

# Burlington Walk-Bike Council Meeting Minutes

October 27, 2016

5:40-6:55pm

**Presiding:** Erik Brown-Brotz

**Minutes taken by:** Sarah Goodrich

**Others present:** Mayor Miro Weinberger as well as Tony and Mike representing the Coalition for a Livable City. 14 people total in attendance.

## Agenda Item: Introductions

- Tonight's topic: Burlington Ballot Items and their impact on walking and biking

## Agenda Item: Capital Budget (ballot item #1) as well as items 2, 5, and 6

- Item 5 is a charter change that gives the flexibility to use parking funds for street improvements in the future.
- Item 6 is about moving the bike path to the west side of the railroad tracks between Maple and King streets, which is especially important before Amtrak comes to town.
- Question: Is the charter change (item 5) mainly housekeeping? Miro answers that there's some clarifying language as well as some broadening language in there. He thinks it makes sense.
- Some other communities have used parking revenues to improve streets, and that's what we'd like to do, although with current needs for repairs to parking garages it's unlikely that this will result in additional funds for street improvements in the near future.
- As much as we want to move away from a car-dominated society, we need to upkeep the parking garages that are in place.
- Question on item 6: What is the timeline, cost, etc? Miro's answer is that this will become clear over the next few years. The land belongs to the ferry company. Eminent domain would be appropriate in his view if it's needed.
- Ballot item 1 will give some resources to the bike path, more on that soon.
- Question on item 6: RJ's understanding is that the ferry company needs access to this land during high water. There should be a way to work this out with the city. Miro says that the ferry company needs to use the land with some frequency and they're risk averse to using their heavy equipment near cyclists, etc. but it should be possible to work something out.
- Ballot items 1 and 2 represent a sustainable infrastructure plan that address many needs, including
  - all of the poor and failing streets and sidewalks
  - replacing fire engine fleet
  - replacing old water lines (42% are 75 years old or older), the pipes are cast iron and rust builds up, paving streets causes more pipes to break and then we're tearing up new streets, freezing and breaking pipes in the winter is awful, we should be proactive in replacing the infrastructure before it's ready to fail. The new pattern will be to redo the water line the summer before a street is replaced.
- Ballot item 1 is a 5-year, \$50M plan
- There's a big focus on sidewalks in the plan. Our sidewalks are embarrassingly bad in some parts of the city. Sidewalks have been woefully underfunded. Sidewalks last 40 years if you're lucky, and they've been funded at 100-year replacements. Doesn't make sense. Huge win for pedestrian infrastructure.
- Curbs need attention and the capital plan addresses this. About half a million dollar budget for curbing going forward. The walk-bike master plan requires us to move some curbs, so this will help fund that.
- Question: A lot of focus in the capital plan is on failing infrastructure. Will the money be available to move perfectly good curbs if necessary for walk-bike infrastructure? Miro says yes, he's really excited about the walk-bike master plan and thinks it will be really hard to implement but thinks we need to do what needs to be done to get there.
- At this point focus is on the center and south of the city, not the new north end with the exception of the North Ave corridor, which they're committed to.
- They have the resources to implement the master plan, but only if we get a yes on ballot item 1.
- Bike Path will be funded by the capital plan. The progress made so far was with TIF and Federal funds, but that has run out. To expand these improvements on 8 miles, we need to approve item 1.
- We need 2/3 yes vote on ballot item 1. Only 1/2 on item 2.
- 60% of the plan is represented in ballot item 1. The water bond in number 2 provides more.
- Average tax increase will be \$10 per month per property 5 years from now if ballot item 1 is approved.
- Question: How are spending priorities established? Christine is much more interested in infrastructure downtown than the bike path.
- Response: the bike path has been established as a priority. The walk-bike plan took a long time to be released in part because Miro wanted it to be a realistic plan that we have a plan to implement.
- There's nothing completely sacred about the plan. It's written in a white paper. How the money is actually spent will be determined as we go, there is some flexibility there. There is a strong vision and a plan, but plans are adjusted over time.
- One more real win for walking and biking: A substantial increase in spending on traffic calming and street planning. This includes another employee like Nicole.

- There will likely be resistance to items on the walk-bike master plan, so we will need to keep advocating for it.
- We need a yes vote on ballot item 1 to fund the walk-bike master plan.

### **Agenda Item: Ballot items 4 and 3 presented by the Coalition for a Livable City**

- The coalition agrees with the mayor about revitalizing downtown.
- The proposal we're looking at is 6 months old.
- Increase heights from 65 feet to 160 feet, which was not publicly processed.
- Showed overlay zoning changes and depictions of development.
- Clearly these are not Burlington-scale or human-scale.
- The mailer that went out about voting yes on 3 and 4 didn't have photos of anything larger than 3 stories, and we're talking about a 14-story building. The mailer was funded by the mayor's PAC, which receives money from corporations.
- Mike is concerned about the height increase from 65 feet to 160 feet.
- We shouldn't be scared by the all-or-nothing pitch that if we don't go with Sinex, we'll be stuck with the current mall forever.

### **Agenda Item: Ballot items 4 and 3 presented by Mayor Weinberger**

- Mayor plans to focus in this presentation on walking and biking infrastructure improvements that will result from a yes on 3 and 4
- Shows images from developer to contrast with the coalition images.
- Replacing aging mall with mixed-use neighborhood
- We just lost downtown hospital jobs for lack of open office space, which will be included in the development.
- 270 homes will be included, much needed downtown homes.
- Mayor Weinberger admits that his images are focused on the current development, and doesn't attempt to show the maxing out of the new zoning as shown by the coalition.
- Yes vote will result in downtown jobs, housing, revenues.
- Benefit for the environment in global warming and cleaning up the lake.
- Big step forward for housing availability. Heads of Champlain Housing Trust, COTS, VT interfaith, and others all stood with the mayor today to say that this plan is a yes for housing affordability.
- Slide show on opening the street grid.
- Some history: The 1970s urban renewal, a super block was formed from six individual city blocks.
- The TIF funds are only for public improvements in an 8-block section of downtown.
- For the first time, there will be a cohesive vision for the entire downtown that is thought through and coordinated.
- Storm water management is part of the plan, to avoid overflowing sewage, etc.
- Before and after shots at street views of new through streets.

### **Agenda Item: Questions and Comments on Ballot items 4 and 3**

- Sarah: Does Burlington have enough people, business, etc. to fill all this space?
- Miro: There are 3 areas:
  - Retail: The proposed project has less than the current mall
  - Housing: 270 homes. Housing is very tight in the city.
  - Office space: Most speculative element. The developer has some level of commitment from users, including the hospital, which would take up about 30%
- Miro: We haven't had a lot of investment in downtown and he's confident it will fill up.
- Mike: Why 160 feet instead of 105? It seems like the only benefit is for the developer.
- Miro: The new zoning requires step backs ("wedding cake" buildings)
- Miro's perspective is that this plan started 2 years ago with a memorandum of understanding (not just 6 months ago).
- There were trade-offs and negotiations that got us to this plan. There are people who have a problem with the taller buildings. Some folks wanted even taller.
- Miro says the project will change the character of downtown, he thinks for the better. Even if you think it's for the worse, the height is the only drawback, and there are lots of benefits, including a reconnected street grid, 54 permanently affordable homes, environmental benefits, etc.
- What about the 925-space parking garage? And the prices on the housing units? (response wasn't recorded)
- 21.8 M on ballot item 4: How is it broken down? It's on the city website, but he doesn't have it committed to memory. The priority is to restore the street grid.
- Burlingtonvt.gov has more info.
- For Miro's propaganda, go to BTVfuture.gov
- What happens if only 3 passes? And what if only 4 passes? Miro: We don't really know, which is scary. Either way they wouldn't give up on trying to reconnect and transform the downtown.
- The ballot items are difficult to understand.