statutorily created organizations that support our Vermont Downtown Program. The Vermont Downtown Program was established in State statute in 1998 to incentivize the creation of Designated Downtowns. Since 1999, the downtown designation has provided communities with financial incentives, training, and technical assistance to restore historic buildings, improve housing, design walkable communities and encourage economic development by incentivizing public and private investments.

Establishing the Vermont Downtown Program was a worthy investment by the state legislature. The Downtown Organizations are on the front lines in our communities, supporting small businesses and making our communities more inviting places to live, work, and visit. During the pandemic, our work has become even more vital. From helping businesses build e-commerce platforms to literally sitting by their side as their completed grant applications to creating safe events and promotional campaigns to bring business back into downtowns, our organizations have helped sustain the life of our communities. My organization, Montpelier Alive, worked in partnership with the Center for Women and Enterprise to create a Business Recovery Navigator position to provide personalized assistance to over 150 Montpelier businesses. The program was named one of the best practice strategies for local community recovery by the Agency of Commerce and Community Development and has been replicated statewide. We have also provided technical assistance to dozens of new businesses that have worked to open during the recovery, and grant funding to support four businesses who have opened or expanded in the last six months.

In spite of this critical work, Vermont's downtown organizations are not supported by state dollars. To ensure the continued success of the Vermont Downtown Program, we are asking you to fund the 23 downtown organizations. Together the Vermont Downtown Coalition and the 23 downtown organizations will spur COVID recovery and overall growth in our State. This investment supports the success and the vitality of one of our State's most precious resources, downtowns.

We are asking for funding of \$485,000: \$20,000 for each of the 23 downtown organizations and \$25,000 to support the Vermont Downtown Coalition. Funding would expand the ability of the downtown organizations to educate, guide and partner with businesses, non-profit and community organizations to strengthen our downtowns. It would support local marketing and content development that would leverage State investments in the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing. And it would help develop a stronger network of downtowns that will work together to support Vermont communities and our shared prosperity.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dan Groberg
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Data Lead, Vermont Downtown Coalition

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