

Albany General Store Work Begins



courtesy of Albany Community Trust

A recent rendering of what the reworked Albany General Store will look like. Since this design, "the grade around the front of the building and the location of the stairs has changed ... there are no longer any stairs leading up to the porch at the front of the building and the stair shown to the left is now a gentle ramp/walking path," according to designer David Koschak of Stowe's Cushman Design.

by Doug McClure

ALBANY – Construction on the new Albany General Store has commenced. The store marks the first project spearheaded by nonprofit group Albany Community Trust (ACT). The town has not had a store since 2013, when the old general store closed. Since then, residents have been forced to travel to neighboring towns to shop for basic supplies.

The new Albany General Store is envisioned as a small grocery store with a pizza oven, fryer, and fresh baked goods. Approximately three years ago, a grant-funded survey of Albany residents identified a store as a critical need, but there was not enough funding to get the project off the ground.

Construction is scheduled to wrap up by December, with the store's grand opening to take place sometime in 2021.

"Our mission is to increase the vitality of the community," said ACT Board President Hannah Pearce, "Having a storefront is huge."

On its website, ACT recounts how just over a century

ago the now-quiet town center was bustling with "many dairies, farm equipment sales and repair businesses, grain mills, sawmills, loggers, blacksmiths, doctors, farriers, grain dealers, veterinarians, shops, dance halls, a restaurant, [and] a hotel."

But in the last century, everything changed. As job opportunities in the town disappeared, residents moved to bigger cities in search of work and new places to live. Local businesses soon followed.

Advances in technology dealt the town another blow, as many local trades became obsolete.

According to ACT's website, even residents who continued to live in the town often worked, shopped, and conducted business in "more developed towns and cities." ACT hopes that with the new general store, Albany can experience something of a renaissance.

While nothing has yet been signed, Craftsbury General Store owners Emily Maclure and Kit Basom, along with local baker Jana Smart, have been involved in the process from the start and will likely run the new general store. The three have "provided a



photo by Doug McClure

In early August, the Albany Community Trust signed construction contracts with Kingdom Construction of Newport and Peters General Contracting, Inc. of Albany to begin sitework and construction for the new Albany General Store. The hope is for work on the project to be complete by December.

lot of input," said Pearce.

Pearce said the experience Maclure and Basom bring to the table could benefit both the Craftsbury General Store and the new Albany General Store.

"We see it as providing more to the town than just a gallon of milk," Pearce said.

The facility will also feature outdoor greenspace and a small multi-purpose room that may work as a space for community functions, Pearce said.

The store also hopes to offer high-speed broadband.

Funding for the project came from \$425,000 in grants and gifts, with major donors including the Freeman Foundation, Northern Border Regional Commission, and USDA Rural Development, the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development, Vermont Department of Buildings and Grounds and the Vermont Community Foundation.

Throughout the process, assistance was provided by partners Preservation Trust of Vermont, Northeastern Vermont Development Association, and Lamoille County Planning Commission, Pearce said.

ACT raised another \$300,000 from within the Albany community, Pearce reported.

The store "became a bigger project than expected, and the community support has been amazing," she said.

An additional \$100,000 is still needed to round out the project's budget, Pearce said. Fundraising will continue through the fall.

"This past spring was going to be the big fundraising push [for the \$100,000]," but COVID-19

"put a big pause" on those plans, Pearce explained.

Newport-based Kingdom Construction and Albany contractor Peters General Contracting, Inc. signed contracts for construction and site work in early August, and work began shortly thereafter.

Thus far, preparation work has begun on the adjacent vacant lot, and the facade from the old store has been removed.

Parking for the new store will be behind the building, Pearce said. The old general store struggled with parking issues, as there were few available spaces in front and speeding motorists on Route 14 made street parking potentially dangerous.

Selectman Chris Jacobs said the town was considering options for addressing the issue of speeding vehicles. Currently, Orleans County Sheriffs periodically position themselves in town.

Jacobs said while he is on the ACT board, he is a non-voting member and his interest in seeing the project through is to benefit the town. In his official statement on ACT's site, Jacobs said, "To me, the 'heart' of Albany is/was its store. I am very concerned to see it operate again and serve our community." Jacobs said he "still can't believe we got over \$700,000 to make this happen."

With the first major project underway, Pearce said that ACT will begin considering other projects to benefit the community, but laughed, "just not right away." For more information or to donate, go to albanycommunitytrust.org.

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Source: liquorcontrol.vermont.gov.
 Not all retailers in the Lamoille Valley had compliance checks during this time.

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