

Department of Housing and Community Development



Walkway installed in Fairlee's Village Green

Planning Today for a More Connected Village Tomorrow

Improving Safety, Access, and Walkability in Fairlee's Village

Fairlee is a small Upper Valley town known for its historic village center, strong sense of community, and proximity to Lake Morey and other recreational destinations. While these assets contribute to Fairlee's character and quality of life, the town has long faced challenges connecting people safely and comfortably between the village, schools, residential areas, and nearby recreation. Through support from a **Better Connections Grant**, Fairlee took an important first step toward addressing these challenges, launching a community-based planning effort that positioned the town to secure **Downtown Transportation Fund** support for pedestrian improvements in the village center.

Challenges

Fairlee's village is compact and walkable in scale, yet gaps in sidewalks and limited crossing improvements along key corridors made it difficult for residents and visitors to move around safely. Community members consistently identified concerns about walkability, particularly for routes connecting everyday destinations - such as shops, residences, and schools - with nearby recreational assets.

Town leaders recognized that addressing these issues would require more than isolated projects. Instead, they saw the need for a shared vision that could guide future investment and align safety, mobility, and community goals.

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Impact and Benefits

The **Better Connections** planning process gave Fairlee the opportunity to step back and take a holistic look at village connectivity. Through community engagement, the town identified priority routes, mapped key destinations, and clarified where pedestrian improvements would have the greatest impact. Just as importantly, the process built broad support around a shared vision for a more walkable and connected village.

With this foundation in place, Fairlee was well positioned to move from planning to implementation. The town's application for **Downtown Transportation Fund** support drew directly from the Better Connections plan, demonstrating readiness and alignment with state transportation and land use goals. As a result, Fairlee secured funding for new sidewalks and crosswalks designed to improve safety and accessibility in the village center.

These improvements represent more than infrastructure upgrades. They support residents of all ages and abilities, encourage walking and biking, strengthen connections between civic life and recreation, and create a safer, more welcoming village environment. Improved pedestrian infrastructure is also expected to support local businesses by encouraging foot traffic and reducing reliance on vehicles for short trips.

Lessons Learned

Fairlee's experience highlights the value of pairing **Better Connections** with the **Downtown Transportation Fund**. Better Connections provided the planning framework, community alignment, and clarity of purpose, while DTF delivered the resources needed to implement priority projects.

For small communities, this approach offers a clear path forward: invest in thoughtful, community-driven planning to clarify needs and build support, then leverage that work to pursue implementation funding. As Fairlee looks ahead, the momentum created through this process continues to shape local decision-making - demonstrating how planning can connect people, places, and possibilities, all across Vermont.

To receive this information in an alternative format or for other accessibility requests, please contact:

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