REGIONAL PRIORITY PROJECT PRIORITIZATION PROCESS

PROJECT INFORMATION FORM

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PROJECT NAME:

All Access Project at the Vergennes Opera House

TYPE OF PROJECT:

- ☐ Infrastructure:
  - ☐ Water
  - ☐ Wastewater
  - ☐ Broadband
  - ☐ Transportation
  - ☐ Public Facility
  - ☐ Other
- ☐ General Development:
  - ☐ Industrial
  - ☐ Commercial
  - ☐ Residential
  - ☐ Mixed
- ☐ Site/Facility Development for Specific Business
- ☐ Workforce Development
- ☐ Business Development
- ☑ Other: ADA Accessibility

PROJECT SPONSOR:

Organization Name	Friends of the Vergennes Opera House
Organization Mailing Address	PO Box 88 Vergennes, VT 05491
Organization Email	info@vergennesoperahouse.org
Organization Phone	(802) 877-6737

Contact info for the person submitting project information:

Name	Susan Schaefer
Title	Treasurer, Friends of the Vergennes Opera House
Mailing Address	PO Box 88 Vergennes, VT 05491
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PROJECT PRINCIPAL(S) (if different than above):

Person 1:

Name	Gerianne Smart
Title	President
Organization	Friends of the Vergennes Opera House
Mailing Address	PO Box 88 Vergennes, VT 05491
Email	getsmartvt@gmail.com
Phone	(802) 777-7610

Person 2:

Name	
Title	
Organization	
Mailing Address	
Email	
Phone	

PROJECT DESCRIPTION - Provide a brief (2-3 sentence) description of the project. (500 character limit):

The All Access Project envisions a City Hall/Opera House that is truly accessible to all. This will be a

DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION (5000 Characters):

The All-Access Project envisions the creation of an ADA-compliant elevator tower, affixed to the southwest side of the building, to service both the lower level of City Hall as well as the second story Opera House space. The project will also include an interior lift to provide respectful and discreet access to the dressing room and stage levels for performers. An ADA restroom will also be added at the dressing room level.

The project also includes necessary landscape improvements to facilitate public access to the new elevator tower from Main Street by repurposing the alleyway between City Hall and St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

The Friends of the Vergennes Opera House (FVOH) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. An all-volunteer Board of Directors manages the Opera House located on the second floor of the city hall building owned by the city of Vergennes.

The Vergennes Opera House was built in 1897 as a city hall (first floor) and performance and community gathering space (second floor). By the late 1960s, the second-floor community space was suffering from neglect and by 1974 it was shuttered and ignored. For close to 25 years, serious deterioration continued, leaving the space unsafe and unusable.

Recognizing the significance of this historic building and the opportunity it presented, in 1993 an energetic group of community members stepped forward, calling themselves the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House (FVOH). They successfully raised the necessary funds to safely restore and reopen the community/theater space in time for the theater's 100-year anniversary in 1997. Since then, the FVOH has continued to further improve, upgrade, and maintain the space, raising and investing well over $1.7 million to date.

Now, in the building's 125th year, and after 25 years of successfully hosting performances and public and private gatherings of all kinds, the all-volunteer Friends have set their energies to making the entire building accessible to all. Not only the auditorium, but the stage and green room as well, underscoring the FVOH's commitment to 100% accessibility for all.

Vermont's vitality is anchored in the strength of its downtown communities. The

PROJECT LOCATION (3000 characters):
Provide the physical location of the project and/or the area to be served by the project

The elevator tower will create a proper lobby entrance for ADA access to City Hall on the lower level as well as ADA access, via the elevator, to the second-floor Opera House space. The elevator tower will be affixed to the building (at 120 Main Street) and situated in the alleyway between the Opera House/City Hall and St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Plans for the alleyway include the creation of a public courtyard, complete with benches, lamp posts, plantings, and attractive pavers - a beautiful addition to the historic Main Street. The courtyard area will also create a safe and convenient bus stop waiting area for patrons using Tri-County Valley Transit, the public transit provider for Addison County. The access point for the stage and green room (dressing room) levels is uniquely situated to accommodate a lift that will reach the stage, and the green room as well as the

PROJECT PURPOSE AND BENEFITS (3000 Characters):
Describe the purpose and benefits to the region of the project. Describe if/how the project builds capacity within the region for improved economic development or community development, builds capacity in the region for improved economic and community development, and/or advances the goals and objectives of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and/or regional plans, and addresses the most pressing needs of the region.

The Vergennes Opera House has been and continues to be a community hub for municipal services as well as host for the annual town meeting, community events, public performances, and private gatherings of all kinds. The Opera House attracts and serves as a gathering, education, and entertainment space for the Vergennes community and beyond.

The Vermont Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development Programs 2020-2024 recognizes the need for and lack of accessibility to Vermont's historic municipal structures: "Vermont's population, like much of New England's, is aging fast. In addition, many of our downtowns, villages and historic buildings were built before modern accessibility codes and standards were required. In Vermont, we continue to see the need to address architectural barriers that prevent populations with disabilities from participating in daily activities. Communities throughout the state need assistance to provide accessible sidewalks, public buildings, and parking facilities for their residents (p. 57)."

The Vergennes All Access Project meets the goal of "Strengthen communities and improve quality of life" by promoting downtown preservation and revitalization. Specifically, the Plan calls for support for projects that serve Designated Downtowns, Opportunity Zones (City of Vergennes), and reinvest in downtown

PROJECT TIMELINE, MILESTONES, AND STATUS (3000 Characters):
Describe the project timeline, the current status, and impediments to proceeding. Include factors such as site control, engineering and design, financing/funding identification and commitment, and permitting. Clearly identify where the project is within the project timeline and what work remains.

Planning and Design work for the project is complete. Detailed construction documents prepared by architects and engineers are in hand.

Zoning and building permits have been issued by the City of Vergennes and the State of Vermont.

Grants for the project have already been received or awarded by the Vermont Community Foundation; the Vermont Community Development Program; Preservation Trust of Vermont; the Vermont Arts Council; the Northern Border Regional Commission; and US Congressional Directed Spending. Additional funding applications are pending from the Community Recovery and Revitalization Grant; the League of Historic American Theatres; and an Accessibility Grant from the VT Community Development Program. Our annual appeal and local targeted fundraising campaigns will provide additional funding resources.

PROJECT PRINCIPAL EXPERIENCE/PARTNERSHIPS (3000 Characters):
Describe project principals' experience managing federal or state grants, and/or successfully developed similar business models, their ability to complete the project, and describe any partnerships that will help ensure success.

The Friends of the Vergennes Opera House and its all-volunteer board of directors are committed 100% to the success of this ambitious project. The City of Vergennes, at all levels, is very supportive of the All Access Project. The City Council unanimously endorsed the project at a public hearing on March 22, 2022, and the community have supported the project at every opportunity. In a renewed 25-year lease the city has accepted responsibility for maintenance and repair of the all access elevator as well as maintenance of the alleyway access to the elevator.
Agreements have been finalized with the city and St Paul's Church for sharing the ownership, use and maintenance of the alleyway between city hall/Opera House and St Paul's.
The Friends of the Vergennes Opera House have convened a project management team consisting of development, construction, historic preservation, and accounting professionals to work with the board members ensuring appropriate expertise at every level and stage of the project.

PROJECT SUPPORT AND REGIONAL NEED (4000 Characters):

Describe how the project is consistent with identified local and regional goals, advances regional needs identified in the region's CEDS and/or regional plans or is supported by reports or public forums. Describe the community support for the project and any community engagement that has occurred. Include reference and link to region's CEDS, the municipal and/or regional plan, and reports, or forums identified. Also describe how the project leverages regional human, social, financial, cultural, and/or physical capital, and supports, compliments, or enhances existing efforts.

This Regional Priority Project meets the #2 Equity goal of the West Central Vermont CEDS by "facilitating equitable development, planning and the delivery of services and programs that advance opportunities for traditionally under-represented populations in the regional economy" and community.

The project supports the VT Dept of Economic Development plan by "working to improve the economic well-being and quality of life of Vermonters, while preserving our natural resources and community values."

And it supports the mission of the VT Division of Historic Preservation by "supporting the continued use of historical assets and the integration of our history into our future planning and growth, job creation, and communities' culture."

The All Access Project has received support at every opportunity, at numerous public meetings and presentations. The City Council of Vergennes unanimously approved the project, issued required permits, and is in the process of renewing the lease to the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House (FVOH) for an additional 25 years. Even though the FVOH is responsible for 100% of all costs of planning and construction, upon completion of the project, the city will assume all responsibility for operation and maintenance of the elevator, related equipment and access to it.

"*The All Access Project will create safe and inclusive access to the Vergennes Opera House and City Hall. The new elevator and other elements of the project will allow visitors and performers to utilize and enjoy our historic building for years to come."*
Chris Bearor, Mayor City of Vergennes

"Indeed, there has been as enormous amount of work in the downtown area to make the city respectfully and thoughtfully accessible to all. The one area that is needing accessibility work is the community's own City Hall and Opera House. On any given Saturday it is a joy to watch families go into the space with their little ones all dressed and ready for dance class. What is difficult to witness is the struggling parent who a child by one hand while trying to negotiate the steps with the stroller and infant in another."
Representatives Diane Lanpher and Matt Birong

"As an adjoining property owner, we have been pleased to collaborate with the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House and the city to review and provide input on the conceptual design. The history of being good neighbors continues. Our hope is to improve access to our own building in the future and the site improvements planning for the All Access Project will make it possible to do so."
Chris Hale, Junior Warden St Paul's Episcopal Church

"As a provider of affordable housing for many of the area's most vulnerable residents, we are intimately aware of the many challenges and barriers people with limited mobility face when accessing resourced the typically abled often take for granted, like a home. A welcoming and safe place involves features such as: accessible entryways, ramps and stair lifts. A new entrance and elevator, in the Vergennes Opera House, would afford everyone the dignity we all deserve and which most of us take for granted."
Elise Shanbacker, Executive Director Addison County Community Trust

PROJECT COST, IDENTIFIED AND COMMITED FUNDS/FINANCING, AND FUNDING GAP:

Provide the total project cost and complete the simple sources and uses chart.

Total Project Cost: $ 1,639,428

Sources:

Source	Amount
VCF, Walter Cerf Grant	$ 5,000
VCDP Planning Grant	$ 30,000
ACRPC Environmental Testing	$ 5,000
VT Arts Cultural Facilities	$ 30,000
Northern Borders Regional	$ 300,000
Friends of Vergennes Opera	$ 244,501
Total Sources:	$ 614,501

Uses:

Use	Amount
Feasibility Studies	$ 20,930
Architecture, Engineering	$ 98,664
Permits	$ 11,320
Construction	$ 1,472,518
Legal, Accounting	$ 18,996
Admin, Insurance	$ 17,000
Total Uses:	$ 1,639,428

Funding Gap: **$ 1,024,927**

Note: Uses must exceed sources or there is no funding gap

Budget Narrative (3000 Characters):

Describe the amount of funds/financing that have been identified and include a clear status of the funds (Received, committed, applied for, identified, etc.) including the dates of receipt, commitment, application, expected distribution, etc. Clearly identify any funding gap. Also, identify the type of resource (cash, grant, loan, sponsor in-kind, third party in-kind, etc.) and describe which resources can serve as a match, noting that, for example, some grant sources do not allow matching federal funding with other federal funds. Clearly identify any funding gap and identify the state or federal resources that you expect might help fill the gap.

The current total estimated cost of the project is $1,639,428, which includes the construction of the elevator tower plus the addition of an interior lift to provide full access for performers to the dressing room, auditorium and stage.

The FVOH raised sufficient funds to complete preliminary concept designs, engineering, topography, and landscape studies. A $30,000 planning grant from the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) enabled the completion of the planning process and delivery of complete detailed construction documents.

FVOH also received $5,000 from the Vermont Community Foundation; $15,000 from Preservation Trust of VT; and approval for $30,000 from the VT Arts Council Cultural Facilities Grant, plus a commitment of $300,000 from the Northern Border Regional Commission.

Our application for $500,000 in Congressional Directed Spending has been approved, pending final legislative budgeting. Applications for $279,734 in Community Recovery and Revitalization funds; and $10,000 from the League of Historic American Theatres are pending at this time.

We are also preparing to apply for a $150,000 Accessibility Grant from the VCDP by the end of the year. Additional grant applications as well as a major local fundraising campaign are being planned. The Opera House and its board/management enjoy the confidence and generosity of the community and expect to raise sufficient funds from their loyal donor base to ensure the successful completion of the project.

JOB CREATION (4000 Characters):

Provide an estimate of the number of permanent and temporary jobs to be retained and/or created by the project, including the period of time over which new jobs will be created.

While the project itself through the planning, construction and finishing phases will employ a wide range of specialists and workers, the non-profit organization, Friends of the Vergennes Opera House, has no employees. In fact, we are proud that we can manage and operate the organization with all volunteers which allows us to use every dollar donated and earned for the care and maintenance of this historical treasure.

The FVOH does hire performers, artists, technical, sound and design engineers to support performances and activities that take place in the Opera House. Improving accessibility and increasing usage will generate more revenue and staffing for local businesses that benefit from the goods and services purchased by the FVOH as well as those attending events. Better accessibility will also increase usage by local non-profits and service organizations that currently find the space difficult to access. As a community service, the FVOH does not charge the city or local non-profits rental fees for their own use of the facility.

CLEAR FORM

PRINT FORM