

Burlington Planning Commission

149 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401
Telephone: (802) 865-7188
(802) 865-7195 (FAX)
(802) 865-7144 (TTY)
www.ci.burlington.vt.us/planning

Peter Potts, Chair
Bruce Baker, Vice-Chair
Yves Bradley
David Cain
Ralph Montefusco
Andy Montrill
Wayne Senville
Vacant, Youth Member



Burlington Planning Commission Long Rang Planning Committee Meeting Notes Monday, September 21, 2009

Present: D. Cain, R. Montefusco, W. Senville (Chair), J. Stevens, M. Waites
Absent: None
Staff: D. White & S. Thibault

I. Planning for the Next City Master Plan

The committee's immediate priority is to prepare a scope of work (SOW) for a downtown/waterfront plan as a first step in the update of the Municipal Development Plan (MDP). The Chair opened the meeting by explaining the process the committee is following for the preparation of the SOW and the purpose of the meeting.

Staff presented the proposed study area, as being the designated downtown district, including new proposed expansion areas. The committee agreed with this delineation for the downtown/waterfront plan.

Public comments period

B. McGrew – What is the difference between the Central Business District (CBD) and the designated downtown district?

W. Senville – The designated downtown district is a state designation that enables Burlington to get funding and is much larger than the CBD.

P. Mackenzie – hatched area? Not superfund

W. Senville – The committee wants to hear from the public on reactions to the draft SOW that staff prepared. Everyone is also invited to bring forward issues that are not included here. What would you like to see addressed in the plan?

C. Daly – She is a Church marketplace commissioner and a downtown partnership member. That group would like to see included in the scope of work, the following items:

1. Net Fiscal Impact of property tax payments. Understanding the ratio of taxes paid by a property owner to the cost of services provided to the property owner will inform discussion about increasing the tax base. We think that this information will motivate many stakeholders to support reasonable development in DT. A couple of cities have learned that their commercial property owners pay in multiples of what they take. It is probably the case here in Burlington.
2. Market Analysis of different existing and potential commercial uses. Understanding what does/would succeed in DT will help to shape the sorts of development that should be encouraged and facilitated. As part of this, it would be useful to understand where the "tipping point" is for vacancies in DT. Some percentage of vacancy is important for a competitive rental market, but there is a point at which the number of vacancies will drive property owners to rent to tenants who provide lower cost and quality goods and services typical to what most consider a depressed DT.
3. Competitive Analysis. What are the real pressures on DT businesses from suburban development?
4. Build out analysis of available sites, so that we can be realistic about our possibilities.

J. Wood (Ward 1) – Don't lose track of the rest of Burlington while working on this planning process. The University of Vermont and Champlain College add to the vibrancy of the city and are great economic development engines.

H. Driscoll – Curious why the city concentrates only on the downtown/waterfront, not onto the other commercial areas of the city?

W. Senville – The Planning Commission is starting with the downtown/waterfront area but will address other parts of the city in the future.

R. Montefusco – The City Council recently passed a resolution to ask the Commission to prepare a scope of work for downtown/waterfront.

B. McGrew – There is a need for development in the urban core of the city to help reduce sprawl.

- Aesthetics of the city as a whole and for individual developments is essential.
- Views and view corridors should be preserved with sensitivity to the topography, keeping buildings lower near the lake and higher up the hill, just like in San Francisco.
- For individual buildings there needs to be a sense of sustainability, proportion, scale and aesthetics, Westlake being the bad example and 40 College st and Main Street Landing good ones.
- Make developers accountable for building what they get permitted for, especially for affordable housing, adequate parking, setbacks, etc.
- Enforce the zoning codes and limits exceptions.
- Keep street signals in good repair with sufficient time to walk across.
- Street line painting fade quickly in the winter. Address sidewalks repair and insufficient street corner signage. Please enforce rules to ride bikes on sidewalks and marketplace.
- If encouraging downtown living, needs of residents must be balanced with those of businesses. Add a dance studio space downtown.
- Make sure the process is well publicized and encourages community involvement.

T. Fryer – The city needs more adequate cycle track (bike lane between sidewalk and parked cars).

S. Rubin (Ward 3) – The meeting on September 29 for the 3D project, is the public invited? Developers who proposed large scale projects should be required to build 3D models.

M. Lang – Consider different types of retail shops downtown – computers, hardware stores...

P. McKenzie – He is looking forward to the planning process. Was closing all car traffic across Church Market place ever considered?

R.-M. Conn – For siding of historic buildings, we have good guidelines but they need to be followed.

J. Davis (Ward 4) – More options for teenagers to do downtown that would have low or no cost – community center or else.

B. McGrew – Could residents also offer input as part of a focus group for retail in the downtown?

S. Nealon – Member of the permaculture group and would like to be involved in the process.

S. Rubin – Linking marketplace with the waterfront needs to be looked at. Perhaps light carbon neutral bus system to get people around the downtown/waterfront would be efficient.

R. Beddoe – Member of the permaculture group. Has concerns with sustainability, self-reliance and resilience. The connection with the Intervale is crucial and real long-range planning for energy independence. Permaculture is based on utilizing the resources you have in front of you to live, especially with regards to food systems.

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H. Driscoll – Please consider tying in the Old North End Revitalization Project as you work out a vision for a greener, more vibrant, financially viable, sustainable Burlington Downtown/Waterfront. After all, it was once the "downtown" and ties directly to the waterfront at the bottom of North Street.

Transportation:

Lane model with bike path situated between parked cars and sidewalks, known as a bike channel would be safer and more desirable.

There is no North South access for bicycles between Battery Street and North Winooski (very unsafe there) since the building of the Mall. I'd love to see a rooftop park - think living roof - on top of the mall and a pedestrian/bicycle bridge going over it North to South around St Paul.

If the City is to be desirable I advocate that Public Transportation be available at least as late as businesses are open (1am?) and seven days a week. People will only switch to it if it meets their needs.

I would like to see the Cherry Street station removed. I believe we could see traffic calming by removing the necessity for every bus to come downtown, and could improve service through a series of lines that cross and are timed for transfer. Perhaps we could implement a rapid transit lane for buses and HOV's on our busiest lanes during rush hours.

We could use more than one point of vehicular entry to the Waterfront District. I propose that should be to the North side.

Ecological Design:

We could regulate the use of packaging in our City. Example: outlawing or taxing plastic bags and styrofoam containers. I don't think this would be a hardship on businesses and could go a long way to promoting "green" living in Burlington.

The municipality could either take over or collaborate with Garbage Collection providers. Currently on any given block there are multiple companies serving households so you have every section of the city driven over several times in a week by diesel spewing trucks. We could make this system more efficient by creating sectors or something that will lessen this traffic. We could do something similar with refrigerated trucks serving the downtown establishments.

Design:

I would like to see approval/denial of building projects more focused on energy usage, density, height, et al, and less on aesthetic design. I believe allowing for greater creativity in new construction and retrofits will serve to accentuate the beauty of the historic structures in our City. New brick next to old brick, and you miss the beauty of the old. We should loosen up here.

K. Paul (Ward6) – The garbage collection issue is being worked on by City Council. City staff is also working on a new Clean energy assessment district to allow homeowners to get low interest funds to do energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. City Council passed a permeable pavement resolution a few months ago that requires justification if the city is not using pervious pavement. The Transportation plan has a section dealing with bike streets. TEUC will finish its review soon and send to the Planning Commission for adoption.

P. Potts – The Planning Commission will take up the Transportation plan on November 10, 2009.

L. Curry – We need to address maximum density and height or we will lose ground to the suburbs if we don't do anything. Connecting downtown to the waterfront for 24 hrs activity will make us strong culturally and economically. Post meetings on the FPF and schedule them outside of work hours.

Sandrine Thibault - sthibault@ci.burlington.vt.us
865-7193

Meeting #3 – October 13, 2009, 7:00pm – Conference Room #12, 1st Floor of City Hall.

Meeting #4 – November 3, 2009, 6:30pm – Location TBD.

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