

South End Innovation District

Public Engagement Summary



Public Engagement

Introduction

The South End Innovation District is a concept generated through the planBTV: South End planning process, which included extensive public engagement. In implementing the plan's recommendation to create the Innovation District, City staff have facilitated and participated in opportunities to engage the community on how its vision may have changed in the years subsequent to planBTV: South End's adoption, particularly in light of the housing question and the COVID-19 pandemic. This public input summary documents feedback gathered at the following engagement events:

- Three Ward 5 NPA Meetings
- One in-person public meeting
- One virtual public meeting
- One web-based Storymap providing history, context and rationale for the District
- One web-based Miro engagement board open to the public for the month of July
- One South End Arts & Business Association Annual Meeting
- One Burlington Farmers Market
- Seven Stakeholder Advisory Group Meetings

Ward 5 NPA

City staff from the Office of City Planning, CEDO and DPW participated in three Ward 5 NPA meetings. Two of these meetings – March 17th and May 19th, featured staff presentations and an open discussion period in which NPA members commented on and asked questions about the proposed zoning amendment. A third meeting was facilitated by the NPA and was an opportunity for City staff to listen and respond to community concerns and priorities with respect to the South End as a whole, along with related infrastructure initiatives, including Champlain Parkway, the South End Multimodal Center Feasibility study, and the Barge Canal. Throughout these three NPA events, the

following themes arose:

Ecology

The area's ecology has been a primary topic at the Ward 5 NPA meetings. Specifically, many meeting participants advocated for the continued conservation of the Barge Canal. While the Barge Canal and immediately adjacent land is not within the proposed district boundary, the district's development will impact this ecosystem. Recognizing potential impacts, multiple residents expressed a desire for the City to allow ongoing natural regeneration of the Barge Canal land and water to continue. Indeed, the Barge Canal is rich in biodiversity and key to sustaining species populations will be continuing efforts to maintain and improve water quality in the streams and wetlands that drain to the Barge Canal.

Mobility

A frequent discussion topic at NPA meetings has been how residents move through their neighborhood today and how future development may impact these travel patterns. Within the general theme of mobility, a few common community goals were expressed:

- Many residents spoke about their neighborhood's walkability and proximity to the lake as being valued amenities. As such, multiple residents expressed a desire for future development to maintain, improve and expand upon pedestrian infrastructure, particularly that which would improve access to the lake. Meeting attendees also noted that the district is within walking distance of downtown, including the train station
- The Harrison Avenue bike path connection at the western edge of the city-owned 68 Sears Lane parcel is a critical link for local residents to access the waterfront and bike path. Numerous Ward 5 residents expressed a desire to see this connection maintained and improved.
- Where current and future employees, residents and visitors of the Innovation District will park was a common topic. Numerous residents of the Lakeside neighborhood commented that many HULA-based workers currently park in their

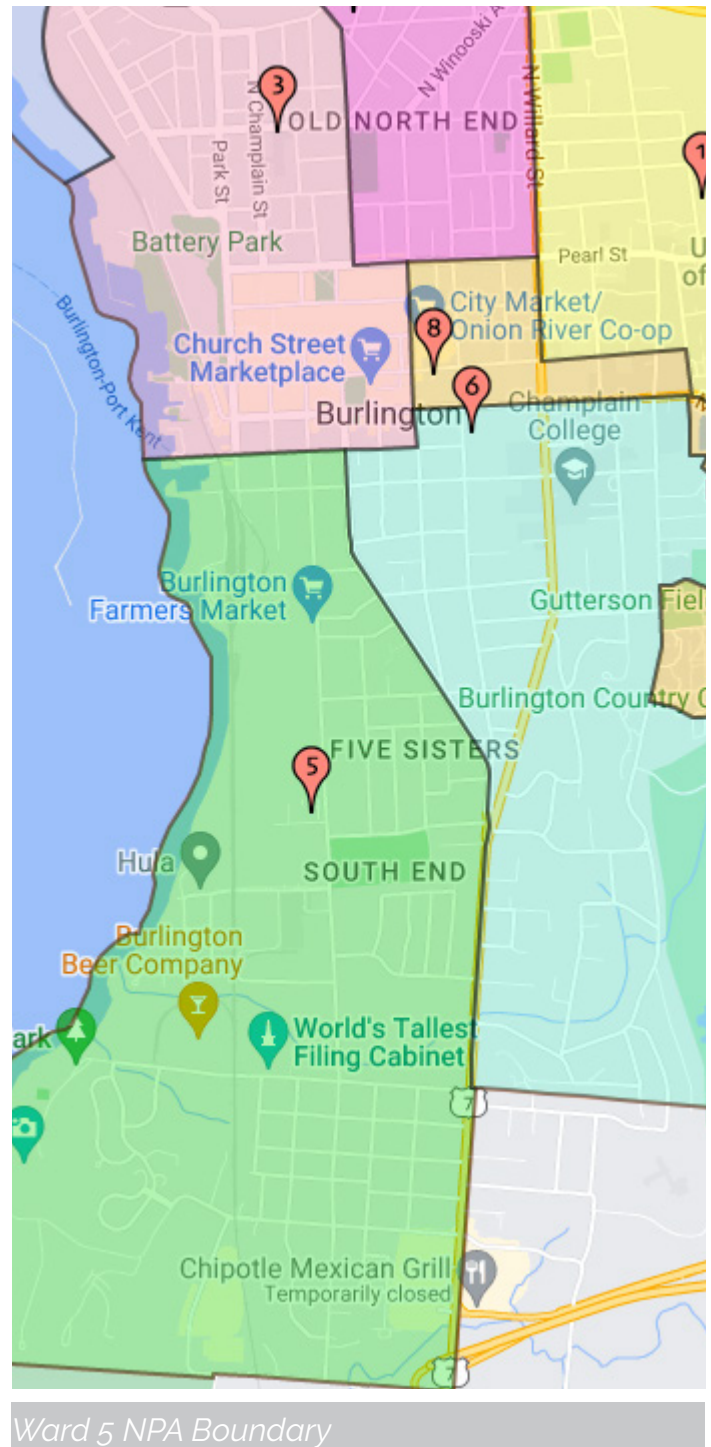
neighborhood, negatively impacting parking availability and mobility for residents. Residents worried that this situation could be a harbinger of future parking problems as a result of Innovation District buildout.

Equity

The lack of affordable housing options in the South End was a frequent Ward 5 NPA discussion topic. Multiple residents cited the specific need for affordable housing as a current concern and a desire that the Innovation District can be a place where abundant affordable housing can be provided. One resident suggested that affordable homeownership options, in addition to rental opportunities, are in great need.

Arts

The South End has long been the heart of Burlington's arts community. Ward 5 NPA meeting attendees spoke of their experience as witnesses to the declining artist population and presence as a result of rising costs for housing and studio space. Residents expressed a desire to see the zoning amendment prioritize the artist community through the creation of affordable homes, studio and market opportunities.



Stakeholder Advisory Group

Beginning in April, City staff from Planning and CEDO have facilitated a series of seven meetings with advisory stakeholder group members consisting of the following:

- Leslie Avril (Champlain College)
- Sara Katz and Doreen Kraft (Burlington City Arts)
- John Caulo (representing HULA and owners of 125 Lakeside Avenue)
- Meg Hammond (Generator)
- Rick Davis (property owner)
- Steve Conant (property and business owner)
- Michael Monte (Champlain Housing Trust)
- Corrine Yonce (Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity)

As property owners, affordable housing developers, arts and economic opportunity advocates, this group represents a diverse range of interests and expertise. Over the course of three months of meetings, the following themes have emerged:

Equity

The topic of equity as it relates to housing, community services and the arts community was a frequent topic of stakeholder conversation.

- The group acknowledged that residential uses would likely produce more revenue for property owners than uses associated with arts, making and manufacturing. As such, the group agreed that residential uses should only be permitted in new construction, as a way to facilitate the continued affordability of existing non-residential space in the Innovation District.
- Also related to housing, the group discussed at length the City's Inclusionary Zoning (IZ) standards. Some advocated for a higher inclusionary zoning requirement, while some expressed a desire for a multi-tiered approach that could provide affordable housing at multiple income levels, including levels that may not be directly encouraged by the City's IZ ordinance.
- Recognizing that the Innovation District will be home to hundreds of households in addition to being a new community

and commercial hub of the South End, stakeholders expressed a desire to see care work services such as childcare and elderly care prioritized within the zoning amendment.

Public Realm

Stakeholders discussed a shared goal that the district should be a car-light neighborhood with ample shared community amenities, including parks, plazas and play spaces. To advance this shared goal, City Planning staff has facilitated ongoing infrastructure coordination discussions with colleagues from Department of Public Works.

Public Meetings

Office of City Planning staff facilitated two public meetings and one extended web-based engagement site. The in-person public meeting was held on June 29th at Generator within the proposed Innovation District boundary. Around 20 members of the public attended the meeting and took part in a series of activities meant to gather input on the district boundary, land use, district scale and urban form and the character of the district's public spaces and streets. One week later, staff facilitated a virtual public meeting on Zoom that included a facilitated online engagement board that replicated the previous week's in-person activities. Subsequent to the virtual meeting, the online Miro engagement tool remained open for the month of July, during which time many Burlington and area residents provided input. City Planning staff collected input at two additional public events: the July 16th Farmers Market and the July 20th SEABA Annual Meeting. City Planning staff collected input at the Burlington Farmers Market. For members of the public who were unable to attend any of the in-person meetings and for whom the Miro board was inaccessible, City staff produced physical, take-home engagement materials and offered one-on-one assistance. The summary of input collected across these public engagement opportunities is provided below and grouped according to themes.

Engagement Activities and What We Heard

To facilitate dialogue throughout these public engagement events, City staff created four activities, each of which addressed a unique planning concept related to the proposed zoning amendment:

District Boundary:

The proposed South End Innovation District boundary includes an area at the core of today's Enterprise – Light Manufacturing District (E-LM). The vast majority of the land within the proposed boundary is composed of vacant land or large surface parking lots. While this proposed boundary has been the focus of work to date, the boundary remains subject to approval by the Planning Commission, City Council and Mayor. As such, staff has asked members of the public for their opinion on how large – or small – the district should be. Using thread and sticker dots, meeting participants

were able to suggest which properties should or should not be included in the boundary. Central to this activity has been a discussion, facilitated by city staff, regarding the likelihood that allowing residential uses on land currently used for arts, making, manufacturing or other local businesses, could compromise the sustainability of such uses, given the higher rents and land value generated by residences relative to non-residential uses.

What We Heard:

The complex nature of the boundary discussion unsurprisingly produced a range of opinions. Artists and arts community advocates generally advocate for the existing working boundary that consists mostly surface parking and vacant lots. They argue that expanding the District and allowing residential uses in more places could exacerbate a troubling trend that has seen artists pushed out of the South End due to lack of affordable studio and market space.



"Just a note as it relates to art spaces - I would say the highest priority for me would be inexpensive studios that could allow someone to get their business off the ground! It took me two years to turn a profit, and it takes time to learn how to make things work. I would say \$300-500 a month for a 15x15 studio... something like that. High prices are going to keep artists out."

"An overlay that allows residential development across the Enterprise-Light Manufacturing District is not favorable."

Land Use:

A primary task of the community and staff in crafting the South End Innovation District is the regulation of what uses or activities will be permitted. To that end, staff created a pair of image-rich boards that asked meeting participants what types of land uses – businesses, activities, community services, and amenities, they would like to see in the district. Using color-coded stickers, participants were asked to prioritize types of uses. The boards also included space for post-it note comments so participants could elaborate on their input.

What We Heard

Urban Convenience

Voting and comments show strong support for a district that provides the range of services and businesses that people need to live a car-light (or car-free) lifestyle.

Local Economy

Unsurprisingly, the "art and making" uses received the strongest support in the ranked sticker exercise. Facilitating the sustainability and growth of the arts and maker community should be a focus of the zoning amendment and development according to participants. Of note, residents expressed strong opposition to hotels and other tourism-focused amenities.

"No hotels. Hotels will encourage gentrification towards tourist-friendly retail/restaurants, and that honestly has very little crossover with what I as a current resident/worker/make need more of in this City. Keep the hotels and tourism in Downtown."

"Uses should serve the neighborhood and south end rather than be regional draws like entertainment and hotels"

"Having a mix of both businesses and residential creates an accessible and close-knit community. Good for growing Burlington economically."

"Burlington over the years has definitely started to become more gentrified, making this new district should reflect local values, ideals, and wants while making it green and sustainable."

Buildings and District Scale:

Using the same sticker and comment approach as the land use activity, meeting participants were asked to rank and comment on three questions related to the scale, type and ground-floor activity of the district's buildings. The scale board asked how tall buildings should be allowed to rise. The housing types board presented participants with a range of housing types, including low-scale rowhouses, medium-sized apartments to full-block apartments. The third board asked participants whether buildings should be required to include space for commercial and community activities (e.g. shops, restaurants, and services such as childcare or small medical clinics).

What We Heard Height

Building height preference is a topic that produces a range of opinions. However, the ranked sticker exercise shows a strong preference for a mix of building heights (4/6/8 stories). Advocates of taller buildings acknowledge a need for open spaces to balance the district's scale, but also support the density and activity such buildings can bring. Advocates of shorter buildings prefer a district that is less in contrast with existing buildings in the South End and that preserve lake views.

"Having views of the water is one of the best things about living in the South End. Don't take that away."

"A mix (of building heights) but with shorter buildings closer to the lake to maintain the view as much as possible."

"We need density! Build up as much as possible."

"This area could be a great example of buildings of mixed height which act visual interest to the area."

"A variety always makes for the best urbanism."

"Include option for mix of building sizes midsize + triplex/quad + town/rowhouse etc."

"Maximize possible development density, particularly for housing opportunities. Encourage buildings which break down scale to not be the size of full city blocks."

Landscape

The Innovation District will be the densest area within the South End. Participants commented that the scale of buildings will require careful attention to guarantee visual and physical connections from adjacent neighborhoods, as well as generous open spaces.

"Provide plenty of natural landscape between/throughout with bike lanes and walking paths. blend with appropriate parking."

"Maximize possible development density, particularly for housing opportunities. Encourage buildings which break down scale to not be the size of full city blocks."

Street Life

Voting and comments related to the way buildings' ground floors should be regulated and designed show a desire for an active, pedestrian-based street life with many shops and services. However, there is some concern that commercial tenants may be difficult to find if shops and other non-residential uses are required on the ground floor.

"Would love to have full retail, but would be concerned that development wouldn't be able to find commercial tenants."

"Having a mix of both businesses and residential creates an accessible and close-knit community. Good for growing Burlington economically. "

Public Realm Character:

Again, using the same sticker and comment approach as the two previous examples, participants were asked to provide input on their vision for the district's public realm, including its streets, parks and the way in which it should integrate the Champlain Parkway into its urban landscape. While the zoning amendment does not contemplate requiring a specific design character, this input will help staff determine how much space should be allocated to different ways of moving around (e.g. walking, wheeling or biking), and pervious surfaces, or those that can soak up water and thus take strain off of the area's water bodies and infrastructure.

What We Heard

Cars + Parking

The ranked sticker exercise and written comments show a clear desire to create a district where streets and paths are accessible to all ages and abilities and where driving is limited to only necessary trips. In line with preferences for a "car-light" district, participants commented that parking should neither exist on-street nor within lots or structures in the district's interior, but rather should be located at the district's edge to encourage walking within.

"Have a Church Street-like area without fear of cars, but need to balance serving new buildings. Maybe mixed use based on times of the day, with parking outside of the area for walking within."

"In this district, the ability of residents and outsiders to pass through is critical. Any solutions that do not include how to safely integrate motor vehicles (including public transport options) with pedestrians, cyclists, and other users are short sighted and doomed to be 'less.'"

Economy

A few participants provided economic rationale beyond safety and the climate imperative in their support for a car-free district, noting Burlington's limited land supply, the high cost of car infrastructure and the vitality that dense, walkable neighborhoods can support.

Open Space

Consistent with a common desire for human-scaled streets, a few comments expressed a preference for small open spaces well-integrated into the districts buildings and street and path network, rather than large "campus-like" open spaces.

Heritage: Like years of public input into planBTV: South End demonstrated, Burlington residents support a strong arts and enterprise presence and character in the South End.

"Combo of green infrastructure & art & creativity spaces."

"Look at the heritage and see if we can do something interesting if there is something to work with."