Defeat the 430 million Burlington Main Street Proposal with its Four Vermont Four High Crash Intersections—Avoided Any Serious Safety, Equity and Climate Change Public Review and Analytics

Burlington voters decision on the The Burlington $30 million Main Street vague investment, a so-called “Great Streets” design, on the March 1, Ballot item 4, remains a bad choice at a time of change where safety first along with equity and climate change which comprise the new paradigm for downtowns and neighborhoods must prevail.

Michael Long (https://vtdigger.org/2022/02/18/michael-long-tif-districts-are-an-economic-development-boondoggle/) “TIF districts are an economic development boondoggle” (VT Digger, February 18, 2020) details the diversion of millions of dollars from City’s municipal and school tax resources using “Tax Increment Financing” (TIF). What the $30 million actual used for, vague at this point, also is equally disturbing at a time of transformative transportation change in what we invest and how we invest in downtowns and low income, racially diverse neighborhoods like the Old North End and King Maple which borders part of the Main Street, section from South Union (Edmunds Schools grounds) and westerly to Battery Street. Our Burlington core area suffers overburden with the majority of the City’s 20 high crash intersections (111 statewide), 11, generating 140 injuries a decade with great human suffering and overall costs of $35 million estimated by VTrans.

The City in a decade has not addressed a single VT high crash intersection to maximize safety in the last decade with the single exception last year when the City Council overruled Public Works in the case of Colchester/East intersection. The four high crash Main Street intersections along generate 78 injuries per decade and $15 million estimated costs using the most recent VTrans high crash report data. We live in a nation “trailing” other nations as US Department of Transportation Pete Buttigieg said in releasing a roadway safety strategy last month calling for a Safe System Approach in road investments to reverse the US three decade decline in safety from #1 in 1990, a decline which accelerated during covid and during a period 2010-2021 when pedestrian deaths increased
46%, disproportionately affecting people of color. (https://www.transportation.gov/NRSS)

Yes, our core area of downtown and adjacent neighborhoods are overburdened by traffic and its terrible price exacted in injury and death even though most of the streets involved feature 25 mph speed limits. Five of the six west end of North Street intersections, for example, are high crash intersections with a rate of 46 injuries per decade—the new standard intersection, the roundabout, at five Vermont downtown intersections recorded just one injury a decade in their first half century of operation. The weekly roughly one pedestrian or bicycle injury in Burlington (about 2 car occupants suffer injuries weekly) are concentrated in the core of the City where 32% of residents do not have a car and are dependent on walking and public transit. And yes those residents are in neighborhoods with the lowest incomes and highest concentration of people of color—and they disproportionately suffer from the historic and current lack of safety predominant in the carcentric age, an age now ready to shift to safety, to minimizing climate emissions, and ending the high injury rates in our City, particularly first and foremost to the City low income and persons of color.

The Main Street project includes the S Winooski intersection, highest crash intersection in Vermont and part of the four S Winooski blocks privately referred to as “Death Valley” for its lack of safety, but never mentioned as a safety issue in the hour long Great Streets City presentation February 1. (The words “climate change” and “equity” were never uttered either.)

Burlington City Council has adopted to major policies directly related to the Main Street proposal never discussed since the last public engagement on Great Streets date back six years to 2016 before Racism as a Public Health Emergency and Climate as a Public Health Emergency were adopted. Great Streets never address these issues nor was safety even a consideration in the original scheme.

Please vote “No” on Ballot item 4 when there is no rush, there has been no public process, and we truly are at an inflection point where transportation safety will finally be first priority combined with dealing up front with racial equity, the poor and climate change!
cannot in any way be supported if you care about the safety of residents and
electives, care about racial and income equity, or care about climate changes.
The proposal fails all three tests. And the Tax Increment Finance scheme
rejected in a recent Vermont Digger commentary itself adds to the fatal flaws for
this question.

Not only has there been no public engagement on this ballot question for six
years until just days before ballots hit our mailbox about February 11, but the
entire issue of safety has been ignored, a clear case of malign neglect on the
part of Public Works and the consultants hired to promote it the proposal.

On February 1, the two hour zoom meeting on the proposed $32 million Main
Street investment—from South Union Street to Battery Street drew about 20
participants, the first public engagement in six years. In fact public engagement
never took place in a serious way. No advisory committees, no involvement of
Neighborhood Planning Assemblies (NPAs), no analysis of safety at some of
the most dangerous intersections in Vermont. NPA Wards 2/3, NPA Wards 1/8
and NPA Ward 6 all touch the Main Street proposal roadway section and NPA
Ward 5 a block south from Saint Paul to Battery Streets arguably deserve to be
part of any discussion of roadway changes.

No plans, specifications, estimates, or intersection designs have been studied or
presented—just really just some pretty pictures. Pretty pictures of trees,
sidewalks and bike lanes but no pretty pictures of intersections. This is not
sufficient to justify giving a $32 million blank check to Mayor Weinberger and
the Department of Public Works. Champlain Parkway need not be mentioned.

Worst of all, four of the seven cross intersections—So. Union (Edmunds Schools
crossing), So. Winooski, Saint Paul and Battery are on the Vermont Agency of
Transportation list of the 111 highest crash intersections in Vermont! See the
data below on these intersections (PDO is “property damage only” crashes).

Formal%202012-2016%20High%20Crash%20Location%20Report.pdf

And the downtown gateway So. Winooski intersections holds the honor of being
the highest crash rating in Vermont!

The four high crash intersections record an average of 7.8 injuries per year, 58
total crashes and an economic cost of $1.5 million a year. But until prompted
by attendees the Public Works staff and consultants never brought forth the
safety issue and declined to even acknowledge that So. Winooski/Main is the
#1 highest crash intersection in the state and a roundabout, the gold standard
for pedestrian safety, is shown as a gateway and safety design in the recently completed Winooski Corridor study!

Burlington has 20 high crash intersections, 18% of the 111 current VTrans list while our City and its Public Works Department has refused to address safety as a priority for addressing at any of these intersections—its refusal to prioritize safety in the case of East Avenue/Colchester Ave was overruled this past year by the City Council who ordered if money were available the safest-for-all-modes roundabout would be installed. [Note the roundabout is the first Dutch type roundabout with a separate lane for pedestrians and cyclists--now very likely to go forward as UVM plans hundreds of students to be housed in new dormitories in the Trinity Campus area.]

The Great Streets proposal, truly a boondoggle, comes as the US Department of Transportation adopted a National Roadway Safety Strategy last month, essentially Vision 0, using a Safe System Approach on street investments along with Safe System Intersections. Secretary Buttigieg states the safety initiative must include not only safety but also equity and climate change elements—the words “climate change” never were spoken in the one hour consultant presentation last night. Nor for the matter was equity even though King Maple, our lowest income neighborhood and largest community of color in Vermont borders Main Street from Saint Paul to Battery! https://www.transportation.gov/NRSS

So please consider a “no” vote on the fatally flawed Great Streets proposal—an amount of expenditure it might be noted more than sufficient for the City share of a light rail line from the waterfront via Marketplace to UVMMC-UVM to University Mall!