


Office of
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Burlington City Council

FROM: Mayor Miro Weinberger 

DATE: September 20, 2012

RE: Response to June 18, 2012 City Council Resolution requesting Mayor's Office exploration of alternatives to proposed route of Champlain Parkway

Since taking office in April, a priority of my administration has been to pursue the construction of the Champlain Parkway project – an effort that is approaching its 50th year of planning – and to address the concerns that various individuals and groups have expressed related to the Parkway. Those efforts have intensified since the City Council's passage of a resolution on June 18, 2012 requesting my office to explore possible alternatives to the proposed route of the Champlain Parkway to reduce traffic impacts on the King Street neighborhood, and to report back to the Council on our findings by September 30.

I am pleased to report that after extensive consultation with state officials, property owners in the area, and neighborhood groups and individuals, we have made substantial progress in the form of the following concrete achievements:

- 1) **For the first time, we have secured a commitment from the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to support a new project that would link Pine Street to Battery Street through a new urban street grid south of Maple Street.** The attached graphic is a conceptual drawing of this grid that currently is being referred to as the "Railyard Enterprise Project." (Please understand that this graphic represents only an initial concept. Numerous alternatives will be considered in the upcoming scoping and planning processes and, based on the information gained in these processes, any final designs may be substantially different than the design shown in this graphic).

Although the graphic is only a concept, the key features of the new project include a proposed interconnected street grid creating new routes to connect Pine Street to Battery Street, truck access from the railyard directly to Pine Street, and potentially new sites for mixed-use economic development. This concept is based on an alternative laid out in the June 2010 Waterfront South Access Study by the Chittenden County Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) and the Burlington Department of Public Works (DPW).

- 2) FHWA and VTrans have agreed – subject to state legislative approval that VTrans has committed to work to achieve – to pay for the roadway segments and other eligible project elements on an 80/10/10 basis (Federal/State/Local).**
- 3) Property owners and lessees likely to be impacted by the new project are open to exploring the new project.** This new project would involve road construction on land currently owned by the City, the State, and some private parties. Some of the property likely involved in the project currently is controlled by Vermont Rail System, an important business in the City and the State. We have met extensively with Vermont Rail System, and the company is open to exploring this project with us.
- 4) We have had numerous meetings with individuals and groups interested in the King Street neighborhood and there appears to be a preliminary consensus to support pursuing the new Railyard Enterprise Project.**

The attached letter of July 11, 2012 to Secretary Searles from me, and the response letter of August 9, 2012 from Secretary Searles, outline the City's and the State's positions on the status of the Champlain Parkway and the proposed new Railyard Enterprise Project. Secretary Searles' letter conveys the commitments summarized in points 1 and 2 above, and outlines several important parameters related to the design and implementation of the Railyard Enterprise Project:

- The existing Champlain Parkway project cannot be amended to include any new streets;
- The Railyard Enterprise Project must be a separate, stand-alone project with its own independent process; and
- If the current Champlain Parkway was not built due to decisions made by the City, the City would be responsible pursuant to FHWA regulations, Vermont law, and the Cooperative Agreement between the City and VTrans for a minimum payback of expended federal funds of \$5 million.

Extensive consultations with other interested parties

In addition to securing these commitments from VTrans, the City has met with a range of individuals and groups that had expressed concerns about the potential impacts on the Maple and King Street neighborhood including:

- Board of the Champlain Housing Trust
- Matt Viens, Board President, Preservation Burlington
- Greg Marchildon, State Director, AARP Vermont
- Jack Donnelly, Executive Director, Community Health Centers of Burlington
- Vicky Smith, Executive Director, King Street Center
- Ted Wimpey, Chair, Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition
- Joe Reinert & Matt Mahoney, King Street Neighborhood Revitalization Corporation
- Andy Montroll, Burlington Representative to the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC)
- Sandy Levine, Senior Attorney, Conservation Law Foundation
- Jack and Debbie DuBrul, Jackson Terrace Apartments, 500 Pine Street
- Tom Torti, President, Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Kelly Devine, Executive Director, Burlington Business Association
- Chapin Spencer, Executive Director, Local Motion
- Neil Mickenberg, Citizen
- Ernie Pomerleau, Citizen
- Joan Shannon, City Council President
- Rachel Siegel, City Councilor & Burlington Progressive Coalition Steering Committee

In general, the Railyard Enterprise Project was viewed as a positive development and all expressed an interest in continuing to work with City to move the project ahead. While valid questions regarding time, details and cost remain, the general consensus was to work together to advance the Railyard Enterprise Project in the state transportation planning and funding process.

The attached diagram shows a composite of potential street, bike, and walking corridors as explored in the June 2010 study. It is important to understand that the diagram contains generalized concepts. Analysis of specific alternatives and options will be developed through the project scoping under the NEPA process.

Finally, we have met on a number of occasions with all appellants (or their attorneys or agents) to the Act 250 appeal that is currently pending at the Superior Court, Environmental Division. These appellants include Allan Hunt, Vermont Rail System President David Wulfson and CFO Mary Anne Michaels, and representatives of GP Burlington South (a Gilbane company) and Fortieth Burlington. These conversations will continue with all of these parties.

Conclusion: Administration will seek support of City Council in October to move forward with Champlain Parkway and commence scoping of new project

Based on this work, we will be bringing back to the City Council in October a resolution that will authorize: 1) continuing with the work related to the current City - State Cooperative Agreement on the Champlain Parkway; and 2) requesting commencement of project scoping by the CCMPO for the Railyard Enterprise Project.