



October 2, 2012

Mr. David E. White
Director, Burlington Planning & Zoning
City of Burlington
149 Church Street, Burlington, Vermont 05401

Dear David:

Our thanks to you and Sandrine for your leadership on Plan BTV. The two of you have worked arduously to produce an outstanding draft plan for our Downtown and Waterfront. It's been a remarkable undertaking and we're very excited to see the finished product and begin working together to implement recommendations.

I'm writing with some additional comments to consider for incorporation into the final planning document.

PARKING

We believe that parking is the single most important issue for the downtown. We note that every successful downtown in North America struggles with having "enough" parking. We believe in effective parking management and in pursuing alternative modes of transportation to reduce the need for parking.

- **Parking needs to be seen less as a last resort.** Every new development in the downtown will be affected by parking. The success or failure of development of new parcels and infill development will hinge on parking availability and parking requirements.
- **We see a disconnect between aspiration** (few or no automobiles in the downtown) **and reality** (private automobiles make up the majority of trips to our downtown). The predominant mode of transportation to our downtown is still the private automobile –whether those autos are fueled by gasoline, electricity or are hybrids. If and when all vehicles are powered by sources other than fossil fuels, we still believe automobiles will remain the primary means of transportation to our downtown.
- **We note an unrealistic expectation placed on public transit.** We must continue to improve public transportation, but we believe it is unrealistic to assume it can or will play a major role in solving our mobility and parking problems. To successfully compete against the private automobile, we must increase density in our region and secure predictable sources of public funding.
- **Private employers in the downtown are evolving from the traditional corporate headquarters to independently-owned businesses.** Our ability to provide parking increases our chances of capturing them, as we compete against suburban office spaces.
- **Retail and hospitality workers are an under-reported segment of the downtown workforce.** There are thousands of full and part-time retail and hospitality workers employed at our over 80 plus eating and drinking establishments and 200 plus retail and service stores. Our

retail and hospitality workers do not work a traditional 9 AM to 5 PM shift, and current bus service is often not a practical or realistic alternative.

- **Bicycles are an important alternative mode of transportation but have limitations.** Unless one lives close to Burlington and/or embraces northern Vermont's weather for bicycling in January, bicycles will have a minimal impact on solving our mobility and parking challenges.
- **We must advocate for multi-level parking when opportunities arise.** There are possible multi-level parking locations on the Waterfront (Pease Lot), public parking lots at Browns Court, Elmwood Avenue and Main & South Winooski can be redeveloped and multi-level parking included.

DOWNTOWN AS AN ECONOMIC ENGINE:

We believe there is room in the plan for greater emphasis on our downtown as the economic engine for the City. Our downtown provides employment and generates revenues that help fuel the many services Burlingtonians have come to enjoy and benefit from.

Many residents are not aware that the Downtown Improvement District (DID) accounts for just 2% of the total acres of the Grand List but generates 22% of total property taxes in the city. The DID pays \$147,813/acre compared to \$13,148/acre of the overall Grand List **(1)**.

There are approximately 12,210 people working within a half-mile of the intersection of Church and Main Street, of which 10,500 are employed within the boundaries of the downtown Study Area. This represents more than two-thirds (31%) of total employment in the City of Burlington (estimated at 33,800 workers as of 2010), and over 11 percent of total employment in the Burlington-South Burlington MSA. **(2)**

Our downtown employees – particularly those engaged in law, finance, accounting and architecture – play a critical role in our downtown's economy. They purchase millions of dollars each year in goods and services, attend our events and activities, and act as downtown's ambassadors to prospective visitors and employers.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND COMMUNITY POLICING:

Since 2000, when the Burlington Police Department introduced community policing, a range of collaborative partnerships have been initiated between the police department and downtown stakeholders to maximize the City's public safety resources. Every day, downtown stakeholders engage in efforts to identify problems and develop effective responses.

As the downtown matures and future funding for public safety is leveled or reduced, safety and security must continue to be an area of focus for the downtown. We must ensure that our downtown is a place where everyone can come and enjoy themselves in a safe and secure atmosphere. The vitality and attraction of the downtown area is enhanced when everyone feels welcomed and safe.

Planning of public and private spaces must incorporate the use of strategies like CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design). CPTED encourages changes in the physical design of our buildings, streets, sidewalks and parks to minimize opportunities for crime to be committed. Individual strategies can include increased security lighting, locking gates, landscape design that discourages intrusion, scheduling activities in certain areas to attract more people. CPTED practices can result in a dramatic reduction in crime, improved business climate and increased pedestrian activity and awareness.

Also, planning, zoning and land use impact police, fire and regulatory forces in our downtown. There is no current protocol for engaging Burlington Police and Fire Departments in planning decisions, and they are normally left out of the process.

SOCIAL SERVICES:

We note there is no mention of the role of our social service agencies in our downtown.

It is important to note that one in four Burlingtonians live at or below the poverty level (3). This reality is compounded in our City and downtown by a lack of affordable housing, rigors of substance abuse, and the cyclical nature of mental illness.(4) Reductions in mental health program funding have resulted in a state-wide shortage of psychiatric beds. Some people suffering from mental illness are having to opt for the Emergency Room.(5) Pressure on the State of Vermont's Corrections Department to release offenders into often structure-less settings has also created a fragile environment in both surrounding neighborhoods and in our downtown. Cuts in state and federal programs place additional pressure on both service providers and those receiving services. All of these issues are contributing to a rising level of dysfunction in our downtown.(4)

Our social service organizations are key downtown stakeholders and are making Herculean efforts to address these issues. Burlington has the highest concentration and number of social services in Chittenden County and the State. There are 32 non-profit and government organizations in Burlington delivering social services through 65 different locations– 32 of which are in the Downtown. (6)

Because we are a commercial and community center, our social services are used by those living in our state or region, other U.S. states and sometimes foreign countries. We believe this high concentration of social services can become easily unmanageable, if all stakeholders are not working together. We must be vigilant in our collective efforts to employ sound management practices, and advocate for continued financial support for our social service agencies, and build strong communication among downtown stakeholders.

We want to be known as a downtown that offers a diversity of uses and services. A balance of our commercial, residential and social services that sustains our downtown's economic vitality is essential. Therefore, we believe we must be sensitive to the future location of new social services in the downtown. Locations should be selected in a way that ensures

- social service agencies can protect the dignity of those receiving services,
- their location will not place additional burdens on police and fire departments.
- safety for those living, working and recreating in the downtown.
- safety for our more vulnerable and challenged citizens.
- the highest and best use of locations to maximize tax revenue, that in turn supports Burlington's high quality of life.

We believe the right balance requires careful thought and respectful discussion by all stakeholders through honest and forthright communication – and when needed, task forces and memoranda of understanding.

HOSPITALITY SECTOR:

Our downtown's hospitality sector should be involved in the planning and development of publicly funded investments in the downtown such as transportation, water and sewer, parking, and streetscape improvements. Hospitality leaders have very valuable insights to offer

People naturally seek safe, vibrant places to socialize – and our downtown has acquired a well-deserved reputation for its sociability. The sociability of our downtown is a major draw for tourists, new residents, businesses considering locating in the downtown and prospective college students. Burlington's hospitality sector is a large and growing economic engine. Our downtown is home to 30% of all of eating and drinking establishments in Chittenden County. There are more than 80 eating and drinking establishments in the downtown. In a study conducted in 2005, the Church Street Marketplace department estimated that the sector employed 2,100.

Downtown's night-time economy (starting at 6 PM and ending at 2 AM) is the most vibrant part of our hospitality sector. Closing times for bars mean that large numbers of patrons are on the streets at the same time in the early morning, increasing the likelihood of complaints from nearby neighbors, police calls, property destruction, general litter, and disorderly behavior. More downtown housing increases the possibilities of conflicts between residents and the night-time economy. Rather than approach these challenges from a strictly regulatory and compliance perspective, efforts must be undertaken to bring together bar and restaurant operators, public safety officials, city policy makers and residents to find solutions through collaboration. The city should more fully leverage resources provided through the International Downtown Association and Responsible Hospitality Institute.

The desire to live "where the action is" may be strong, but new downtown residents can be rudely awakened by the realities of living in a mixed-use district. New downtown housing developments must consider the realities of our night-time economy. Bedrooms, for example, should not be built facing busy public streets and thoroughfares. Soundproofing measures for windows and walls must be considered. Community covenants between residents and the City should be considered. The hospitality industry needs to be part of the process.

DESIGNING DOWNTOWNS FOR WOMEN

The economic power of woman is growing in the US.

- In 47 of the 50 largest US metro areas, single childless women in their 20's make more money than their male peers.
- The percentage of wives earning more than their husbands has grown from 25% in 1990 to 35%.
- Women hold sway over 51.3% of the nation's private wealth.

Today's women exercise more buying power and decisions than ever before.

- Eighty-five per cent (85%) of household buying decisions are made by women.
- 58% of online retail dollars were spent by women.
- 80% of US health care decisions were made by women.

In education, young women have pulled ahead of young men in higher education.

- In 2009, the percentage of women ages 25-29 holding a bachelor's degree or higher was 35% compared to 27% for men.
- By 2013, 60% of college enrollment will be women. (7)

Women are downtown's most frequent customer. Our downtown features the highest concentration of women's clothing and accessory stores in the region. Restaurateurs develop food and drink offerings to attract the preferences and palates of women. Our numerous downtown events and activities and our spectacular Waterfront draw women (and their children and families).

With all of this growing power and influence, Downtown Burlington – and downtowns across the country – continued to be planned and designed by men. Architecture, Engineering and Construction firms in the US (and Vermont) are predominantly led by men. What’s needed is a shift in thinking about how we will plan and design our downtown in the future. Our female customers have special needs well beyond what males require, and we must be attentive to them if we want to continue to be a place where women want to shop, dine, work and recreate.

Our female customers require higher standards for public amenities; we must strive to make our downtown welcoming to women. Public restrooms must be clean and regularly maintained. Parking garages must have better lighting, and be cleaner than they presently are. Anything less gives the impression that the City does not care and the garages are not safe. Restroom facilities must be clean and well maintained. Streets and sidewalks must be designed in a way that accommodates women’s footwear and strollers. Women also have a broader color spectrum than men – beyond the traditional whites, grays and blues of downtowns. Future designs need to include more vibrant colors in public (and private) development. Rather than painting the interiors of our municipal parking garages white, for example, we should be considering using wider range of vibrant colors.

HOUSING:

The plan states that “*a significant number of buildings on Church Street have upper stories that are vacant or underutilized.*” We do not believe the number to be as significant as stated. Our calculations show that there are approximately 378,000 square feet of leasable space on Church Street, excluding Burlington Town Center and Burlington City Hall. Currently, upper floors that we would define as vacant can be found at:

<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>FLOORS</u>	<u>TOTAL SQ. FT.</u>
12-18 Church	2 floors	7,200 (vacant)
46-50 Church	2 floors	<u>9,600</u> (vacant)

$$16,800/378,000 = 4 \%$$

We are not sure of TPUDC’s definition of “underutilized upper stories.” Space in upper stories is being utilized.

Thank you, again, for your hard work on the plan. We appreciate all that you’ve done for our Downtown and Waterfront.

Sincerely,

Jeff Nick, Chair
Church Street Marketplace District Commission

REFERENCES:

(1) Retail Market Feasibility Analysis – Downtown Burlington, VT. The Eisen Group, 2011.

- (2) Grand List for Downtown Improvement District ending 7/1/11; 2011-2012 Final Grand List Spreadsheet. <http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us/assessor/grandlist/> Prepared by Megan Olsen, Research Analyst, Church Street Marketplace, City of Burlington, VT. * Downtown Improvement District (D.I.D.) is bounded by the shoreline of Lake Champlain on the west, Pearl Street on the north, South Winooski Ave. on the east and Main Street (on the south) to the intersection of Battery Street and then extending southerly to include properties fronting on Maple Street. **Includes City of Burlington's commercial property tax rate of 120% plus Downtown Improvement District tax on commercial properties that subsidizes 2 Hours of Free Parking in three city-owned public parking garages.
- (3) Persons below poverty level, percent 2006-2010. U. S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates. Updated every year.
- (4) Interventionist Report, 2011. Matt Young, Supervisor, HowardCenter Street Outreach Team and HowardCenter Interventionist Program, November 2011
- (5) *Sleeping in Vermont Dumpster Shows Psychiatric Cuts' Cost*, Business Week, June 04, 2012 <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-06-04/sleeping-in-vermont-dumpster-shows-psychiatric-cuts-cost>; Mental Health System Straining A Year After Irene, Vermont Public Radio, Vermont Edition, Tuesday, 09/18/12
- (6) Analysis of non-profit organizations and governmental departments in Burlington, updated by the Church Street Marketplace, September, 2012.
- (7) US Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics; Woman Power: The Rise of the Sheconomy Time Magazine, November 22, 2010 <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2030913-1,00.html>