



**Vermont Housing Finance Agency**

City of Burlington

DOWNTOWN HOUSING DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

I want to thank the Mayor, the City Council and CEDO for undertaking this housing study. There is clearly an affordable housing crisis in Burlington, and we must develop thoughtful strategies to address this. As Burlington addresses its housing issues, it is important to keep in mind who you are trying to serve in the City of Burlington. Below are a few of my thoughts on the study's finding and recommendations:

- We absolutely agree that it is appropriate for the City to provide land and economic incentives to facilitate increased production of multifamily rental housing to improve the supply of housing and affordability. Streamlining the local development process, the adoption of a form-based code, building code consistency, and permitting of by-right housing projects would be a go a long way in facilitating more housing development. **However, if we are going to use public resources to further our housing strategies and we must insure these resources are really targeted to serve the public's needs that are not otherwise being met by the market.**
- We respectfully disagree that the development of student housing on strategic downtown sites will necessarily free up existing housing inventory for other market segments. This must be a very well planned strategy, not something the market will just make happen any time soon. If you want to return homes north of Pearl St. to less density and more homeownership, you will need to provide incentives to property owners to specifically do that. If you want to provide affordable housing opportunities for the workforce that lives near downtown you need to specifically build housing in the rent ranges they can afford.
- Two points in particular: Why wouldn't you want to build mixed income housing on the Gateway site for our workforce in the downtown and retirees who don't need a car? And, if it is true that UVM and Champlain may walk away from the student housing they are now leasing in Winooski, how does that provide many net new units for student housing?
- The study comments that recent growth in downtown Burlington has not kept pace with other cities, and the City may be losing young professionals and family households. First I think it is important to define "young professionals". What age are they and what income range? What kind of environment are they and "young families" seeking? In our understanding of the market, young professionals and family households are likely looking for two very different housing types. Grouping them together may not be helpful since households with young children are more often looking at homes with at least 3 bedrooms. Young professionals are more willing to have roommates, live in a downtown, and predominantly rent.



The shift of having some more 18-25 year olds in the downtown and modestly fewer young professionals is most likely a function of students, so additional downtown student housing may not improve that demographic. Some of those professionals may have been driven to quieter neighborhoods. VHFA's research in 2011 found that almost 63% of the downtown and waterfront area residents are under age 35. The percentage of the state's population under age 35 dropped from 46% in 2000 to 42% in 2010; but remarkably Burlington saw increases in the percentage of the population under age 35. As we discuss strategies of the downtown we need to think about what kind of diversity might be best? Is having 75% of those living in downtown and the waterfront under 35 really our target goal?

- There is discussion that the development of adequate housing might be leveraged to attract more young professionals and families to Burlington, but as well there is a regional "housing-jobs imbalance". In 2011 Fletcher Allen Healthcare had about 7,100 on the payroll with about 5,500 full-time employees. UVM had about 3,420 fulltime employees and 490 part-time. I understand that the City of Burlington has about 500 employees. Shouldn't we be having much more serious discussions about employer assisted housing programs? I realize not all of these institutions' employees work in Burlington, but these employers have land available both in Burlington and the surrounding towns. Shouldn't those sites be on the table for possible housing development, not just city owned property? We realize new housing will be needed across a range of price points to serve all segments of the labor force, but what are the needs of those Burlington-based employees?
- The study focuses a lot on the area within a half-mile radius of Burlington's downtown core, but then talks about redevelopment in the South End and Pine St. which is good. A great site for housing is the City owned land behind Champlain School, but it is 1.6 miles from downtown. There are lots of possibilities for infill in the new north end of the City. **We must the address the housing needs of the City as a whole, not just the downtown, if we are to be successful in addressing Burlington's housing crisis.**

Vermont Housing Finance Agency is happy to work with you any we can to expand opportunities for affordable home ownership and rental housing in Burlington. Please let us know how we can help.

Sincerely,



Sarah Carpenter  
Executive Director