



## LOCAL MOTION

# Comments on Draft Housing Action Plan

October 7, 2014

## SUGGESTION FOR A NEW TOPIC

### Creating a Walk-Seductive, Bike-Friendly Downtown

Burlington's downtown transportation system is uncomfortably close to saturation. The high existing density of jobs and services (as well as housing) mean that it will be difficult to add the amount of downtown housing that Burlington needs if all that development is serviced primarily by cars. **Given the ambitious goals outlined in this plan, a highly walkable, bikeable downtown is not an amenity; it is a necessary precondition to success.** Walking within downtown needs to be substantially more convenient and pleasurable than driving, and biking to downtown from nearby neighborhoods needs to be safe and efficient. This will require a number of interrelated changes and investments, among them:

- A complete network of protected bike lanes and intersections throughout the city, with the greatest density in and around the downtown
- Ample, secure, and convenient bike storage, changing and showering facilities, and other supports for commuting by bike
- Reconfiguration of streets to selectively replace on-street parking with wide sidewalks, bike lanes, seating areas, and related infrastructure
- A comprehensive review and overhaul of all crosswalks to shorten crossing distances, reduce vehicle speed, and create exclusive pedestrian phases at all high-volume intersections
- Parking policies that encourage people to park once and then walk rather than driving around downtown

## COMMENTS ON EXISTING TOPICS

### Parking Minimums

Local Motion strongly supports the elimination of required minimum parking in and around downtown Burlington. In a densely developed area with traditional land use patterns, space for cars and space for people is in many ways a zero-sum game. This means that giving developers more flexibility in how much parking to build will not only improve housing affordability; it will also make more space available for the kinds of amenities that create a vibrant public realm. From wider sidewalks to public plazas, all kinds of things are possible if less land and money are tied up in providing parking.

### Form-Based Code

Local Motion is currently in the process of reviewing the draft Burlington form-based code, and we are quite impressed with what we see. Its intent is clearly to reinforce and expand upon the qualities that make much of our existing downtown such a great place, with a focus on human scale and high-quality design. This approach yields a built environment that encourages -- even seduces -- people to get out of their cars, which is a key ingredient to a vibrant downtown. And by creating a framework in which most



aspects of development are both closely regulated *and* by right, the form-based code creates predictability for both the community and the developer. For all of these reasons, Burlington's form-based code will receive strong support from Local Motion.

### **Inclusionary Zoning**

Local Motion supports the concept that development projects should be required to provide a range of options for people of all socioeconomic backgrounds. The problem is, our current approach to inclusionary zoning does not do this: its focus is only on the lowest end of the spectrum. We suggest a truly inclusionary approach -- and a flexible one -- in which developers either pay into an inclusionary housing fund or are paid from the fund based on how the mix of price points that they offer compares to the actual range of household incomes in Burlington. This self-funding mechanism would ensure that a wide range of housing types were built, while providing developers with the flexibility to develop the mix of price points that made most sense for their project and their site.

### **Historic Preservation and Infill Development**

Historic preservation is one of the things that has made (or rather, kept) Burlington a community with true character. That said, a substantial portion of our oldest housing stock is suffering from neglect. Anything that would provide incentives for investing in older structures while preserving their essential historic character would add to the quality of Burlington's downtown housing stock. In a related vein, there are a number of locations around Burlington's downtown where a small amount of flexibility on historic preservation would open up major opportunities for historically compatible infill development. Local Motion supports a community conversation on the appropriate balance between restoration, renovation, and new development, with the shared goal of honoring the past in how we build the future.