

TO: Jane Knodell and Committee re: Downtown Housing Strategies

For the City of Burlington, Vermont

FROM: Cynthia Rubin, resident of Ward 3

Re: Report on Downtown Housing Strategies

6/12/2014

Thank you to all who are working to provide in-scale, sustainable housing plans for Downtown Burlington. Very exciting!

A few comments:

As the push for more intensive urban development in the center of the City goes forward, we will need even more "lungs", "oases", and filters for the air, water, and noise pollution that emanate from densely developed mixed use neighborhoods.

I hope you will be moved to encourage our planning folks and public/private developers to invest in more-and maintained- small green spaces, as in vest pocket parks or "parklets"( Montpelier, Vt ); green roofs and community gardens (UVM, Fletcher Allen); and rain gardens (Wing Building, Main Street Landing and Jeffords Building,UVM). A few of our urban housing developments already include attractive plantings surrounding the buildings and small container gardens on balconies. The folks in the building I live in hope to invest in solar panels when the roof is replaced. At the time our building was constructed (1997-98), no thought was given to the possibility of rooftop gardens. I am hopeful that can change sometime.

If you have not already done so, I invite you to walk or ride your bikes through the North-South alley between Macys and the parking garage, behind the buildings on Battery Street, to see how NOT to develop: Three hotels, two condos, one parking garage, and our anchor department store all back into each other. Their placement, combined with the noises of all their HVACs, shredding and service operations often combine to form an unfriendly and unhealthy decibel-level wasteland for walkers, bikers, tourists, workers and residents. Thank goodness for People's United Bank's plantings, picnic tables, and treed lawn providing lush shade! This area, slated for infill, I believe, would do well to preserve – and maybe even expand– some of that green space.

Is there any progress with new mechanicals that are quieter, more energy-efficient and visually attractive than, for example, what is behind all the buildings on the aforementioned College-Battery-Cherry Street block? Developers should reveal their plans for HVAC placement, noise and heat abatement( for electronic operations), etc.) early in the planning and permitting process. Over the years, it has seemed to me that HVAC, for the most part, is not given much thought. It's kind of "the dirty little secret" in urban development.

And what about more imagination in building design? There are examples of building construction done well in this City- new and redeveloped! There are also some very depressingly ordinary ones, with only "the bottom line" in mind. Attention should be paid and good practices acknowledged.

Here's to a well-loved, maintained, and sustainable Downtown: in scale, walkable, bikeable, and continuing to be green!