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Long Range Planning and the South End

The suggestions made by the consultants and P&Z staff include some interesting planning principles but these could be usefully enhanced and made more specific.

The consultants urge the City to address the limited amount of available land in the Enterprise District and the larger South End. We know we can't encroach on the Superfund site but there are several areas where land can be "reclaimed" for uses congruent with the function of the South End as an arts and enterprise zone.

First, create incentives through zoning and other land use tools to replace incompatible or "stagnant" uses of land with arts and enterprise structures. Stagnant parcels include the former DPW lot, the self-storage area, the railroad right of way toward Pine at Sears Lane, and associated surface parking. The incompatible uses include the gasoline station at Pine and Lakeside. This latter not only complicates the traffic pattern at that intersection and impedes pedestrian access essential for vibrant sidewalk use, including coming and going from the Champlain Elementary School, but like all filling stations, inevitably emits carcinogenic fumes as drivers pump gas and as tanker trucks top up the underground tanks. Such facilities belong on major roadways far from food service, retail activity, and primary schools.

Second, the plan should directly address the largest optional use of space in the South End, the proposed Champlain Parkway. This route, following a right of way along C1 and C2 which is at minimum 100' feet wide and wider toward Shelburne Road, represents a profligate waste of opportunity. The opportunity cost in an area of limited building potential is enormous and irrational. Beyond that, the C1 and C2 interdict Pine and three other east-west streets, contravening the planning goal stated in this document of enhancing street connectivity. To what end could this publicly-owned right of way be put? It would be entirely within the planning prerogative of Planning & Zoning and thus a clear field for the exercise of that body's skill set. By preserving existing street connectivity and improving Briggs as a local street adjacent to the planned City Market branch, a great deal of street frontage would become available for sale to private developers, for green space, and for non-profit incubator space for arts and manufacturing. This is a no-brainer. And having mentioned City Market, we know that their plot is twice the size they need. The City should strike a blow for enhanced manufacturing by committing staff time to create a food processing hub next to City Market where local produce can be prepared for retail sale and restaurant distribution. Potential partners--the Intervale Center, City Market, Healthy Living, and others come to mind to help with this effort.

Third, the city owns land directly within the Arts & Enterprise District. This should be used to house an arts hub in new and renovated historic structures. Such a hub would include shared arts facilities such as a retail outlet, forge, performance and rehearsal space for dance, theater, and music, along with individual studios. This is especially

important now that the City appears to have closed down Memorial Auditorium. A collaboration of SEA, SEBA, BCA in partnership with participating colleges could form a governing board that handled design, rental, and marketing of this new, nonprofit facility, including coordinating grant applications.

Fourth, the proposed system of artist certification won't keep down rents. It is cumbersome and permeable as Manhattan's SoHo proved. Nor does it address the generational dynamic, with artists aging and needing to give over space to a new generation. Two better solutions are available. The first is ownership and management of a multi-unit studio structure by a non-profit foundation on whose board tenants are well-represented. The second is direct cooperative ownership by artist occupants. The obvious candidate for such a project is the complex behind SEBA itself. The City should commit itself to working with the existing artist occupants, BCA, SEA, SEBA, and other interested parties in purchasing these buildings or securing a longterm lease on them and organizing either foundation purchase or cooperative purchase.

Rather than committing energy and resources to marketing the South End, given the existing demand for space there and its present visibility in the region, planners should focus on improving the Pine Street corridor, in particular the Lakeside/King segment. Sidewalks need to be widened, dedicated bike lanes added, and a roundabout placed just south of Curtis Lumber which would connect a new street to South Champlain Street. If Pine between this roundabout and King were made one-way north and the new street one-way south, traffic flow would be greatly improved, congestion reduced, and space created for new and separate bike and walk paths that would bring additional people into the Arts & Enterprise District without displacing existing businesses or encroaching on railyard functions. This minimal change is far less costly and more useful than the various railyard proposals currently under discussion by the City.

The conflict between space utilization and parking repeats itself in this document. We need parking but surface lots are among the key areas where building could take place. What's the solution? The answer lies in multiple initiatives. CCTA is already planning to increase bus service to 15 minute intervals along Pine, something that would seem to require keeping the south end of Pine open and better connected to the shopping complex at Hanniford/Lowe's. More busses mean fewer cars and less demand for parking. Somewhere close to the former K-Mart parking lot and structure, a multi-level parking lot for commuter and longterm parking should be built to tie into local mass transit, including the shuttle system serving the hill institutions. That opens up a large area around Lakeside for uses other than surface parking.

As we transition toward non-automobile access, parking will continue to be important as the plan says but can be more creatively added behind and under structures to maintain a pedestrian-friendly street scape. Part of that street scape should include a linear green corridor from the Champlain School clear to the lake that includes ponds, bridges and paths that promote new housing. Tank farms on the NY side have largely been eliminated and I expect that this will also be the case for the tanks north of Flynn. That

area could be redeveloped, in part as open space, in part as the plan calls for, as maker-space.

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