



To: The District Four Commission

From: Local Motion

Date: November 16, 2011

Re: Response to the City of Burlington's memo responding to Local Motion's two previous submissions to the Commission

Local Motion appreciates the opportunity to present the following information to the District 4 Commission for the November 16, 2011 hearing for the Champlain Parkway project. **This information is offered as part of Local Motion's role as a "Friend of the Commission," and is intended to summarize our remaining concerns in light of the City of Burlington's response to our previous submissions.**

First, we would like to thank the City of Burlington for agreeing to a number of the changes that we have suggested. The plan as modified by the City's memo is substantially improved, and we appreciate the City's willingness to make changes that will increase safety and convenience for people on foot and on bike.

However, there are two major areas that the city has not yet addressed adequately. One is the need for pedestrian crossing enhancements at intersections along the corridor, many of which remain inadequate as designed and still fail to meet Criterion 5. The other is the need for continuous, dedicated bicycle facilities in both directions for the entire corridor, the northern portion of which offers bicycle accommodations that are inferior to what is on the ground today. **We believe that a permit should not be granted for the project unless specific conditions are required to address these two remaining issues.** The body of this memo outlines our recommendations for conditions to impose on the permit so as to ensure that the project adequately addresses Criterion 5.

With regard to Criterion 10, the City contends in its memo that the design meets the standard set by its Transportation Plan. It argues that the City is not required to adhere to the standards laid out in its own design guidelines, as these are simply advisory and do not have force of law. While this may indeed be the case, **we are disappointed that the City has elected to ignore large portions of its excellent Transportation Plan, particularly the designation of upper**

Pine Street as a Bicycle Street. The current design may meet the letter of the Plan, but it falls significantly short of its intent.

We hope that our comments have been useful for the Commission in its deliberations regarding permitting of the Champlain Parkway. **We request that you give the issues raised in this and previous submissions full consideration.** Please let us know if we can be of any additional assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chapin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chapin Spencer
Executive Director

CONDITION 1:

The Champlain Parkway design must include pedestrian-friendly street design and technologies for actively assisting pedestrian crossings at every non-signalized intersection along the entire corridor.

The Pine Street corridor is a busy neighborhood commercial center, with multiple retail businesses, artist spaces, and services on both sides of the street. Pedestrian traffic in the area is heavy and increasing. Without a considerable investment in pedestrian crossing facilities, the projected increase in vehicle traffic will cut this vibrant district in half, leaving pedestrians to fend for themselves in a near-constant stream of traffic.

The current design offers pedestrians crossing assistance only at signalized intersections. Between Lakeside Avenue and Maple Street - a distance of nearly a mile - the design provides only painted crosswalks and static signage (and some legs of some intersections lack even these basic facilities). This design offers little or no improvement over current conditions, at the same time as traffic volume is projected to increase dramatically. At present, pedestrian waiting times at Pine and Howard are already excessive (an average of over 15 seconds) and that only 20% of vehicles actually yield to a pedestrian (based on a Local Motion assessment conducted in summer 2011). Increased traffic on Pine Street will only make the situation worse. Again, the design will directly contribute to (and worsen) a preexisting unsafe condition, thus requiring the placement of conditions on the project to mitigate that preexisting condition.

There are a variety of technologies and design options that can enhance pedestrian safety and convenience. For example, a recent study by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has shown that a Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) sign can increase motorist compliance with pedestrian crossings to about 80% during the day and over 90% at night. The City's memo correctly states that RRFBs should be deployed only if conventional signage has been installed and an engineering study has shown non-compliance with signage as installed. However, the city has for the most part neglected to install such signage (or even to paint crosswalks at many locations) despite numerous requests from businesses and residents, let alone conduct an engineering study of the efficacy of such signage.

Regardless of the approach that is ultimately chosen, what we want to see is a commitment to ensuring that the corridor is safe and welcoming for all modes of

transportation. Pine Street is a major artery into the city, but it is also a neighborhood commercial center and a key corridor for travel by foot and by bike. The city's design does not reflect this reality and fails to provide safe conditions for the large and growing number of people who traverse this corridor by some other means than an automobile.

In addition, we would like to reiterate the importance of smaller curb radii in the newly constructed part of the Parkway. Broad, sweeping curbs facilitate high-speed turns at the expense of pedestrian and bicyclist safety. While we appreciate the city's willingness to include an exclusive pedestrian phase at all such intersections, the excessively long crosswalks that result from large curb radii - some of them 70 feet long or more - are themselves a barrier and a disincentive to pedestrian traffic. We have not seen a willingness to compromise on this issue, and would ask the District Commission to require that the City redesign these intersections to more closely resemble typical intersections in Burlington rather than the kind of intersections one sees in the industrial sections of South Burlington and Williston (where, tellingly, there is almost no pedestrian traffic).

We call on the District Commission to require that the city design all non-signalized intersections to actively facilitate safe pedestrian crossings, with user-actuated crossing technologies and pedestrian-friendly site design throughout.

CONDITION 2:

The Champlain Parkway design must include separated, dedicated bicycle facilities in both travel directions along the entire length of the corridor.

The Pine Street corridor is an important route for bicyclists traveling between Burlington's South End and the downtown area. Anecdotal evidence strongly indicates that bicycle traffic has grown substantially in the last few years as young families have settled across the South End. However, it is clear that the street is already marginal for bicyclists, as indicated by the many bike riders who elect to ride on the sidewalk rather than brave the street. If the upper end of the corridor is to live up to its official designation as a Bicycle Street in the City's own Transportation Plan even as traffic volume increases, it is essential that it provide dedicated facilities throughout so as to bring bicyclists back into the traveled way.

Unfortunately, the current design offers bicyclists only shared lanes with vehicles from Kilburn Street northward. This constitutes a *reduction* in facilities for bicyclists - the street currently includes a bike lane in one direction from Maple southward - at the same time as traffic volume is projected to *increase* significantly. This design will directly contribute to (and worsen) a preexisting unsafe condition. As stated by the City on page 3 of its memo, such circumstances require the placement of conditions on the project to mitigate that preexisting condition.

Current best practices clearly indicate that separated facilities are called for under such conditions, particularly on streets with high traffic volumes. As stated on page 8-9 of the *Model Design Manual for Living Streets*, a guide developed by a group of national experts on bicycle and pedestrian friendly street design:

Shared roadways are suitable on streets with low motor vehicle speeds or traffic volumes, and on low-volume rural roads and highways. The suitability of a shared roadway decreases as motor vehicle traffic speeds and volumes increase... For a local street to function acceptably as a shared roadway, traffic volumes should not be more than 3,000 to 5,000 vehicles per day, and speeds should be 25 mph or less. If traffic speeds and volumes exceed those thresholds, separated facilities (e.g., bike lanes) should be considered or traffic calming should be applied to reduce the vehicle speeds/volumes.

On a related note: the city contends that there is no room to build separated bike lanes, even if left turns are prohibited. This is not true. For example, a two-way, 8-foot wide “cycle track” along the west side of the street accompanied by two 10-foot travel lanes and a 7-foot parking lane would fit neatly within the existing 35-foot curb-to-curb width. (A two-way cycle track would also feed well into the shared-use path, as it would keep cyclists on the west side of the street throughout.) Bike lanes would fit on both sides of the street if parking were eliminated (which would be the case for most of each block if a turn lane were built). In any case, there are numerous options for fitting dedicated facilities into the existing footprint, thereby creating a street that meets the spirit as well as the letter of the City’s Transportation Plan.

We call on the District Commission to require that the city provide separated, dedicated bicycle facilities in both travel directions for the entire length of the corridor as a condition of its permit.