



# New vision for future is chosen

By STEPHEN MILLS - STAFF WRITER  
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MONTPELIER — State, city and civic leaders from the governor on down hailed a new vision of the future for the Capital City on Wednesday. It marked the culmination of a six-month design competition, Sustainable Montpelier 2030, organized by Net Zero Vermont to make the city carbon neutral by 2030. And the winner is — Team Bridges, a multidisciplinary collaborative based in Montpelier and Cabot that was presented with a \$10,000 prize. They were among five finalists picked from 27 entries, which included 12 Vermont architectural firms and other submissions from as far away as California, Iran, Japan and one from Sweden that made it into the final five. A final presentation Jan. 7 of detailed submissions was followed by a week of online voting. Team Bridges, a collaborative of 12 professionals from 10 companies and organizations, came up with a winning combination of ways to deal with perennial problems in the state capital for residents, businesses and visitors alike. They include: parking, transportation, a housing shortage, lack of green space, energy use and environmental challenges. Although seeing the winning entry for the first time Wednesday, Gov. Phil Scott said the design objective would help the city and state adapt to changing economic needs and environmental challenges. “The Sustainable Montpelier 2030 competition creates a vision of the type of small city that I believe could help and attract and retain working-age people to Vermont, offer housing, art and open spaces for people of all ages, and grow our local tax base,” Scott said. “I’m encouraged this design project continues an important dialogue about affordable, renewable energy and transportation solutions.” Scott stressed the need to work together, harness technology and form a partnership with business and nonprofit groups to find solutions to complex problems. “The kind of vibrant, livable, affordable community design this competition inspired showed how innovative we can be,” Scott said. Scott said state support of the Capital City was important, adding, “In many communities in Vermont, and Montpelier in particular, we’re an integral part, and we’re a partner in this with the city. This is the first time I’ve seen this design, and I think it’s very creative, very

imaginative. There are certain sectors that we've discussed before and certain pieces may be doable." Mayor John Hollar credited Net Zero Vermont with creating partnerships with the city to become carbon neutral, and helping revitalize downtown. "It's about making better use of the enormous amount of land that is used for surface parking. It's about more housing, creating more population in our community which is going to make Montpelier a more vibrant place, and produce more economic activity, which benefits all of us," Hollar said. Beth Rusnock, a spokeswoman for contest sponsor National Life described the design competition as a triple win for the city, the people of Vermont and the environment. She said National Life had focused on sustainability for years, underwriting a commuter bus to Chittenden County, using solar arrays that provide 15 percent of the company's electricity and using a biomass boiler for heating. "This Net Zero project beautifully echoes our values to do good, be good and make good at National Life. We were so impressed with the creative and forward-thinking proposals that were submitted," Rusnock added. The key component of the Team Bridges proposal is to view the city as an integral part of a five-town "Capital Corridor," with Montpelier, Barre, Berlin, Middlesex and Waterbury linked by existing rail lines. The corridor is an area that embraces more than 26,000 residents, 23,612 jobs and 1.5 million square feet of state facilities. The train link would allow residents and workers to leave their cars at home — a prime Net Zero carbon-neutral goal — and free up surface-area parking space — much of it state-owned — that occupies 60 percent of downtown Montpelier. Satellite parking lots would also serve as gas and convenience store locations, and double as solar-panel sites to further offset city carbon emissions. Travel through the downtown "spine" would be aided by shuttle buses, a trolley service and a pedestrian/ bike path. The plan calls for a mix of homes and studio space at the intersection of Pioneer Street and Route 2, and an aerial tram linking the downtown to the National Life insurance company, where a mix of housing, hotel and conference space would be added to create a new neighborhood. The plan identified locations for over 2,000 new housing units. Economically, it predicts the combination of 3,500 new residents would add an additional \$410 million to tax rolls and \$65 million in spending in the city annually. Accepting the award for the winning team, Michael Rushman, of Land Strategies in Cabot, thanked Net Zero Vermont and contest sponsors. "From the outset, with everything we did we thought, 'How can this be implemented? Who are we going to have to work with to implement this,'" Rushman said. "We're committed as a team to continue to work with Net Zero Vermont, the state of Vermont, the city of Montpelier and other municipalities in the Capital Corridor to bring this vision to a reality." The contest was organized by Net Zero Vermont co-CEOs Deb Sachs and Dan Jones. Jones thanked other contest participants who had indicated they want to remain involved, and said a discussion about adding elements of some of the other designs had already begun. "This kind of design challenge is something they yearn for. ... It's kind of why they got into the trade. This is a model for imagining the kind of place we all want to live in ... and make us feel good, not only about our lives but our lifestyles." Design competition sponsors included AllEarth Renewables, Ben & Jerry's, Vermont Creamery,

National Life Group and VSECU. The other finalists were White and Arup, of Stockholm, Sweden; Gossens Temkin Collaborative, of Montpelier; Scott and Partners, of Essex Junction; and Weimann Lamphere, of Colchester. The winning design materials and video presentation are available at: <https://netzerovt.org/design-competition/> winning-design. stephen.mills@timesargus.com