

Local Motion Comments at February 14, 2017 DRB Hearing Regarding Burlington Town Center

Thank you for the opportunity to speak regarding the BTC redevelopment project. We'd like to start by reiterating Local Motion's support for this project. We believe that, as currently envisioned, the redevelopment of the BTC property has the potential to make Burlington a significantly more walk- and bike-friendly place.

Our reasons for supporting the project remain the same as last fall, when we spoke in favor of the project before City Council. As we see it, the project confers the following benefits:

1. Reactivating the streetscape with storefronts and walk-bike friendly infrastructure
2. Re-opening public rights-of-way at Pine Street and at St. Paul Street, with an emphasis on walking and biking
3. Adding a substantial amount of housing and office space, which Burlington very much needs and which will help build a vibrant downtown

Based on tonight's presentation by the project team, we would like to draw the DRB's attention to four specific aspects of the proposal that need further attention in order to fully realize its potential.

1. AMOUNT OF BIKE PARKING

It is great to see that the project proposes to provide more bike parking than Burlington's standards currently require. The problem is, Burlington's bike parking standards are woefully out of date, particularly in comparison with other communities with similar levels of biking. For example, Portland, Oregon -- whose bike commute mode share is roughly the same as Burlington's -- requires upwards of 1 long-term bike parking space per residential unit.

The contrast between the project team's approach to bike parking versus stormwater management was striking. The project team has made a commitment to a world-class stormwater management system that far exceeds what is required and puts this project at the vanguard nationally for stormwater management in redevelopment projects. We would like to see a similar level of ambition with regard to bike parking. The current proposal for bike parking is solid and respectable, but it is not visionary.

We request that the DRB take three actions with regard to bike parking:

1. Request an analysis from the project team comparing its bike parking facilities to those of similar-size developments in communities with levels of biking in the same range as Burlington's (6% to 7% bike commute mode share), and review the proposed amount of bike parking in that light
2. Grant explicit pre-approval to the developer to substitute additional bike parking for car parking at a prescribed ratio (in the range of 5:1) without any further review if utilization rates indicate that more bike parking is needed

3. Ensure that the design of the car parking areas easily allows for conversion of car parking to bike parking (in particular, that areas of car parking that are adjacent to planned bike parking can easily be made accessible for bikes)

2. DESIGN OF STRUCTURED PARKING GENERALLY

Our understanding is that the parking in this development is designed to allow it to be repurposed for non-parking uses over time, if and when transportation needs change and the space is better dedicated to other uses. We have no reason to believe that this has changed, as the developer indicated a strong commitment to this design feature. However, we request that the DRB take two actions with regard to parking generally:

1. Ensure that this commitment to flexible design of parking decks is retained in the final approved design, such that the building itself presents no structural impediments to repurposing of parking decks for other uses
2. Ensure that no procedural requirements are enacted that would make it impractical to act on this structural flexibility -- that is, do not bind the developer to maintain a certain number of spaces as a condition of the permit, but rather allow for flexible management of the space currently occupied by parking based on actual utilization rates

3. SCHEDULE FOR OPENING STREETS

We noted in the project team's presentation that they plan to open St. Paul and Pine streets to traffic at the end of the construction period. **We would like to register our strong objection to a delayed opening of these two streets.** Burlington desperately needs more and better north-south connections for driving and transit as well as for walking and biking.

A two year delay in re-establishing these streets is significant, particularly with regard to two key elements of the planned bike network: a continuous bike route on Pine Street from the South End to the Old North End, and conversion of Winooski Avenue through downtown to a three-lane street with bike lanes. The latter depends on the opening of Pine & St. Paul because a reconnected street grid will reduce the traffic demand on Winooski, allowing more flexibility in design for that street.

To this end, we request that the DRB take the following action with regard to opening of these streets:

1. Require that St. Paul and Pine be fully constructed and opened to traffic immediately following demolition of the existing structures, and that construction be managed from within the footprint of the block bounded by those two streets

4. BIKE FACILITIES ON PINE STREET

It was unclear from the presentation what bike facilities are planned for the reconstructed section of Pine Street. Given the importance of this street in a city-wide bike network, the street should be designed with dedicated bike lanes, not simply with shared-lane markings. These lanes should not run next to on-street car parking or a drop-off zone, but rather should be against the curb. To this end, we request that the DRB take the following action with regard to bike lanes on Pine Street:

1. Require that Pine be designed and built with curbside bike lanes on both sides of the street for the length of the block that are a minimum of 5' wide

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
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