

Subject: Public Comment against, Project ZP-22-199 – 51 Elmwood Lot Pod Village

Scott,

I saw your name on this project, the Elmwood parking lot pod village, so I'm sending these materials to you, with a cc to Board members, for posting with the other materials on this project. I see it's on the Development Review Board agenda for tomorrow night, May 17.

I discovered when looking at the documents filed for the hearing tomorrow that few public comments about the project are included.

As a Public Works Commissioner, at the March 16, 2022 PWC meeting, I voted against the choice of the Elmwood lot for this pod village. On May 12, 2022 I spoke at the Ward 2/3 NPA against endorsing the project. Please include this message and the attached documents as part of the Board's record for consideration on this project.

In communications with CEDO Director Pine in preparation for the 3/16 PWC meeting, I was shocked to learn that no homeless folks had been consulted about the plan for the Elmwood lot pods, nor had any of the social service agencies. I was particularly concerned that none of the Sears Lane residents had been involved in how to replace the housing they had lost, or where the pods could most beneficially be located.

I'm attaching the scant information the Public Works Commission received in March upon which it was expected to vote on the Elmwood lot project. Also attached is a copy of my communications with Director Pine seeking information prior to that March 16 PWC meeting and his response that no homeless people had been consulted nor had social service agencies.

I'm including my comments made at the 5/12/2022 NPA meeting, along with a section from the John F.C. Turner book I refer to in my NPA comments, which partially informs my opinion about this project.

I acknowledge this plan has been made by well-meaning people. But they are frankly, well-meaning housed people deciding how unhoused people should live. The fact that no bicycle facilities were included other than the two spaces required by the DRB reveals just one blind-spot caused by excluding from the decision-making, the very people expected to live there. The lack of planning for winter usage is another blind spot. Are pod residents all supposed to fit into the 573 square foot Community Center with the other folks also seeking services there, to socialize in the winter?

Houseless people make choices about their housing based on their preferences and their resources. We can benefit them best by listening to their choices and providing resources to help them achieve housing that works for them. This plan perpetuates dependency on social services.

The project, sadly, will be a costly, short-term experiment. It will also be dangerous for pod residents, neighbors and other residents of the Old North End who regularly pass down Elmwood Avenue to get to the downtown. The 9-0 vote by the Church Street Marketplace Commission against using the Elmwood lot location for a pod village should be heeded. After this three-year, million-dollar experiment, I predict that Burlington will be in the same place it is now regarding homelessness.

Solveig Overby