

January 30, 2012

Sandrine Thibault
Department of Planning & Zoning
149 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401

RE: Plan BTV Comments from Local Motion

Ms. Thibault,

Thank you for all of the City's work to plan for the future of the downtown and waterfront area. Here are Local Motion's comments:

GOAL: Burlington Wins a Gold-level Walk Friendly Designation:

We'd like to see specific language in the plan that calls for enhanced pedestrian facilities in the downtown area. Plan BTV should recognize that walking and biking are critical modes of transportation for Burlington's future. Burlington has not yet applied for Walk Friendly status, but we should aim to achieve gold status from Walk Friendly Communities through the following strategies:

Strategy: Institute a policy to have every intersection include full pedestrian signals with automatic leading pedestrian crossing phases. Under this policy, pedestrians would be treated equally as motorists, getting their due time every cycle. Additionally, pedestrian buttons could be removed which would reduce system maintenance.

Strategy: Implement a Business Improvement District (BID) that can focus on spreading Church Street's pedestrian-rich amenities (benches, public art, shade trees, wide sidewalks, publicly-accessible restrooms, interpretive signage, and high level of maintenance) throughout downtown.

GOAL: Burlington Wins a Gold-level Bike Friendly Designation

As an active community with compact development, Burlington should be able to increase bicycling for transportation and recreation. The plan should make a clear pitch for Burlington to be one of the most bike-friendly communities in New England. Burlington is currently a silver level community through the League of American Bicyclists.

Strategy: Have the plan call for the implementation of a well-planned network of physically separated and continuous bicycle facilities into and through the downtown. Specifically, a corridor study of Winooski Avenue and Union Street is needed to plan, design and implement a physically separated bicycle facility running north/south to connect the Old North End, downtown and the South End. The City's 2005 North/South Bike and Pedestrian Plan had this critical north/south spine as its major recommendation.

Strategy: Call for the implementation of the Burlington Bike Path

improvement plan. In addition to needing a comprehensive rehabilitation of Burlington's well-loved bike path, the path needs better connections to downtown and adjacent neighborhoods.

- An off-road connection from the waterfront to South End neighborhoods along a Pine Street path as identified in the Champlain Parkway plans.
- An off-road connection to the Old North End from the Urban Reserve / Burlington College property
- A signed on-road bicycle connection from the waterfront into the downtown

Strategy: Call for the development of a city-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

The plan would likely focus on the downtown and waterfront areas, but also how to connect these areas to the surrounding residential areas. The plan should call for innovative bike/pedestrian facilities and services such as bike sharing, heated sidewalks, secure bike parking, etc.

GOAL: Burlington Achieves a Truly Multi-Modal Downtown

We suggest Burlington set a goal to make walking, biking, and taking the bus as safe and convenient as driving downtown.

Strategy: Have the plan state the City's full support for a new, modern CCTA Transit Center in the downtown that provides a full range of modern amenities (heated waiting areas, secure bike parking, carshare access).

Strategy: Have the plan call for a downtown-wide coordinated transportation demand management effort. Whether delivered through a Transportation Management Association (TMA) or through an ongoing collaborative promotional campaign, transportation options need to be better promoted and incentivized for downtown employees.

Strategy: Have the plan call for integrated 'multi-modal hubs' where residents and visitors can seamlessly transfer between transportation modes in the downtown / waterfront areas. The hubs would have convenient, well-designed access to transit, carsharing, bicycling and walking.

Strategy: Have the plan recognize that the best way to create expanded access to downtown without negatively impacting congestion, air quality and traffic safety is to expand our transportation options – including the development of satellite park and rides strategically located on the arterial roadways into the city. The lack of a park and ride at Exit 14 that is served by high-frequency transit service into the downtown is a major impediment to increasing access into the core.

GOAL: Burlington's Robust Downtown Grows as Fast as Suburban Centers

We will not have an active culture of walking and biking without a vibrant and mixed-use city center. Walking and biking work best when trips are short and multiple destinations can be reached in the same trip. In this light, land-use and development policies are critical to increasing levels of walking and biking.

Strategy: Build more housing downtown by removing the zoning requirement that mandates new developments to have at least 50% commercial space.

Local Motion is supportive of additional housing development downtown so that more people can live near their work and have a rich array of transportation options at their disposal. Retail experts have also pointed out that to get more practical stores for Burlington residents downtown requires more adjacent housing.

Strategy: Encourage affordable and flexible development downtown by reducing parking requirements for new construction. A private developer in Portland Oregon just completed an affordable housing project (EcoFlats, <http://ecoflatspdx.com/>) that has no car parking because the units are marketed to young professionals who want access to carshare, transit and bike facilities. The project leased-up in days. Parking minimums substantially increase the cost to develop in the downtown and can be a significant barrier to affordable housing development. Local Motion suggests that a more innovative and flexible approach be adopted. If the City wants to keep minimum parking requirements, there must be an opportunity for waivers that would also require a comparable investment into a fund for transportation options.

Strategy: Have the plan call for developing policies that will reduce existing surface parking lots in the downtown. Surface lots are not the highest and best use for downtown space and they take away from the pedestrian-oriented feel of the core. Policies need to shift parking to satellite, under-building and behind-building locations.

GOAL: Burlington's Outdoor Recreation Environment Flourishes

Burlington has a growing active outdoor industry. The city's young population, its environmental culture and its fantastic location on Lake Champlain offer an opportunity to make the city a dynamic landscape for active recreation and transportation.

Strategy: The plan should explore ways to encourage and attract more active outdoor use of our downtown and waterfront. Concepts such as a sledding hill (with snow making), an outdoor ice skating rink, an outdoor climbing wall, more active events and kayak / canoe rentals are ways to improve the quality of life as well as attract more visitors to spend money in our city.

Strategy: The plan should call for a new level of collaboration among Burlington's vibrant businesses, non-profits and community groups.

Recognizing that the City doesn't have the resources alone to make the plan a reality, we must find new ways to harness the resources and talent of those on our community.

Finally, we suggest that all Plant BTV goals have measureable benchmarks so we can collectively measure our progress. Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on this important plan.