

Comments: PlanBTV-South End — Amey Radcliffe — include in public record

Overall, there is much improvement to the new draft. Hooray! Here though, are some thoughts and suggestions. I've provided the first few words of the paragraph I am referencing in each comment.

1. Since much of the description and discussion of the South End, is really about the Enterprise District, I believe this should be clarified up front. The first line could read "Second only to Burlington's downtown, the South End Enterprise District (SEED) has long been an economic engine for the City and the region" A further suggestion would be to call the area the South End Arts and Enterprise District (SEAED) since there is a state designation in place for the arts district. This would serve to "brand" the area in a way that fits with both the reality and the aspiration of the area in many people's minds.
2. "Demand for spaces" section paragraph: The fact that industrial rents are higher in the SEED than in Chittenden County may be a misleading fact. One, there is very little industrial space in Burlington besides the SEED. The only other area may be the Riverside Ave. area. As for Chittenden County as a whole, the comparison is apples and oranges. Consider the "no man's land" feel to most industrial parks of CC in Williston, Essex, Winooski and Colchester. There is no historic charm and very little in the way of creative or artist activity. Two, proximity to downtown Burlington also makes the SEED very unique. It's a no-brainer that there is much desirability in the SEED for arts, enterprise, innovation and industry. We have the vibe, we have the space, we have the parking!
3. "Office rents....." paragraph: This section could use some more clarification. One, The kind of office space that is comparable between downtown and the SEED is limited to only certain buildings. The fact that rents are comparable in such spaces makes sense but the fact that parking is available shouldn't be downplayed. As a former renter in an upstairs Church Street office, I can attest to the every day challenge of finding free parking downtown (a preferable choice to a high monthly parking cost) and the fact that the lack of parking is challenging for clients as well. The SEED represents a lower cost more accessible alternative, so while office rents of a particular kind may be comparable, the ease of the SEED far exceeds downtown. The other important point is that the SEED offers a different kind of rental space than downtown in the rougher, older and less improved buildings and for these buildings, rent is much less than downtown. Our own move from a 400 square foot office in downtown allowed us to triple the space for less than double the cost. As a creative business, the roughness of the space is in fact desirable. I believe this less tangible quality to the SEED should be factored-in in desirability as well as what in fact needs to be preserved. I have seen many other offices in the SEED's older buildings that have this same quality and it's what draws the ooohs and ahhh's from a particular demographic of creative people and entrepreneurs.

4. “Increasing difficulty in finding affordable....” Paragraph: Some community experience may show that small spaces are mainly what is in demand at least in the artist community. In the Howard block, when a small space is available (less than 1000 sq feet) News travels through the community and a shuffle happens where one artist/business upgrades to a larger space, and an artist that may have been part of a collective space will opt for their own private space. The only time that does not occur is when a very large space opens. Case in point: When the artist community learned that Burlington Furniture would be moving to 747, the interest arose but because of the large amount of space and the total monthly cost, it represented too big a “nut” to crack for most artists. The space took several months to rent. The Unsworth’s did initially try for something closer to “market rate rent” due to the fact that the space was well improved by Burlington Furniture but in the end, the prices are more comparable to other Howard spaces. (8/ft for finished, 6/ft for warehouse) Unsworth’s difficulty in renting this space required them to hire Vermont Commercial to help. It is now under contract by two creative entities who will share it. The HR&A market study leaves out some important nuances to our SEED – in the same way I believe Goody Clancy and Civic Moxie also missed some particular phenomena of our area that needs consideration if we are to preserve the area for what it does, why people like it and what will keep it from further gentrification. Lastly, another local story that has inspired conversation in the community. Urban Moonshine wanted to stay in the SEED for its manufacturing facility but ran into compliance issues. Many of us wonder why CEDO and the City could not have stepped in to help make something work for them. This is the kind of business that is a good fit for the SEED. Bruce Seifer did a lot in his tenure to help businesses thrive and stay in the SEED. This kind of preservation effort should be continued. Embracing the area as the most vibrant creative economy center of Vermont can’t be emphasized enough. To further this thought: CEDO could also consider the following. What if they provided a space management service so that when a larger space like Burlington Furniture opens, they manage the space by breaking it into multiple smaller affordable spaces that are the ones MOST in demand? A small increase to sq ft rates for each space could cover operating costs if this is not looked upon with a high-profit motive. This would be a preservation effort for affordable spaces and perhaps the building owner could be given some incentives to keep yearly increases minimal to provide a long term affordability.
5. “An evolving economy and workforce....” Paragraph: I like the notion of diversity of jobs in the SEED. I also like the idea that the industrial/manufacturing/innovation/entrepreneurship aspects to the SEED help provide economic diversity for the city overall. Downtown is largely a mix of office, professional services, retail, restaurant and hospitality. A worker downtown could be a lawyer, a psychologist, a store clerk, a waitress or a housekeeper in a hotel. The evolution of downtown with increases in the hospitality industry, means that there is a big gap between high wage earners and lower wage earners. The SEED may offer a greater breadth of wage levels than downtown due to the fact that there is room for larger more diverse businesses

like Rhino, Edlund, Burton and Dealer. This should be encouraged and the balance of this kind of industry and manufacturing with retail and restaurant should be closely watched.

6. “Retail, entertainment and service uses....” Paragraph: This introduction of this facet of business, may in fact be the downfall to the SEED. Given that the framers of the original restrictions of the SEED prohibited certain uses and required certain perimeters should be revisited for today’s situation. What kinds of retail? What kinds of restaurants? Brattleboro’s downtown has discouraged chain stores. This has created a more interesting and unique downtown. Should “making” be an aspect of all retail/hospitality – or Vermont-made? I don’t agree with the idea of “strong demand from workers who are looking for places to eat, shop, exercise and socialize after work”. What makes the SEED desirable for many is parking... plain and simple. With the new downtown core parking costs, this has probably become even more true. Why try to park downtown to go to Penny Cluse or Magnolia if you can park at the Spot? Why wrestle with downtown parking to get a drink when you can park more easily at Citizen Cider? Regardless, an influx of more retail establishment and restaurants is not necessarily a good thing for the SEED.
7. “A demand for housing in the South End....” This section needs work. Firstly, discussions of “crisis” and “scarcity” could benefit from more clarity. From my understanding in listening to Michael Monte and others. the real problem is in fact a problem with affordability. Both subsidy level and all housing below market rate is needed in our city and in our region. While “workforce housing” is sometimes the term given for BMR housing, I think it’s a misrepresentation to say there is a “demand for housing in the South End to accommodate a growing workforce”. According to conversations with over 40 businesses, members of SEA did not find a conclusive call for worker housing from large SEED businesses. And in fact, the housing survey that went out to SEED businesses was so flawed that one large company did not want to give it out to employees as they thought it poorly executed. My own experience found two significant problems. One was that despite my own disclosure that I live in the country outside Burlington and I am happy doing so, the survey allowed me down a trail of hypothetical questions “if you did want to move would you want to live in x, y or z?....” My answers were not applicable and the survey should not have allowed me to continue. There were also leading questions along the lines of “wouldn’t you like to live in the industrial south end?” without the benefit of explaining current zoning restrictions and why they are in place which may bring about a different answer. In short, this section is misleading the data from which conclusions are being drawn is questionable.
8. As for the bullet “Employees of the South End businesses....” The issue raised here could most simply be solved with a good park and ride at Kmart or another accessible lot with a Pine Street shuttle every 10 minutes. Many people like myself, like living outside of Burlington for land, fresh air, proximity to outdoor

- activities like skiing and a less crowded environment. This will not change with housing in the South End.
9. Last bullet in this section should read “However, the demand for new housing in the Enterprise District has the potential....”
 10. I would add a bullet in the same section that states an effort to utilize lots and opportunities that already exist in residentially zoned areas of the South End including behind Champlain School, the Pine Street Deli corner, an additional floor on Jackson Terrace, and a below market rate housing building created by CHT and Housing Vermont by renovating the Blodgett building in an affordable manner to create small units of housing for many people who need it.
 11. Page 3. “As we look to the future” section... what is meant by “redefining the one-size-fits-all approach to land use regulation” This could use clarification.
 12. Strategies section. I’m skeptical of the sub-district approach for a few reasons. One is that it serves to divide an area that actually needs more connection. Because the SEED is a large area geographically and right now the best method to connect to outlying points is by car, we need to rethink transportation to maximize connection. Ideas such as city bikes, regular shuttle buses, trolley, monorail, tubes, tunnels, and other creative solutions should be considered to consolidate not separate areas for maximum benefit. What happens in my own block is fascinating with regard to shared services and resources amongst businesses. With a city-sponsored transport of people and goods, this could become District-wide.
 13. Page 7 – preserving arts and affordability. The number one way to preserve affordability is to stem gentrification. Many areas around the country and the world are looking at this issue.
 14. Page 9. “create zoning and development regulations....” I’d like to see this section expand to discuss more than just artist affordability, and perhaps it belongs in an earlier section. I’d like to see zoning and development regulations to help expand the creative, innovative, entrepreneurial and artistic possibilities of the SEED. How can zoning be used as a tool to direct change toward a most favorable goal.

Finally some overall comments:

1. We need more studies. We need a study that looks at the current climate of manufacturing/industry/artistry/innovation/entrepreneurship and makes recommendations for creating a fostering environment for more incubator facilities, micro-manufacturing and Vermont style business activity. What are

the ways to foster this and what are the threats to it. The path is started, how do we help it grow?

2. Gentrification study. What are the causes and effects? How is it discouraged? What guidelines/restrictions thwart it? What can Burlington do that other communities have failed at?
3. Study of how small cities come together to create amazing cultural centers. How did North Adams create Mass MOCA? How did the Torpedo Factory get done? What tools are available that do not require housing as a method? What federal grants could be utilized to create an energy innovation hub or a center for invention/innovation/entrepreneurship for all people including new americans, refugees, and marginalized populations. How can creativity be used for the greater good?
4. The plan is missing an important ingredient and one that needs to come from the community in a deliberate way: A “mission statement” for the SEED. It would be a statement of purpose, vision and the guiding principles to achieve it. This could be achieved through a community lead visioning workshop with much greater depth than what has been provided thus far. It could start with the revised draft of Plan BTV SE as a foundation, but should not be city run if it is to have true community buy-in. Many active and engaged citizens would appreciate this opportunity to create a simple vision directive that is what all future efforts are measured against in the same way a corporation measures its activities against its mission statement and brand identity. I have met with a woman who does this work for a living and would be willing to offer her services to run such a workshop. Do let me know if you would consider this idea and I will happily champion it in the community.

Lastly I offer my own participation in the next efforts of plan BTV-SE. I would volunteer to join the Collaborative Working Group and I would offer my design services for any next drafts at a reduced rate.

Thanks for reading my lengthy comments and ideas.

Thanks for the opportunity.

Amey Radcliffe,

Artist, co-owner of Gotham City Graphics now in our 27th year.