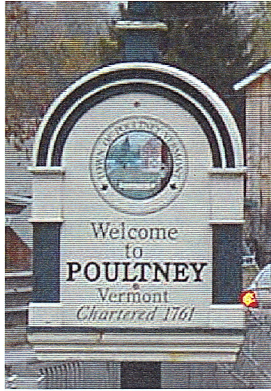


1: Introduction:



Background:

Poultney, originally chartered in 1761 has a long and illustrious history of economic, physical, and cultural development. Although its population has increased over those 250 years to 3,633 residents in 2000, Poultney has retained its small town appeal. Residents and visitors alike consider Poultney to be a quintessential example of small town Vermont. Poultney's history as the center of the slate industry, the presence of Green Mountain College, the former Railroad connections to New York State, and the popular recreational destination of Lake St. Catherine make the town a center of activity on the western border of Vermont.

Poultney's past and present define the town's significance in the Rutland region. Part of that special character is its extraordinary Main Street. Poultney's downtown has a rich tradition as the center of social and economic life for the town. Main Street has been a place with numerous commercial enterprises, ranging from antique boutiques to gift shops, hardware stores and a local pharmacy, book and craft stores lining the wide sidewalks and tree-lined avenue. There are insurance agents, accountants and real estate offices, lawyers, writers and other professionals. Main Street serves both residents and visitors alike with both the essential goods and services for daily life as well as whimsical frivolities. Green Mountain College (GMC) and, to a lesser extent nearby Castleton State College, add a diverse and young population to the Town. Both GMC and Poultney High School serve as bookends to the Main Street story. The community is alive and anticipatory of a prosperous future.

The origin of Poultney through the 1850s was as a rural farming center and waterpower-oriented industrial development along the Poultney River. Like other former industrial towns, Poultney was subject to regional and national economic trends in the history of New England and New York State. Poultney is now looking forward to a new economy that promises both the quiet character of a local town as well as the vibrancy and prosperity that comes with visitors from other places and the Green Mountain College presence.



Originally based in what is now East Poultney, the center of economic gravity in the community shifted with the coming of the railroad in 1857 to Poultney village. Most of the development of Poultney village occurred between the late 1850's and 1910, and the prosperity created the handsome downtown blocks of commercial buildings, the distinguished tree-lined Main Street and adjacent neighborhoods of sophisticated Greek Revival, Italianate Revival, and Queen Anne homes.

The depression saw the fall of the slate industry, and was followed by the loss of labor in WWII, and the post war economy of mass-produced housing that did not use slate roofs, the mainstay of the slate economy. Once the major driver in the local economy, along with a wide range of support services such as machine tools, transportation, and the basic services for a busy working town, slate is now a much smaller endeavor in the region. What remains in downtown Poultney of the slate era is the Public Library (a former bank) built in the grand age of Poultney's slate era prosperity. The downtown is surrounded by neighborhoods with some 250 structures that make up the Poultney Village National Historic District. The vast majority of those structures are in remarkable condition, although many need significant maintenance.

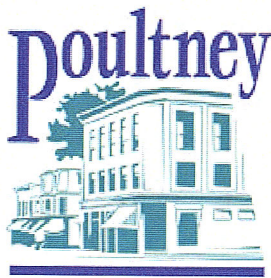


Main Street itself still bears the hallmarks of the slate industry past – sections of old slate sidewalks, the wide treelawn and rows of street trees that form a public realm on Main Street that is unique among Vermont downtowns. The former cast iron street lights that graced Main Street found a new home on the Green Mountain College Campus. The vision of a dignified Main Street has persevered for 120 years, but in the face of incremental change, loss of the elms to dutch elm disease, impacts of widened utility line clearing, the tendency for urban environments to be paved in

greater amounts, and well intended but misinformed attempts at sidewalk repair. Main Street today appears tired and in need of a facelift.

The demise of Main Street is not without due cause. Between the 1950's and 1980's many jobs were lost in Poultney. The town has struggled to sustain itself and many hard decisions have been made. The loss of the grand Town Hall is one example, when financial strains caused a decision by town officials to demolish the building rather than face the costs of maintenance and renovation. Since then the town has sought to define a future economy that is both prosperous and sustainable. The community would like to appeal to both local residents and visitors to the region. The desire to define a future economy is driven by the realization that the historical industrial economy of the slate industry, which almost exclusively created the downtown, will never again be a sustainable economy for the community.

In 1999, a group of local residents and business owners decided that a more aggressive stance on community development was needed to guide this new economy. Encouraged by the passage of the VT Downtown Development Act of 1998, the group began to organize and enlist the assistance of both regional and local support.



Through the vision, dedication and energy of the Downtown Redevelopment Committee, a Vermont Community Development Program Planning Grant Application was successfully sought in 2001. The purpose of the grant was for Poultney to develop the needed materials to apply for inclusion in the VT Downtown Program, which provides enhanced access improvements. The grant provided funds to enable a Main Street Design for streetscape improvements to be developed, and funded a Main Street manager to administer the application process and assist in public participation.

The Committee went through a Request for Proposal process, and selected the team of Guertin - Elkerton & Associates, Engineers and Planners, and the Office of Robert A. White, Landscape Architects and Planners of Norwich, VT to develop a Master Plan for Main Street improvements that would be included in the application to become a Designated VT Downtown through the VT Downtown Program. The team and Downtown Redevelopment Committee met often and worked closely on the plan. This report represents the fruits of that process. Residents and business owners of Poultney additionally lent their support, voiced concerns and helped guide the development of this plan.