

Land Use Visioning Workshop Notes

Subject	Vergennes PEL Study Green Route Land Use Visioning Public Workshop
Date and Time	December 13, 2023 - 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Location	Panton Town Hall, 3176 Jersey Street Panton, Vermont
Invitees	All Members of the Public
Study Team	Katharine Otto, VTrans (Project Manager) Amanda Holland, VTrans Mike Winslow, ACRPC Katie Raycroft-Meyer, ACRPC Annabelle Dally, WSP Elaine Ezerins, WSP Ken Robie, DuBois & King Dan Mallach, DuBois & King (Land Use Lead) Emily Lewis, DuBois & King Kait Campbell, DuBois & King Chris Sargent, DuBois & King Jim Gish, VHB (Project Community Liaison)

Number of attendees: Approximately 95

Welcome, Introductions, Study Overview, and Current Status

Katharine Otto, Planning Coordinator with the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and Project Manager for the Vergennes Planning and Environment Linkages Study (Vergennes PEL Study) welcomed attendees, stated the purpose of that evening's meeting, and introduced the members of the Study Team in attendance that evening.

Attendees raised hands to indicate whether they lived or worked in the Study communities, or elsewhere. Most attendees live in Panton and Waltham, followed by Vergennes, and Ferrisburgh. A smaller number of attendees live in Addison, New Haven, Weybridge, or somewhere else. For place of work, most people worked in Vergennes, outside the study area or do not work

Approximately the following number of attendees lived in the following places:

- Ferrisburgh: 10
- Panton: 25
- Vergennes: 20
- Waltham: 35
- Other study communities (Addison, New Haven, Weybridge): 2
- Elsewhere: 1

Approximately the following number of attendees worked in the following places:

- Ferrisburgh: 6
- Panton: 3
- Vergennes: 25
- Waltham: 7
- Other study communities (Addison, New Haven, Weybridge): 1
- Elsewhere: 20
- Note: Approximately 30 attendees did not raise their hand. A few attendees were children, and most others were likely retirees.

Attendees at this Green Route workshop were also asked whether they had attended any of the three prior workshops. Approximate numbers are:

- Attended the Orange Route workshop: 15
- Attended the Pink & Blue Routes workshop: 15
- Attended the Purple Route workshop: 20

Katharine then proceeded with presentation slides that outlined the Purpose and Need, the screening criteria, and the status of the Study work. She offered preliminary highlights of the public survey as they related to the Green Route. A digital "birds-eye-view" fly-through visualization of the Green Route concept was shared with the participants.

"Land" and "Use" Overview

Dan Mallach, landscape architect and planner with DuBois & King (D&K) and Task 5 Land Use Lead for the Vergennes PEL Study continued with an overview of planning considerations as they pertain to "Land" (soils, rocks, waterways, wetlands, slope, contours, forests, fields) in the Study area, and "Use" types (residential, working lands, commercial, institutional/civic, industrial, open space/recreation), as these elements are informing Study decision-making and design processes, and the evening's breakout groups.

Breakout Groups

As guided by Study Team facilitators, the breakout groups consisted of members of the public at several separate tables to brainstorm and discuss land use options if the Green Route were built or improved. Each table had various tools including maps and Land Use icons (uses noted above, plus one for walk/bike facilities), as well as post-it notes, markers, paper. Discussion and documentation addressed existing natural features, current farm vehicle and truck travel, local history, desire for certain types of uses and not others, connectivity and accessibility, public safety and noise. The breakout groups lasted for approximately 45 minutes. All map work was photographed, and notes were taken by designated note-takers in order to document the breakout group conversations (see below for notes).

Table 1

Facilitator: Chris Sargent, D&K

Note-taker: Kait Campbell, D&K

Highlights:

- Concern about the intersections of the new route at Church Street and New Haven Road
- Need for a clear pedestrian access across the road from the church and the school
- Concerns regarding wildlife and wildlife crossings
- Interest in a shared use path along the route
- Preference to maintain agricultural lands
- Interest in sound barriers to protect existing residential areas

Notes:

- Desire for sound barriers, especially near houses along Maple Street. Concern about quality of life and property values.
- The Green Route is shown between the Champlain Valley Christian Reformed Church and the Champlain Valley Christian School. Children cross Church Street between the two multiple times per day. The properties currently have no fencing.
- If the Christian School gets an addition, it would be even closer to the Green Route.
- The proximity of the church and school was a driving factor for some people's attendance at this workshop.
- Wildlife comes up from the south between Green Street and Route 7. A "wildlife highway."

- Some areas along the Green Route are seasonally wet, with vernal pools.
- Animals seen in the eastern portion of the Green Route corridor include:
 - Bobcat or lynx
 - Deer
 - Owl
 - Hawk
 - Fox
 - Raccoon
 - Turkeys
 - Moose
 - Various reptiles and amphibians
- Water currently moves northwest across the proposed route into the neighborhood between New Haven Road and Green Street, causing basement flooding.
- The intersection of New Haven Road and Route 7 is challenging.
- Desire for agricultural uses to the west of the Otter Creek.
- Question about the potential width of the right-of-way.
- Suggestion for grade separation at existing intersections.
- A bike route along a Green Route would be attractive.
- Desire for fishing/river access above the falls.
- What if truckers don't want to use a new route?
- Multi-workshop participant: "It's not my favorite route, but it's a good compromise."

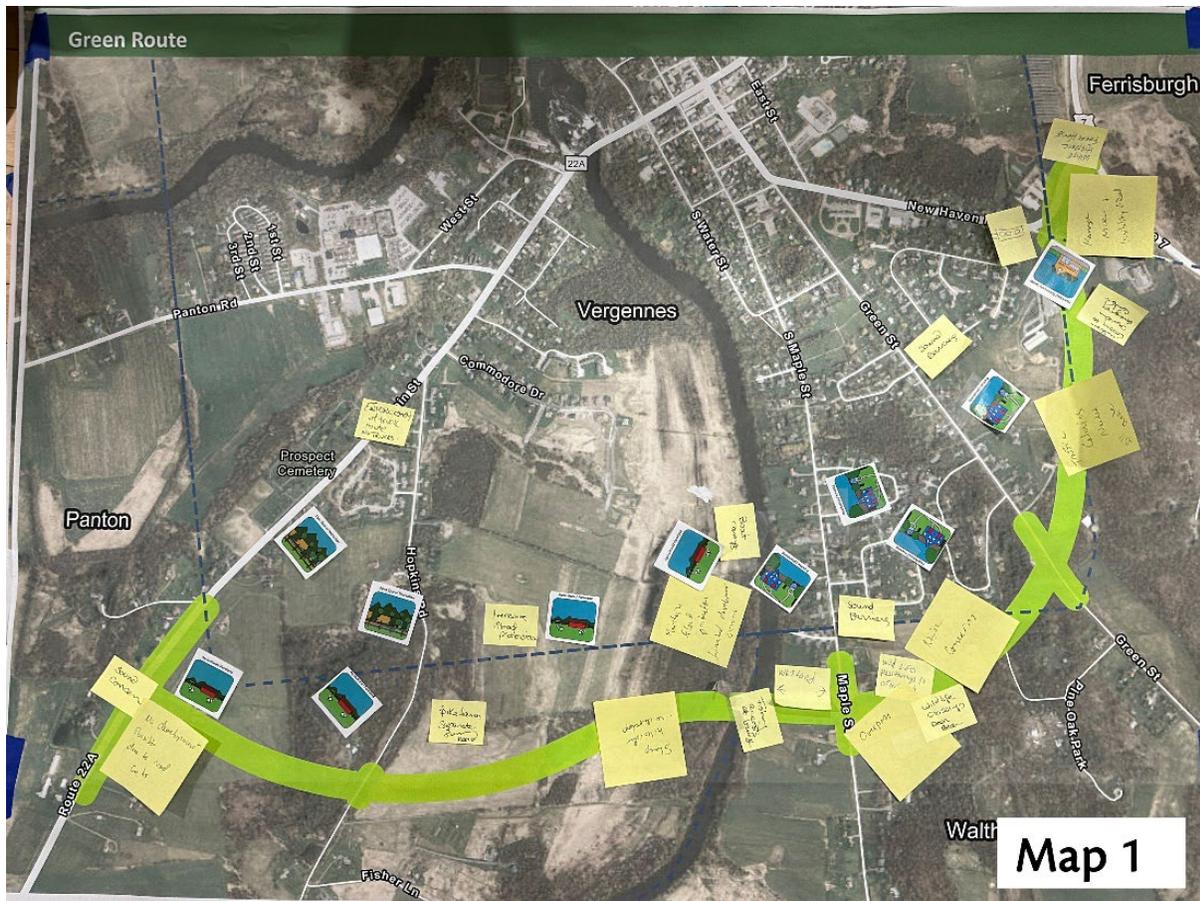


Table 2

Facilitator: Mike Winslow, ACRPC

Note-taker: Elaine Ezerins, WSP

Highlights:

- Lots of concern regarding the Route 7 intersection
- Lots of concern regarding noise and protecting the existing residential areas
- Support for non-traditional intersection crossings whether they be over or underpasses or rotaries
- Potential for residential housing between Maples Street and New Haven Road ranged from little interest to very enthusiastic
- Concerns about soil and wetlands and the need for water septic/sewer
- Support for bike/pedestrian facilities along the route
- Support for fishing access near the new bridge if a new bridge is constructed

Notes:

- Traffic calming measures would be needed along the Green Route to reduce speed and improve safety.
- The depth of cuts needed for the Green Route between West Main Street and Hopkins Road may prevent any new land use.
- The Green Route would need to ensure safe crossing for children between the school and the church near the intersection of the green route with Church Street. Suggestion for adding traffic signals for pedestrian traffic.
- The church serves as the emergency staging station for the school
- Maintain floodplain protections by the Otter Creek, near the intersection of Maple Street. Soil conditions there may limit development options.
- There is a steep hillside on the Green Route southbound from Maple Street and crossing the Otter Creek. No development is desired in this area.
- Wildlife pass through the land near the Green Route, traveling near Green Street, past Maple Street toward Otter Creek. Concern for the wildlife habitat and movement.
- Noise concerns in the area due to the residential areas north of the Green Route. Add sound barriers between the residential areas and the Green Route near the Maple Street and Green Street neighborhoods.
- Noise should be managed at the intersection of New Haven Road and Route 7 due to homes in the triangular section of land in between Church Street, the Green Route, and Route 7.
- Recommendation for grade separated intersections or rotaries for the Green Route's intersections with cross streets. No four-way intersections with traffic signals at Maple Street and Green Street; concern this would cause congestion and delay.
- Maple Street and Green Street are popular cyclist routes, a shared-use path should be built parallel along the route for cyclists and pedestrians.
- Boat ramps and fishing access at the new bridge, to enhance the recreational opportunities and the scenic value of the area.
- No development is possible at the intersection of Route 22A and the southern end of the Green Route. Concerns about noise at that intersection.
- Mixed opinions on adding residential housing along the northern end of the Green Route in some areas. A number of people did not want to see more residential housing, some felt lukewarm about the idea, and one or two people

were very enthusiastic about adding housing of all types (apartments, multi-family) to the area of Vergennes overall.

- Improve flood plain protections in the agricultural/farmland areas along the southern half of the green route, to preserve the natural resources of the area.
- A Green Route would have to address the slopes and visibility concerns at the intersection of Route 7 and New Haven Road/Church Street.

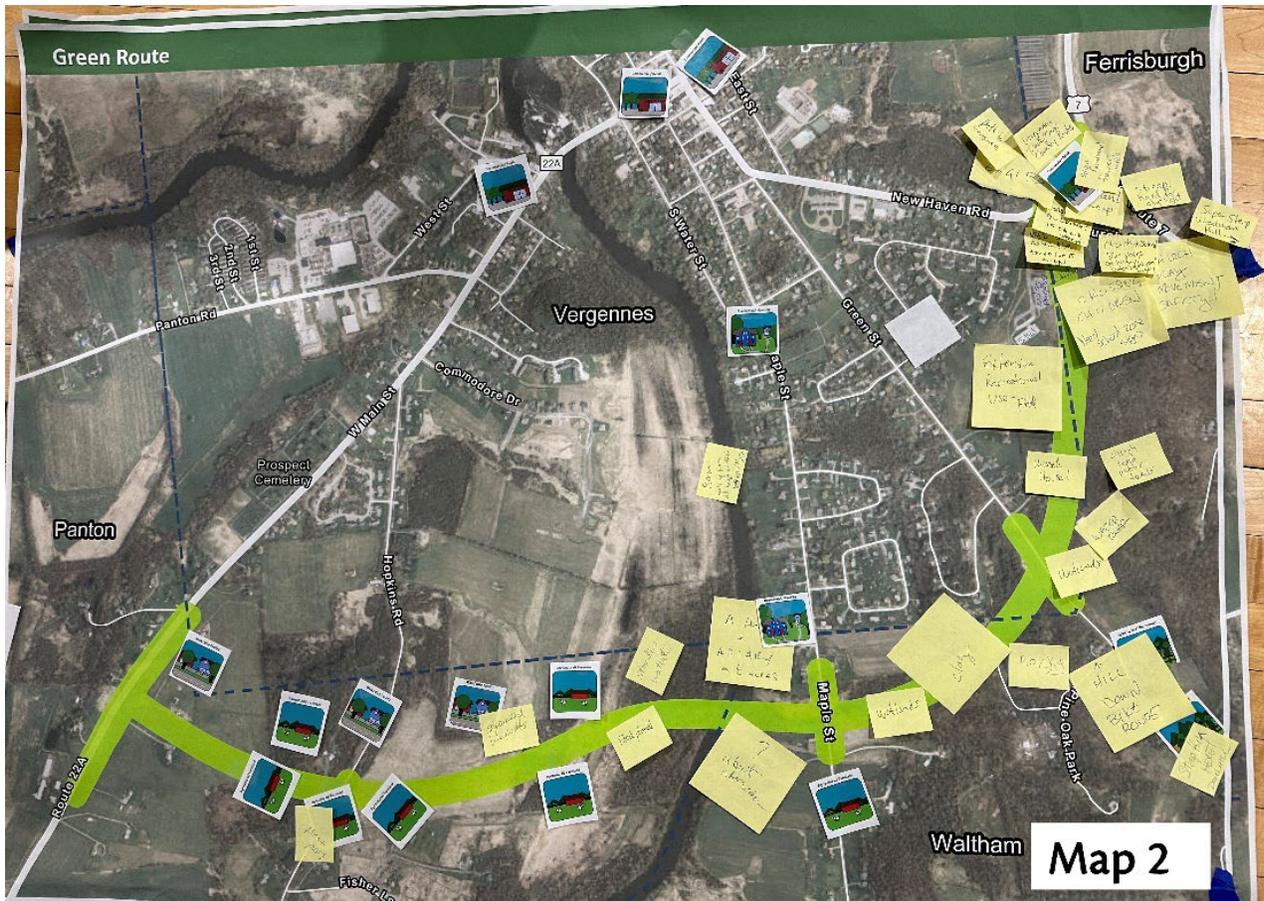


Table 3

Facilitator: Dan Mallach, D&K

Note-taker: Amanda Holland, VTrans

Highlights:

- Folks in this southeast quadrant currently experience relative peace and quiet and there is concern of increased noise
- Recognition of the church and school in this area and significant pedestrian activity

- Concern coming from east to west around here – significant wildlife amphibians, a moose.
- Economic activity in Vergennes needs to continue and expand

Notes:

- There is a 6-acre property with an apiary at the Maple Street intersection with the Green Route.
- This is largely a residential area.
- Lots of trucks stopping makes noise.
- Children walk between school and fields, and to woods to the rear of the Church property.
- There are informal trails at the rear of the Church property that members of the public use.
- Church Street already has a great deal of traffic, it is a school zone.
- Improved signage is needed now near the Church and School.
- There is currently no traffic signal at the intersection of New Haven Road and Route 7. If one were installed, that would mean that traffic traveling southbound on Route 7 (from the north) would have to stop. However, this is a steep downhill coming from the north – it could be difficult to stop on this hill.
- Concern for stormwater impacts and potential flooding of local roads.
- Truck traffic does service the City of Vergennes and its businesses. Any way to assess that volume, or the proportion of its impacts that would remain even if through truck traffic were rerouted?
- The Green Route could increase traffic as well as parking along Maple and Green Streets; parking is already considered a problem.

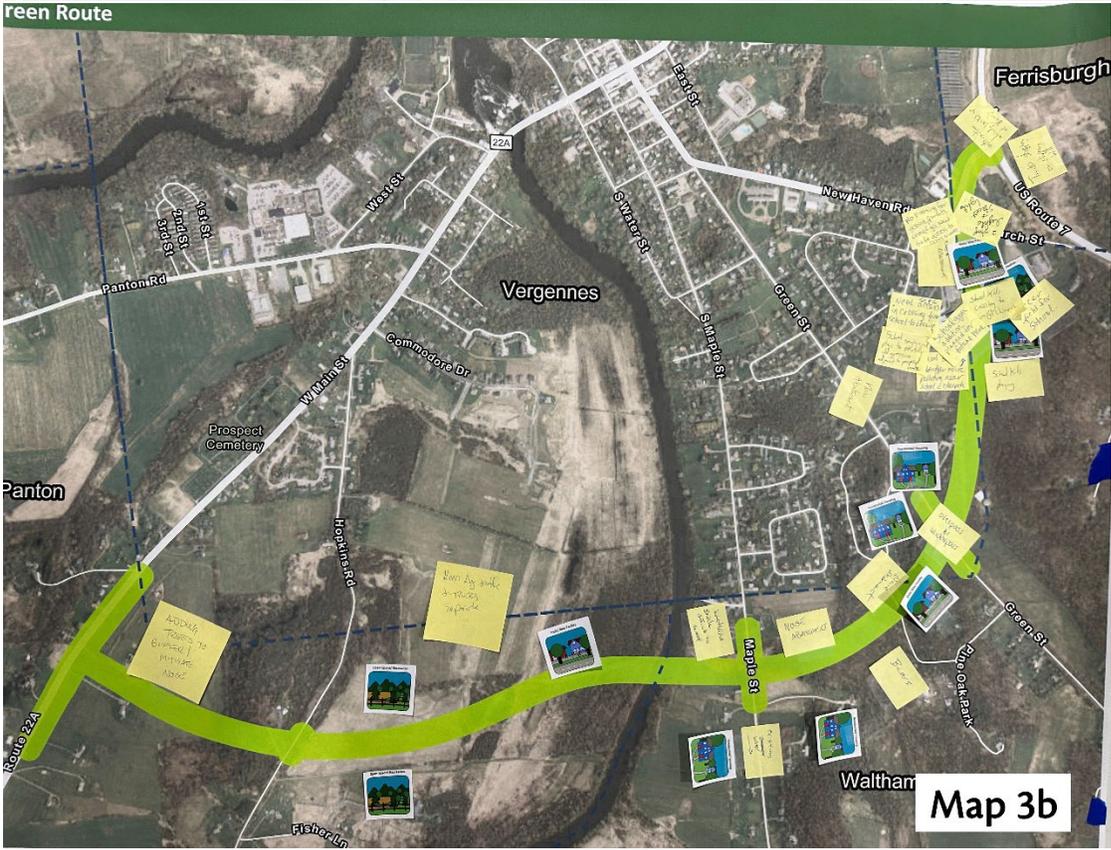
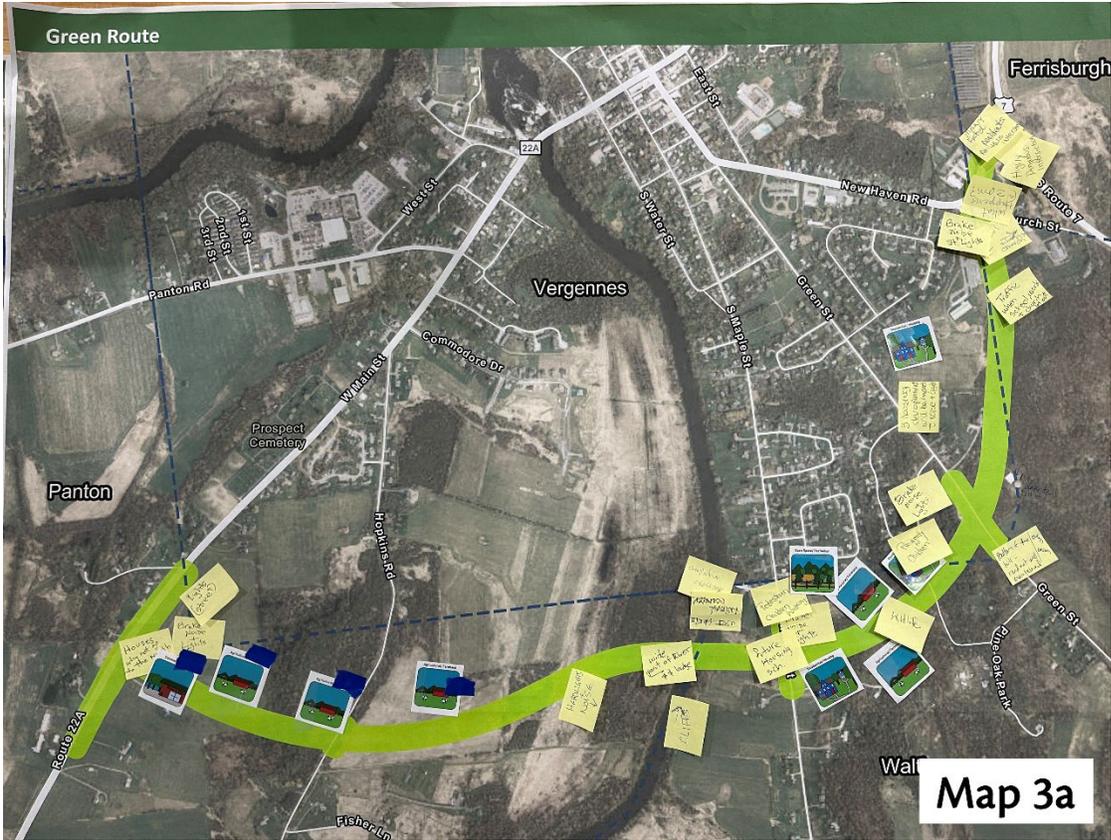


Table 4

Facilitator: Emily Lewis, D&K

Note-taker: Annabelle Dally, WSP

Highlights:

- Interest in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure especially between New Haven Road/Church Street and Maple Street for access to the school/church
- Some interest in residential developments at the intersections of Maple and Green Streets
- Interest in maintaining open space and agricultural land elsewhere

Notes:

- Concerns at the intersection with Route 7, which currently experiences significant congestion and backups, and has a significant grade making it hard for trucks to stop.
- Considerations would need to be made for bussing, pickup, and dropoff [at the school].
- Concern with having a truck route that close to a school and a church – noise abatement and overall safety.
- Children need a safe way to cross this new route to go from the school to the church and recreational fields – that trek is made multiple times a day for sports, recess, etc.
- Interest in providing a separate bike/ped accommodation from the residential areas to the school and church.
- Daily runners, walkers, bikers along Maple Street.
- What will happen with the underground utilities? Will the State make them relocate and bury as a condition of their permit?
- Interest in residential development near the intersections of Maple and Green Streets and even potentially down Maple Street where water service already exists.
- Concerns with sewer and septic capabilities.
- Concerns with noise abatement for existing and future residential development.
- Interest in the potential for over or underpasses and some intersections particularly Green Street.

- There may be some benefit to having access to a Green Route, especially for emergency services.
- Interest in maintaining open and agricultural spaces along the route.
- Significant wildlife populations and habitat (bears, beavers, deer, bobcat, foxes)
- Historical significance – Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen traveled the historic stagecoach road, which had a 1700s tavern and stagecoach stop.

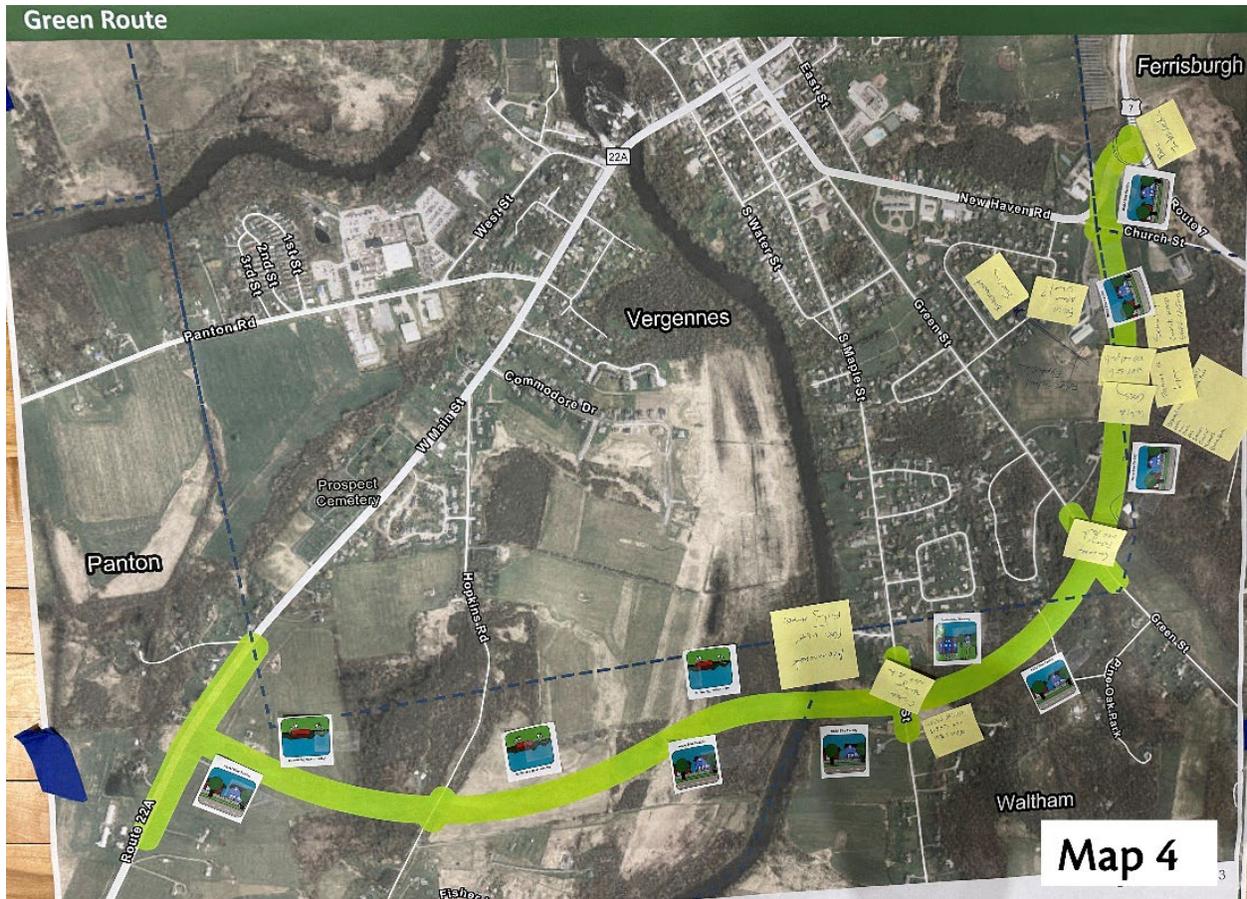


Table 5

Facilitator: Ken Robie, D&K

Notetaker: Katharine Otto, VTrans

Highlights:

- Concerns with the Route 7 intersection
- Concern with splitting the school and the church
- Desire to maintain the same type of residential development that is in the area
- Some sparse interest in small residential development

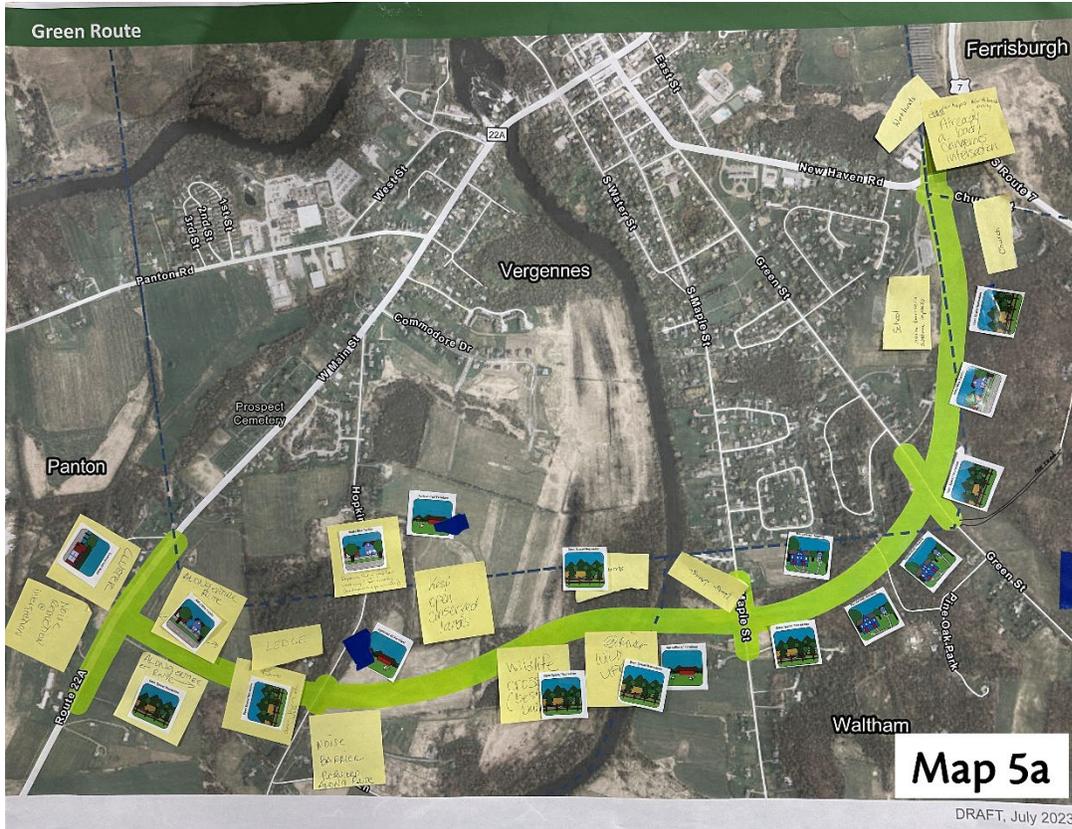
- Potential to connect streets on the other side that only connect to Route 7
- Historic homes near Maple Street
- If there was a shared use path, put it on the north side

Notes:

- Safety issues already exist at the New Haven Road intersection
- Concerns about splitting church and school – children go between these locations regularly.
- Waltham section between Route 7 and Maple Street
 - This area is missing some of the newer homes in the aerials
 - Keep low density residential
 - Or have a little higher density residential at the same density as adjacent part of Vergennes. Noise mitigation would be needed near any homes
 - Some historic homes along Maple Street
 - May be potential to connect local road(s) that currently are dead ends off US 7.
- Bike ped
 - Connect between the backroads which are already popular with cyclists
 - Separate facility preferred
 - North side of the road is preferred
 - Definitely need separate section on the new bridge
- Near the river and Panton section
 - Lots of wetlands and habitat near river
 - Keep as working lands
 - Consider conserving lands
 - Noise is a concern at new intersection with VT 22A and along homes on new route.
 - One person talked about if housing is needed, per statewide housing crisis, maybe some housing here – but not a clear indication of which part of this section

Non-land use discussion

- Why are we studying this when electric cars and trucks are much quieter, and will pre-dominate by the time something is built?
- Questions about the property acquisition process if/when it occurs.



Additional Public Comments

After a "report out" and discussion commentary from the breakout groups, attendees reconvened for a presentation on next steps and any additional comments related to the PEL study. The following comments were made.

- Support for non-traditional road crossings (e.g., grade separation at existing intersections).
- Wetlands are too extensive to support new housing
- The southeast part of Vergennes is quiet; concern that a Green Route would change this.
- "The road should feel like Vermont."
- There are historic properties along Maple Street.
- Put the bike path along the north side of the route curve at the southeast corner of Vergennes for better access to the City; fewer crossings.
- After the PEL Study is over, it will still be important to keep people in the loop about what might happen around any new route, and when.
- Suggestion to find a way to ease the burden on Main Street and the existing bridge immediately.
- Question about a potential time frame and how it will impact current property owners.
 - Answer: the PEL Study will be finished in 2025 and construction would be more than 15 years after that. Any property takings are still very far in the future. If you do have specific concerns about this topic, Jim Gish, our community liaison, has been meeting with concerned communities and neighborhoods about this topic.
- Resource identification work needs good communication regarding parking along, and entrance onto, private lands.
- Support expressed for more housing in Vergennes, noting the availability of septic.
- Belief that Route 17 was already suitable for truck traffic, and that building another route would be "ludicrous and unpopular."
- Concern for the wildlife in the habitats along the Green Route, with a promise to share more information and photographs of the animals in the area.
- Question about the decision-making process and the role of the workshops.
 - The feedback from the workshops would be passed on from the policy committee to the technical committee, and onto VTrans, who would make

the final decision. They would recommend preferred route(s) based on the study findings.

- Opposition expressed to moving the truck traffic, with a preferred a no-build option.
- A Church Street resident asked if the study would lead to any immediate changes, such as school zone signage or a speed limit sign. They said that the intersection was already unsafe for children and pedestrians.
 - Advised to talk to their town selectboard about reducing speed limits and implementing school zones, etc.
- Observation that the high attendance at the workshop was probably an indication of the strong negative feelings of people against the route.