Sinex Town Center Mall Redevelopment Project

MYTHS BUSTED!

This list of **MYTHS: BUSTED!** was created by a team of determined and diligent citizens — **The Coalition for a Livable City**. Through hours of research, discussion, emails and attending countless city meetings, we have done our best to dispel misinformation and speak the truth. We encourage you to join us through our facebook page **"Stop the 14-story mall"** and our blog **http://coalitionforalivablecity.blogspot.com.** We need your help and your donations of any size for printing. Find out how by emailing us at **LivableBurlington@gmail.com.** Thanks for reading! Also, comment on articles in Vt digger, Seven Days and Burlington Free Press. Your voice is needed.

MYTH: PlanBTV stated the need for mall redevelopment, so the Sinex plan is good, yes?

BUSTED! Mall redevelopment as a general theme IS supported in PlanBTV, but that is where the connection ends. The Sinex project does not include moderately-priced housing, senior housing, public parks, green space, parking below ground, true street connectivity or livability in its 14-story three-towered mega-block. Very few of the guidelines set forth by PlanBTV for the mall redevelopment are actualized in the current proposal. A mall redevelopement is a good thing, but the current proposal is flawed in many ways.

MYTH: St. Paul and Pine Streets will be reconnected at street level for vehicular traffic, pedestrians and bicycles. These street "reconnections" will look and function as city streets

BUSTED! With this Mall it will take another half century or so before the City gets is original flat streets again. Pine Street connects through the existing Bank Street parking entrance and tunnel down under the office building, then up a 9% grade through a new opening at the corner of the existing parking garage nearest Pine Street onto Cherry Street—not usable by bicycles and pedestrians because of grades. The tunnel prevents use by City buses or trucks. For pedestrians, an always open arcade or atrium through the current corridor will likely be shared with bicyclists. St. Paul St. connection requires a 12% grade rising 15 feet up from Bank Street to the Mall entrance, then a 7 foot drop, just under 5% grade maximum for disability access from Mall entrance to Cherry Street. This "hump" prevents a pedestrian seeing through between Cherry and Bank Streets. The 12% grade from Bank St. to Mall entrance makes it inaccessible to persons with a handicap and too steep for cyclists.

MYTH: The public's consideration of how to redevelop the Burlington Town Center has been an inclusive 2-year public process

BUSTED! The public process began in January 2015 (18 months ago), but then almost an entire year went by without effective public engagement.) At the next major public meeting (January 2016), the project had changed significantly from what was presented 12 months earlier. And again, over the past 6 months, the latest version of the Burlington Town Center project is very different from the two versions presented in January 2015 and January 2016. In January 2015, Public input resulted in a preliminary sketch requiring no zoning changes. Student housing and above-ground parking were only introduced in 2016.

MYTH: To create density we need to build "up"

BUSTED! Density can be better achieved without high-rises. One block of an older neighborhood may contain many small businesses, studios, shops, restaurants, and apartments with more activity throughout the day and night than one block of a tall office style building with apartments above. Urban innovation and start-ups tend NOT to occur in tall building canyons but in mid-rise neighborhoods that spur interaction. High-rises are like vertical suburbs, sterile, isolating and unlivable. After extensive study of how humans behave in different kinds of environments, the great Danish architect and walkability guru, Jan Gehl, concluded that the most comfortable building height for urban pedestrians is 3 to 6 stories. In their passion for the highest possible densities as an antidote to low-density sprawl, too many urbanist advocates overlook the considerable benefits of still-relatively-high city density at a human scale. Paris, with buildings under 100 feet is as dense in some parts as Singapore with buildings 50+ stories high.

MYTH: Vertical growth helps economic diversity and vitality

BUSTED! European cities, for the most part, have maintained a human scale continuous urban fabric of 6-8 stories with a very fine textured street grid, and mix of uses. These planning principles reflect a different value system. Unlike High-rise construction which provides big returns to investors and developers, small footprint shops and apartments in a fine textured urban fabric yield smaller profits, spread out among many individuals and businesses in the community. Over centuries, this human scale urban fabric has proved to be adaptable to changing political and economic times, making the community resilient, and durable. The City of Paris, with buildings no taller than 100', supports continuous retail along the street, making every neighborhood walkable.

MYTH: Tall buildings are good for the environment and reduce energy and carbon-dioxide impacts

BUSTED! High-rise buildings are not the most ecologically sustainable form of construction. They are subject to the effects of too much sun and too much wind. Steel and concrete construction produces a lot of greenhouse gases. High-rise seldom meets the high sustainability goals its proponents claim. Energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions are driven by many consumption and lifestyle choices (food, travel, adventure sports, 2nd homes, etc.) in addition to housing and driving. Additionally, concurrent programs, such as increasing downtown parking, building roads, and expanding air service, work to increase emissions. Finally, tech-fixes almost always produce CO2 during the building phase, saving CO2 later. This applies to new buildings, and to solar panels! What actually occurs over time can be modeled and forecasted, but the details are critical.

MYTH: Tall buildings create livable cities

BUSTED! The impact of different forms of housing on social and mental health shows that high-rise living has numerous negative health consequences, especially for children, stay-at-home mothers, and elders. High-rises are less satisfactory than other housing forms for most people, and they are not optimal for children—social relations are more impersonal and helping behavior is less than in other housing forms and crime and fear of crime are greater. Based on the research relating to housing and mental health, Gary Evans, professor of environmental and developmental psychology at Cornell University, observed, "people living in high-rises seem to have more mental health problems than those living in low-rises or houses.....Adverse impacts of high-rise dwellings may be due to social isolation."

As for affordability, the higher a building rises, the more expensive the construction. The higher cost to build taller buildings means they tend to be luxury units, often for out-of-town investors. Tall buildings inflate the price of adjacent land, thus making the protection of historic buildings and affordable housing less achievable. In this way, they increase inequality. As Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren and French economist Thomas Piketty have documented, trickle-down economics definitely do not work.

MYTH: Density means more affordable housing

BUSTED! Density does NOT produce affordable housing: Instead of "trickle down" it means displacement, gentrification, more homelessness, and an accelerated loss of our existing low income housing stock. Periods of accelerated residential development in comparable cities have always directly coincided with more demolition of low-income housing, higher rents, lower vacancy rates, longer waiting lists for subsidized housing, increasing levels of homelessness and higher housing costs for all. A consequence of new development is removal of the existing supply of lower-density housing. Housing that's older, non-debt-supported and affordable gives way to new, more expensive housing.

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