

Questions and a few comments on the CEDO Housing Draft

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1. Who chose the number “2200” for student housing beds to be built downtown? Where does this number come from?
2. Why not view the topic of housing from a citywide perspective? We are a small city and clearly the entire city can and should be part of any solution.
3. When quoting data like household income % spent on housing, does that data include students’ costs for living off campus? If just their off campus rental costs are plugged into the data but not their income (or their parents income), how does this affect the data that you are quoting. Please let us know when/how student numbers are part of any quoted data such as population increases, etc.
4. How many UVM students currently live off campus? 3650 or 7650? Both “facts” are in this report.
5. What is the data to show there is a crisis in all housing? Some groups clearly have more challenges than others but the words “crisis” and “critical” are used a great deal in this report. I see rental staying up and houses and condos for sale sitting on the market these days. Does this report take into consideration the large number of units recently built in South Burlington (Quarry Hill, etc), Williston and downtown Winooski? Let’s look at what is regionally available for housing before declaring a crisis.
6. As part of the discussion for housing, this report does not mention any role or responsibility that consumers might have. Should they have some responsibility in all/any of this?
7. DRB appeals are mentioned as a “major source of project delays”. Can you provide data to back this up?
8. Regarding “deteriorating quality of housing stock”, should we start with what responsibility the landlords and renters have in this concern? Our expectation for landlords is way too low. And renters also need to be held accountable for what they do. As a RE agent, I get to see horrendous degradation of homes, often rented to students. These homes survived generations of families – often large families – yet they cannot survive the impact happening today. What is wrong with this picture?
9. Regarding inclusionary zoning, when the city writes an agreement that allows a developer to build high end condos and a hotel downtown but then can easily get out of his obligation to build a 3rd building for affordable housing by writing a small check (in comparison to the cost of a building), any chance the city can do better? Would we have substantially more affordable units downtown if the city had not written an agreement without loop holes?
10. What are the “high fees” developers pay in the city? Since we don’t have impact fees (which we should in my opinion), how high are our fees relative to area communities with impact fees? (Take a look at Williston for example – high impact fees and still tons of new housing in the Taft Corners area going up)

11. Why does this draft refer to cities that have zero relationship to our size and transportation options of Burlington? We are not DC or San Francisco. Please find cities like us to compare us to. The cities you refer to have populations ranging from 600,000 to over 800,000.
12. Housing for seniors needing assisted living or nursing home care will not be solved by the city- that is driven by insurance coverage....or lack thereof. Is this study recommending the city get into that business?
13. The study mentions creating a walkable city yet right now our sidewalks are in deplorable condition. I don't know any street that does not have dangerous sidewalk sections. No wonder all the folks in wheel chairs are now using the roadways to get around. Can we recommend we need serious improvements to happen right now....not in some future time?
14. Under Neighborhood revitalization, this report puts no value on enforcing the 4 unrelated or raising the bar for landlords to get their Minimum Housing Certificates. Why not? Under this section I would also include a strong demand that UVM lift its dry campus status which did one thing and one thing only – pushed under age kids off campus into neighborhoods to get drunk. UVM needs to take ownership of its own problem – not shove it off into the neighborhoods.
15. No mention of the past 25 years of housing studies that all basically came to the same conclusion – UVM needs to build more housing which in turn will reduce pressure on rents as well as on house prices. Why no mention of this volume of work?
16. What are the costs for living on campus? What do students pay at the various on campus housing options? Can we compare that data to what students (really) pay to live off campus?
17. Why not show how many housing units would potentially be available in the city, and what the impact would be on rentals, if UVM housed another 1000, 2000 or all of its students on campus...without having to spend taxpayer money?
18. We as a city have limited resources. Why on earth should we use those limited resources to create housing specifically for students when UVM has a large amount of open or underutilized land that is all in the institutional zone with no density limits? The argument that students want to live downtown is not good enough – we should not be in the business of pleasing students, especially if it is true that so many groups of folks really do need our help – seniors, young professionals, etc. UVM can build student housing but clearly will not be building housing for any other groups.
19. Young professionals that I work with tell me that they do not want to live in areas dominated by college students anymore. They have to get up and go to work and need a good night's sleep. They have moved on and if we concentrate students downtown, I do not know of any group that will want to live in that environment – young or old. I have not seen one family or young professional try to buy a house on Isham St anytime one comes up – only investors looking to rent to college students. Do you know anyone who would want to live there? Let me know – happy to sell them a house the next time one comes up.
20. Thank you for finally recognizing that there needs to be transparency and public notice and time for folks to learn about all this and weigh in. The initial plan to do a public forum on 10/7 (that had no public notice as far as I know), a committee hearing and public comment deadline 10/16 and a city council decision 11/10 was too obvious a rush job. And the fact that NPAs had not been involved at all showed an initial lack of interest in genuinely engaging people. Glad to know people spoke up and slowed this train down.