



The Danville Transportation Enhancement Project

Presenters: Michele Bailey, Vermont Arts Council & David Raphael, Landworks

Vermont's Northeast Kingdom is known for family farms, a small, low-density population, and rolling glacier-carved hills. Tradition informs decisions and change comes slowly. U.S. Route 2 is an important east-west road highway that enters Vermont in Alburg and exits in Guildhall. Along the way, this thoroughfare runs through Danville—a small village in the Northeast Kingdom with a strong sense of community.

Route 2 is Danville's Main Street. A village green, the town offices, a community library, businesses, and private homes are on this route. Danville's K-12 school also borders the road; many children walk along the highway each day. When the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) was ready to upgrade the road, town representatives and VTrans struggled with community concerns about pedestrian safety and the impact the incursion of an expanded federal highway would have on the village. The project was stalled for years.

A Solution Emerges

By 1999, staff at the Vermont Arts Council and VTrans had engaged in several discussions about the value of public art and the role artists could play in community infrastructure projects. At this point, VTrans invited the Council to participate in a pilot project in Danville using both the arts and the principles of Context Sensitive Design. VTrans and the Council jointly approached the Danville Town Select Board to gauge its interest in partnering in this type of work. Everyone was able to agree to move toward preserving the essential rural character of Danville while keeping the village center intact and maintaining an important state transportation corridor.

The re-development work was to be a collaboration between artists, community members, and engineers. Community members and artists were engaged early in the design process. A local review committee comprised of community stakeholders formulated project goals, selected artists, and had input into all phases of the design work. The lead artists were David Raphael, principal of the Vermont-based landscape design firm, Landworks of Middlebury, and Andrea Wasserman, of Vershire, Vermont. Raphael and Wasserman engaged several other artists and designers in the project.

At the Intersection of Art and Infrastructure

Since 2014, gateway signs, fence posts, and traffic islands announce the entrances to the village and calm traffic. Sidewalks extending throughout the village and decorative light posts increase pedestrian safety. The artistic enhancements include sculptural granite posts, a re-designed bandstand on the green, stone walls, and plantings. All of these elements refer to the natural world, the community, and the educational mission of the school.

This transportation project was the first collaboration of its kind in the state. The project tangibly demonstrates the positive impact the inclusion of art in infrastructure can have in communities. By helping them to meet goals of livability, walkability, safety, economic vitality, and community vibrancy, artists contribute to creating public spaces that distinguish Vermont from elsewhere. Main Street in Danville is a public space that people value and will want to preserve for generations to come.

Want more info? Visit <http://www.vermontartscouncil.org/blog/public-art-in-the-nek/>

Checklist: Integrating public art in your infrastructure project

Choose a PROJECT: What project is right for YOUR community? Start by defining your community. Do you have an infrastructure project already in planning stage? Ask how you can add value to an existing development project. It can be large or small. Identify a project that is of appropriate scope and scale for your community and resources. Is the project on public or private property? Will there be any permits and/or permissions you will need to acquire in order to make the project happen?

Identify a PROJECT TEAM (Partners & Advisors): Seek expertise inside and outside your community. Find professionals who can add value to your idea. Who do you have in your community? Architects? Management consultants? Creative professionals/business owners? Arts Organizations? Artists? People with vision? Construction Engineers, City/Town Planners, Local Community Advocates, Who are the silent workers? You need a balance of voices and expertise. Develop a contract and/or memorandum of understanding among partners and project team members to clarify roles and responsibilities. Determine who will be responsible for maintenance and conservation of the work once it is created.

Develop a BUDGET and FUNDRAISING PLAN: What budget is realistic for YOUR community and YOUR project? Set budget and fundraising goals you can accomplish and live with in the future. Have you considered ancillary costs or contingencies? Once you have identified an artist, and are working together on a design, you can continue to refine your budget. Think outside the box and tap the natural fundraiser inside you. Don't overreach, but aim high—people are always surprised at what a community working together can accomplish. Create a consortium of like-minded funders including: National placemaking partners; Issues-based funders (does your project solve a problem?) Large & small foundations; Crowdfunders (Kickstarter, Indiegogo); Local big business (banks) Local small business (retailers, service providers) Local trendmakers and influencers; Community cheerleaders; Train and manage volunteers effectively; Don't (always) take 'no' for an answer. Ask prospects for advice.

Select an ARTIST (or artist team): Engage with an artist early on in your project. Choose an artist who fits with your community and has the right qualifications. Manage a "Request for Qualifications" to put the call out to artists. Be sure to compensate your artist(s) appropriately for their time working with community, developing the design, and fabricating/installing the artwork. Plan/develop ideas well in advance of construction (preferably in the planning phase) as it will often save you money; Public artists are good at adapting their ideas to the realities of budget and construction.

Engage the COMMUNITY: Work with an artist to find creative ways to engage the community in the design process. This can be through: meetings; parties; pot luck dinners; art-making activities; events; videos; local displays of conceptual designs; etc. and much more – use your imagination and make it **fun and engaging**. Give the community a voice in the process.

Maintain COMMUNICATION: This is particularly important when engaging in long-term projects. Maintain relationships with your partners/team members and touch-base regularly via phone, emails and in-person if possible – even if you are in a "waiting/holding" mode. Keep the community informed through local media and news sources like newspapers, front porch forum, and social media. Schools, libraries, grocery stores, and bulletin boards etc. can be effective ways of sharing information. Partner with local community organizations that already mail to residents on a regular basis to include notices in direct mailing. Ongoing community art-making activities can also add value keeping the community connected and engaged.

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