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## Grant to boost Middlebury waterfalls plan

By *Addison Independent*

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A PLAN TO improve pedestrian access to, and enjoyment of, the Otter Creek Falls in downtown Middlebury received a major boost on Thursday with the receipt of a \$240,000 federal grant. Independent photo/Trent Campbell

**By JOHN FLOWERS**

MIDDLEBURY — A major effort aimed at upgrading access to, and enjoyment of, the Otter

[1]

Creek Falls in downtown Middlebury received a huge boost on Thursday in the form of a \$240,000 federal grant that will bankroll the vast majority of the project that borders the Marble Works Business District.

The so-called "Middlebury Riverfront Project," designed last year by an ad hoc citizens' committee, calls for establishing an improved walkway from the Printer's Alley entrance into the Marble Works to the footbridge crossing the creek just over 100 yards away. The walkway would traverse the south edge of the Marble Works lawn (just above creek) allowing disabled visitors to enjoy the vista.

The path would dovetail into a terraced 'amphitheater' with retaining walls just above the footbridge that would allow people to relax on a grassy slope overlooking the falls nearer to the waters' edge.

The project was one of the priorities identified in the Creative Communities program that engaged Middlebury-area residents in discussion about how new ideas could generate

economic and community activity.

Total cost of the project has been placed at almost \$304,000. Members of the Middlebury Riverfront Committee, with the help of Better Middlebury Partnership (BMP) Coordinator Gail Freidin and Town Planner Fred Dunnington, had applied for grant money through the state's Transportation Enhancements Grant Program.

On Thursday, organizers were ecstatic to learn the project had received the \$240,000 grant. The town must find other sources for the remaining \$64,000 in construction costs before the grant can be released.

"It's a very pleasant surprise," said riverfront committee member Nancy Malcolm, who like many of her colleagues, had anticipated the sour economy would substantially restrict the flow of grant money.

"It's very exciting, and we hope to get the project moving," she added.

Freidin, too, was pleased to hear of the grant award, though she cautioned that there were still several hurdles to cross before the funding is secure. She said bureaucratic hoops had to be cleared, more detailed planning needed to be done and land use agreements had to be completed before the project could proceed. She said she was hopeful those steps could be done to allow construction of the project to be completed in 2011.

"We still have some money to raise," Freidin said of the local \$64,000 match, but added she is confident the committee will be able to raise that money, which includes in-kind services and assets.

The grant is the 14th — and by far the largest — the BMP has secured for town Middlebury. The group has garnered nearly \$1,170,000 in grants for capital improvement projects in the downtown area during the past 15 years.

### **BRISTOL GETS \$50K GRANT**

Bristol was the one other Addison County community to receive an enhancement grant this round. Bristol bagged \$50,000 toward a \$58,345 beautification of its town green. Specifically, the project calls for adorning the municipal park and its periphery with 18 new ornamental light fixtures (while taking out the few unattractive utility light poles on the property); updating the park's electrical system in order that it may better accommodate special events; and putting in some new benches, bike racks and litter barrels.

Bristol Town Administrator Bill Bryant gave Selectwoman Carol Wells particular credit for pursuing the grant. He said the local match of just over \$8,000 will flow through Bristol's capital building fund. Bryant hopes the project work will begin either this fall or early next year.

Gov. James Douglas confirmed the total of \$2.75 million in transportation enhancement grants through a press release, indicating 38 applications with funding requests totaling over \$4.5 million. The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) initially reviewed the project applications, then forwarded them to a grant committee, which decided who got the awards.

More than half of the awards and nearly two-thirds of the funding went to pedestrian/bicycle projects. Most of the remaining awards were given to either environmentally sensitive projects such as storm water mitigation, restoring an historic building for a welcome center and acquisition of a scenic easement.

Since 1995, VTrans has annually awarded enhancement grants to communities and nonprofit organizations for a wide range of federally eligible projects such as restoring historic buildings, rebuilding and extending sidewalks, enhancing the environment, improving hiking and biking trails, purchasing scenic easements and repairing historic bridges.

Since the program's inception, more than 300 grant awards have been made to Vermont communities totaling more than \$40 million.

Middlebury

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