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January 7, 2013

Open Letter to the People of Burlington,

Happy New Year!

It was a great honor to attend and participate in Burlington's 30th First Night as your mayor. Thank you again for your trust and support over the last nine months – we will be working hard to continue make good on that confidence throughout 2013.

Waterfront + Downtown Public Investment Action Plan

The Administration has begun 2013 by launching our most significant initiative yet, our Waterfront and Downtown Public Investment Action Plan (PIAP). Over the next two years, through a highly-transparent and efficient process, we will identify and begin to implement prudent public investments in the waterfront and downtown intended to create jobs, make Burlington more affordable, and to grow the property tax base and other municipal revenues. By acting collaboratively and purposefully, the City will execute the PIAP without impacting municipal property tax rates while creating a more livable city.

This initiative is the next step in my commitment to get the City moving again.

What is the PIAP?

As a result of two state-approved Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts, the City has the opportunity to make tens of millions of dollars of waterfront and downtown public infrastructure investments in the coming years without impacting property tax rates. In an era of declining federal funding and constrained local resources, this funding is precious and irreplaceable.

The PIAP is a public process for identifying what TIF investments the City will make. The waterfront process will begin with a request for concepts open to all in February, involve a Public Investment Team of respected individuals who will review and evaluate these concepts as a public body, and culminate in a public vote on a slate of investments in the spring of 2014. A similar process for downtown investments will follow the waterfront effort.

A summary of the PIAP process can be found at www.burlingtonvt.gov/mayor.

What problems will the PIAP address?

With the snow and holiday lights, Church Street looked magical on First Night. There is so much to celebrate in our City that it is easy to lose sight of our challenges.

However, our challenges are significant and growing. Household incomes in Burlington have been flat for many years. A startlingly large percentage of our schoolchildren are living in poverty. Too many talented individuals are forced to leave the region because they cannot break into our tight job market. In terms of local housing prices relative to local incomes, Burlington has become one of the most expensive cities in the country to live in – a phenomenon that threatens to push the middle class out of the City. Municipal expenses are rising at a faster rate than revenues.

Our best solution to many of these challenges is mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, green, "infill" redevelopment of our downtown and waterfront in a manner that enhances the character of the City we love. By reclaiming the surface parking lots and other underutilized urban lots that total more than 1/3 of the City's core with human-scaled housing and office space above busy sidewalk shops and cafes, well-designed infill development has the potential to increase housing and job opportunities, grow municipal revenues, and allow Burlington businesses to grow and evolve.

This promise of the waterfront and downtown has been understood for decades. Numerous city plans, including the current PlanBTV, have sought to move the city towards this vision of an even more dynamic and vibrant waterfront and downtown.

Yet, despite broad agreement in this vision, advancement toward it has been very slow in recent years. More than a decade has passed since the last significant progress reclaiming the waterfront from its industrial past. Over the last twenty years – as cities around the country saw large increases in downtown residents for the first time since WWII – Burlington has built only a handful of new homes in the city center.

The purpose of the PIAP is to achieve progress towards this long-sought vision of Burlington by identifying and implementing public infrastructure investments that: catalyze additional investment in Burlington, grow our property tax base and other city revenues, advance PlanBTV and other long-standing City plans, increase public access and enjoyment of the waterfront, and increase housing opportunities for all.

What kind of public infrastructure investments will be considered?

The range of catalytic public infrastructure investments that could result from the PIAP is broad. We envision funding investments as small as converting two parking spaces into a micro-park to enliven a retail street, to a major staircase and elevator designed to get more pedestrians to and from the waterfront, to a substantial expansion of the lakefront boardwalk and marina.

What does this mean for the Moran Plant Redevelopment?

The Moran Plant is located within the Waterfront TIF district and redevelopment proposals for it will be considered as part of this process. We anticipate that one or more concepts for the building and site will be considered as part of this process. However, after nearly three decades of failed efforts to redevelop Moran it is time to broaden the waterfront initiatives under consideration. The PIAP will ensure that potential public investment in Moran will be weighed against a wide range of other public investment opportunities.

Next steps

We will be seeking public comment on the PIAP at NPAs and through other community venues throughout the month of January. You are also invited to e-mail comments on the plan to CEDO Director Peter Owens (peter@burlingtonvt.gov) and to post your comments publicly at the Mayor's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/MiroBTV). Our intent is to submit a finalized version of the plan for City Council approval at the January 28, 2013 meeting.

In February the Request For Concept period will begin and will be open to all. You will be invited to submit concepts of your own and to comment on those submitted by others. One year from now we expect to have an exciting slate of public improvements to put before the voters in March, 2014.

I invite you to review and engage the PIAP and to share the considerable enthusiasm my Administration has about the exciting effort ahead.

Sincerely,

Miro Weinberger