

October 3, 2020

Department of Public Works  
645 Pine Street  
Burlington, Vt 05401

In Re. Burton conditional use permit/pedestrian and bicycle safety

Dear Mr. Padgett and DPW Commission,

As you are aware, Burton has plans to build a “hub” on their Industrial Avenue property to include a 1,500 person/500 vehicle concert venue. I live in one of the approximately 500 households closely surrounding the proposed Burton/HG venue and believe it is out of scale with the neighborhoods that surround it.

After a mere 45 minutes of deliberation, the Burlington DRB unanimously approved the Conditional Use Permit for this hub, potentially impacting homeowners for a lifetime. Despite multiple pleas by residents to create infrastructure that would keep their pedestrian and bicycle travel safe in the face of the potential onslaught of traffic to come, the DRB turned a blind eye.

If the city of Burlington, along with Burton/Higher Ground, cannot build the necessary infrastructure or create alternative transport modes to reduce the inevitable congestion through all quiet neighborhoods in the south end, then the venue should not be built until it is able to do so. We do not want a train wreck here ~ slowing down to look at this more thoroughly is, plain and simple, the right thing to do for the good of all people, not just the profits of the city, Burton and Higher Ground. To me, this is playing out like large corporate greed on a Vermont scale. You have forgotten the “little guy”.

Burlington is a city committed to encouraging and increasing the safety and use of human powered transport. The Bike Walk BTV plan was developed in 2017, before Burton/Higher Ground proposed their massive scale concert venue. The plan only envisions working with South Burlington to add 5 ft. bike lanes or sharrows on Queen City Park Road, as space allows, and presents a long-term plan for an advisory lane on the old Industrial Parkway section of what is now Queen City Park Road. Nothing in the current plan anticipates the potential fiasco that traffic will create for pedestrian and bicycle activity of both patrons and neighbors.

Even prior to Burton’s proposal, the Bike Walk BTV plan recognized the sorry state of the current bike/walk infrastructure in the area of Burton’s complex (see page 128 of the plan). I’m sure the DPW is well aware of the unprepared situation of our streets, and the DRB’s willingness to push this permit through without regard to safe transport for all.

I ask the DPW to closely review Burton’s Traffic Impact Study (TIS) and the subsequent April 23, 2020 Additional Information for South Burlington, Vermont to see that its results do not pass muster with the Bike Walk BTV plan that promotes, rather than discourages, biking and walking. Much of the current bike/walk infrastructure referenced by the TIS was clearly inflated in their report to make it sound light years better than it currently is.

The TIS (and therefor Burlington/Burton due to their approval thus far), overlooks and disregards the many neighbors who ALREADY walk and bike here with frequency. Our safety will be compromised when navigating the only neighborhood streets we have that get us to where we go with our car, bike or feet. Up to 500 vehicles will swarm in over the quiet neighborhood streets of Queen City Park Road (with one lane bridge) and down Home Avenue (with Railroad crossing) around the time I get home from work late or begin a family evening bike ride for a sunset or a quick meal on Pine Street.

Burton's TIS recommendations for pedestrians exiting to Home Avenue from the concert venue, as lines of traffic are streaming out (think Gutterson Field House) is: "...pedestrians walk along the eastern roadway (Old Industrial Ave.) edge or cross to the sidewalk". That this recommendation for pedestrian safety was acceptable to the city of Burlington's DRB (and the DPW) is foolery. Please go take another look. As you know, the infrastructure is not there.

Equally egregious and misleading (and difficult to decipher unless you go see it on site) is the description in the Burton TIS of current infrastructure on Queen City Park Road, which just isn't there. The TIS recommendations put drivers crossing the one-way bridge at risk due to potential pedestrians in unexpected places (particularly at dark, after attending a concert venue that serves alcohol, and likely with the added distraction of peers in the car). For pedestrians, it is malarkey to think they will find this alleged "side path", which is hidden and broken (and not called a sidewalk in the TIS for a reason). For bicyclists; given the lack of bike lanes, crosswalks, shoulder, and sidewalks, it may literally be too unsafe to navigate. I am a bicyclist. That we would discourage alternative modes of transport by not building the needed infrastructure before opening a venue of this magnitude is breathtaking. If there is not money yet to do what needs to be done, then the project should wait until it can be done right, and not after someone gets hurt.

Through choices the city of Burlington and Burton have made thus far, they are discouraging bike/walk and encouraging car travel, and this discourages me. Justin Worthley once said he saw this hub "the likes of Ben and Jerry's in Waterbury". The problem is, the parking lot for the Burton venue site does not abut a major state road such as route 100.

There are solutions to support bicyclists and walkers and, for obvious reasons, they should be developed BEFORE the Burton/Higher Ground concert venue comes to fruition. There are also ways to reduce the sheer number of vehicles that would clog these small neighborhood streets that cannot handle this high volume and still maintain some semblance of "neighborhood". The choices being made now will impact the people of the South End for a life time. It is a much larger impact than I believe the DRB is giving it credit for.

In addition to infrastructure upgrades, the city and Burton can increase the appeal of other modes of transport such as incentivizing free bussing from a parking lot on a main artery. Free busing would have the additional benefit of deterring concert goers from hanging around before and after the concert at one of the many enticing areas abutting the venue (Red Rocks park, railroad tracks, beaches, Champlain Parkway, quiet neighborhood side streets, Queen City Park neighborhood green), thus reducing the need for police presence and residents' disruptions.

At this time, Burton and the city of Burlington are not prepared to provide safe passage for all. I urge the DPW to:

1. Prioritize and significantly upgrade bike lanes/walkways that are planned in the Bike/Walk BTV plan document for Queen City Park Road and Industrial Parkway which were, shockingly, not flagged as a condition for permit by the Burlington DRB.
  - a. Identify funding and do this BEFORE the venue opens, in order to keep all people safe ~ and neighbors at peace.
2. Identify creative solutions for alternative transport (such as bussing). Alleviate car idling and congestion and reduce the need for heavy traffic and parking on streets ill equipped to handle it through the years.

This is possible!

Sincerely,

Wendy Bratt

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