REGIONAL PRIORITY PROJECT PRIORITIZATION PROCESS

PROJECT INFORMATION FORM

IF ADDITIONAL SPACE IS REQUIRED FOR ANY RESPONSE OR YOU WANT TO SUBMIT ADDITION DOCUMENTS , CLEARLY IDENTIFY THE DOCUMENTS WITH THE PROJECT NAME AND EMAIL THEM TO FKENNEY@ADDISONCOUNTYEDC.ORG.

DOWNLOAD AND SAVE THIS DOCUMENT TO YOUR COMPUTER, COMPLETE THE FORM, THEN CLICK THE SUBMIT BUTTON.

PROJECT NAME:

All Access Project - 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, Inc.
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
Email	sus.schaefer@me.com
Phone	(802) 877-3609

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 (5000 Characters):

The All-Access project contemplates the creation of an ADA compliant elevator tower to service both the lower level of the City Hall as well as the second story Opera House space. The project also includes necessary landscape improvements to create public access to the elevator tower from Main St, within the existing alleyway between City Hall and St. Paul's Episcopal Church.

Additionally, the project will include a phase of improvements to make the stage and green room levels ADA compliant, providing respectful and convenient access for performers as well as attendees to all areas of the building.

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, named the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House (FVOH), stepped forward. 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.

The addition of the stage and green room accessibility phase of the project underscores the FVOH 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 pocket park, complete with benches, lamp posts, plantings, and attractive pavers - a beautiful addition to the historic Main Street. The pocket park 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 levels is uniquely situated to accommodate a lift that will reach the stage, and the green room as well as the floor of the main hall.

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 regional development/economic development/ community development, including: advancing workforce development; expanding entrepreneurship efforts; supporting or enhancing existing business clusters, or other economic impacts within the region.

Allowing everyone equal access to the second story theater space will broaden its appeal and reach, bringing even more people to the downtown. The project also complements the city's own efforts over the years to rebuild and reconfigure the sidewalks to make retail establishments and restaurants accessible to everyone.

Whenever there is a performance or event in the Vergennes Opera House (VOH), the stores are bustling, and the restaurants are full. This is the creative economy at work which benefits everyone. The VOH also hosts town meeting, public forums, service organizations activities, theater and arts camps and classes for all ages, as well as wedding and private parties. It is a busy place. An elevator will enable citizens including 15% of residents with disabilities and 16% over 65 to enter the building without climbing steep stairs or navigating the current inadequate ramp.

Additionally, the accessibility of stage and green room will make the VOH one of the few community and performing arts centers in Vermont that is accessible for artist and audience alike.

PROJECT TIMELINE, MILESTONES, AND STATUS (3000 Characters):
Describe the project timeline, the current status of the project, 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 in the timeline and what work remains.

The project is organized in three broad phases:
1) Planning and Design (2022). In phase 1 architects and engineers will be selected to work on the technical design of the project and procurement of contractors and supplies. The city has applied for a planning grant of $60,000 from the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) to fund this phase of the project. Pending response by July 2022. FVOH has also raised $22,600 in matching funds for planning and design.
2) Construction (2023). Phase 2 will include construction of the elevator tower and related building modifications. An appropriation from the US Congress of $790,000 has been requested to fund this phase of the project. Pending response in spring of 2023.
3) Landscape finishing (2024). The third and final phase of the project will include landscaping the construction site and creation of the community pocket park in the alleyway between the city hall building and St Paul's Church. A local fundraising campaign will provide the remainder of the funding required to

PROJECT PRINCIPAL EXPERIENCE/PARTNERSHIPS (3000 Characters):
Describe project principal(s) experience, ability to complete the project, and describe any projects partnership(s) and how the partnership(s) 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 has accepted responsibility for administrative management of the VCDP planning grant should it be awarded.

PROJECT SUPPORT AND REGIONAL NEED (4000 Characters):
Describe how the project is consistent with identified local and regional goals, advances regional needs identified in plans, reports or public forums, and describe the community support and engagement. Include reference and link to the municipal and/or regional plan, report, or forum identified. Also describe how the project leverages regional human, social, financial, cultural, and/or physical capital, and supports, compliments, or enhances existing efforts.

The following entities in the region have shared their support:

"The All Access Project calls for the creation of an elevator tower that will make our City Hall and Opera House respectfully accessible for all. This project will complement and complete the work we have done to make our buildings, sidewalks, parks, and city a model of accessibility and inclusion."

Matt Chabot, Mayor
City of Vergennes

"Indeed, there has been an 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 has a child by one hand while trying to negotiate the steps with the stroller and the infant in another."

Representatives Diane Lanpher and Matt Birong

"As an adjoining property owner, we have been pleased to collaborate with the Friends of 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 planned for the All-Access project will make it possible to do so."

Chris Hale, Junior Warden
St. Paul's Episcopal Church

"The Preservation Trust of Vermont enthusiastically supports the All Access Elevator Project proposed by the Friends of the Vergennes Opera House. Today, Vergennes is a bustling hub with locally owned stores, a vibrant streetscape, and community pride. The opera house was a key catalyst for this transformation and serves as an example for other Vermont communities of the role the creative economy plays in downtown revitalization efforts."

Ben Doyle, President
Preservation Trust of Vermont

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: $ 1,050,000

Sources:

Source	Amount
VCDP Planning Grant (pending)	$ 60,000
FVOH funds	$ 22,600
US Congress (pending)	$ 790,000
Total Sources:	$ 872,600

Uses:

Use	Amount
Planning and Design	$ 60,000
Planning and Design	$ 105,000
Construction	$ 885,000
Total Uses:	$ 1,050,000

Funding Gap: **$ 177,400**

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.

The current total estimated cost of the project is $1,050,000, divided roughly between planning, design, and engineering at $165,000, and construction at $885,000.

The estimated budget of $1,050,000 does not include the work required to open access to the stage and green room levels. Engineers and architects are in the process of drawing plans for that additional part of the project which will cause an increase in scope and cost of the overall project. This information will be updated and provided when available.

The FVOH have raised sufficient funds for the completion of preliminary concept designs, engineering, topography, and landscape studies. Application for a Planning Grant of $60,000 is in process with the Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) requesting funding to complete the final design and drawings necessary to begin construction in the spring of 2023. FVOH has also submitted a Leahy Congressionally Directed Spending Request in the amount of $790,000 which will be decided in the Spring of 2023.

We are also looking for implementation grants from public and private sources as well as planning for a major local fundraising campaign. 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 the number of full-time jobs to be created and/or retained by the project, a description of the benefits package to be offered to the majority of the new/retained jobs, and the average wage of the jobs to be created/retained.

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 use of the facility.

CLEAR FORM

PRINT FORM

SUBMIT PROJECT