

FINAL

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION &
DOWNTOWN TIF ADVISORY BOARD
JOINT MEETING
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25, 2023 – 4:00PM
Kilton Library Community Room – or remote via Zoom
MINUTES**

EDC MEMBERS PRESENT: William Dunn (Chair), Councilor Karen Liot Hill (Vice Chair), Kevin Purcell, Dan Nash, Chip Brown, Tracy Hutchins (Upper Valley Business Alliance), Councilor Doug Whittlesey (remote)

EDC MEMBERS ABSENT: Andrew Key, David Newlove,

TIF MEMBERS PRESENT: Barry Schuster (Chair), Victoria Smith, Peter Owens, George Sykes, Christina Haidari

STAFF PRESENT: Deputy City Manager David Brooks

1. CALL TO ORDER:

- The January 25, 2023 Economic Development Commission meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM. The Downtown TIF Advisory Board was also called to order.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A. November 30, 2022

*Motion by Dan Nash to approve the minutes of November 30, 2022, as presented.
Second by Victoria Smith.*

** The Vote on the MOTION was approved by the EDC (5-0), and the TIF (5-0).*

Chair Dunn requested an update on the Spencer Street project. Deputy City Manager Brooks stated that the City has continued to work on a clean-up of this property. The only remaining issue is a high arsenic reading of the groundwater under the site. The City is hoping for a clear statement from DES that this is not a limiting factor in developing the site. The site will be connected to municipal water and sewer. If clean tests cannot be carried out, monitoring wells will need to be maintained and monitored on the site.

3. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Review of Responses to Downtown Redevelopment Request for Interest (RFI)

Chair Dunn stated that the EDC was tasked by the City Council with coming up with items to redevelop the downtown parking lot areas. A request for expression of interest was sent out and the groups will now evaluate various options presented. The submissions will be presented by the prospective developers, and they will speak regarding their vision and plans.

Paul Simon, The Housing Initiative, explained that his group responded to the RFI by developing a first concept which collaborates and develops a mix of a focus on the park and housing, with a streamlined focus to a new park that takes up some of the impervious area of the existing parking lot. This concept includes a park with public access, mixed uses, and connections to the Mascoma River and the Northern Rail Trail. The park will provide open space for community events, outdoor performances, and passive enjoyment of the riverfront. The park is designed to include locations for public art installation, with an additional opportunity for a kayak launch. The proposed building placement frames and extends the public access from the mall and Colburn Park. The concept also includes direct public access. The building is designed in height and style to match with the surrounding buildings and to keep in character with the Downtown District. The ground floor/storefront area along Flynn Street will add vitality with café, small market, parking, and retail uses for the public. This will extend the downtown experience from the mall and Colburn Park all the way to the new park. There is a potential to open up the area more and create two buildings

instead, but this gateway feature punctuates the area. The concept includes direct access from the mall over to the proposed café. The design proposes universal access with ADA accessibility. The left side access point is proposed at a 5% grade. From the proposed cafe over to the other end of Flynn Street, the proposed building is a public space. The building is designed to promote downtown public use and access from end to end. The building form minimizes impacts on existing vehicular traffic patterns and preserves emergency vehicle access. The building is also placed thoughtfully to engage with the grade change and existing built form as an extension of the downtown. The proposed parking area is accessible for pedestrians and has a focus on the park. The group reviewed the Downtown Vision Plan and, according to that plan, the development concept must include items such as restoring and enhancing the riverfront, connecting to adjacent green spaces in the downtown, and incorporating connections between the Northern Rail Trail and the Mascoma River Greenway. This design allows for a streamlined bicycle approach to get to the Northern Rail Trail, while still providing the park component. The project has to consider the relocation, incorporation, or replacement of existing parking, and additional mixed-use development. The plan proposed to remove some impervious area near the Mascoma River and incorporating additional green space. The project will remain outside of the nearby floodplain. The river is a strong link to the surrounding area, it is believed that this proposal will allow for sustained restoration projects and a boost of public involvement. The proposal integrates the Mascoma River Greenway and the Northern Rail Trail, with additional walkways to encourage movement through the site, and to adjacent spaces. There is also a potential for additional linkages of bike/ped facilities to Hanover Street or the Mount Vernon Avenue areas. The project could also consider a pedestrian bridge amenity over the Mascoma River. Minor revisions to the existing parking patterns are required for building size and type. All spaces shown in the building envelope are dedicated spaces for the building uses. The current building proposal is flexible, with a large mix of studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and three-bedroom units. There is also an opportunity to put commercial units along Flynn Street.

Jay Champion, The Housing Initiative, stated that this design concept tries to bring a passive park to the downtown in a way that relates to the River and addresses land to enhance the downtown area. The proposal is specific regarding ownership of units in this area. This proposal allow for a configuration of a build out to custom design these units. This same thinking follows for the commercial units. This is a way to attract solid business opportunities, by allowing people to own their own space.

Mr. Simon stated that the concept plan includes approximately 217 parking spaces, with a majority of the spaces permitted for public use. The proposed mix between residential and commercial in this plan is approximately 80/20.

Mr. Simon stated that some of the proposed parking could be removed, but his group believes that some amount of parking in this area is important. The plan could eliminate much of parking proposed to front the park. He stated that the group spoke with Recreation Department Director who emphasized this as a passive park.

It was noted that the plan could extend the walking, pedestrian path further into the site, to allow for greater access to the River.

Ms. Smith stated that she anticipated more green space on all of the plans presented. She stated that the boards do not necessarily agree with the statement from the Recreation Department regarding this being only a passive park.

Mr. Simon noted that the plan dedicates the parking spaces needed for the proposed units within the envelope of the building.

Mr. Purcell stated that he would like to see Flynn Street contain more commercial, or potentially office development. The park could be made more prominent, to be used for recreation, rather than only passive. There could be an option to break up the building, to reduce the scale and optics of it. The proposed archway is beautiful, but very large.

Mr. Sykes asked at what point these plans will take into consideration the housing crisis/missing middle. He noted that, in developing spaces in the downtown, it is helpful to get sense of potential tax revenue from a building versus the space it is taking up.

Chair Dunn noted that these proposals are only conceptual in nature. The groups are presenting possibilities only at this time. Any presenter that moves forward in this process will need to go through a number of other boards/committees to create more detailed plans. The EDC and TIF have clearly expressed that they would prefer more green space in these plans.

Mr. Schuster asked about the economics used to create a plan with only green space, which would likely not be economically viable, versus a wholly commercial area with no green space. Mr. Campion stated that it will be very helpful to developers for the City to define exactly what it wants for this green space. Part of what drove the proposed building structure was the need to park cars under it.

In response to a question from Councilor Whittlesey, Mr. Simon stated that the Flynn Street side of the project is proposed to be entirely commercial.

Councilor Liot Hill stated that she likes the intention of this plan to extend the downtown area. This feels consistent with the goals of the visioning study to make the River more accessible and a feature for downtown. This design seems to do that. She stated that she appreciates the way this makes the proposed building quite public, particularly from the Flynn Street side. She stated that the boards should have discussed the proposal for this park with the Recreation Department. She was hoping this park would be more of an extension of the vibe of the Farmer's Market. It could contain food trucks, performance space, and a more active use. She stated that she likes the arch as proposed. She suggested that the plan could feature more green space, while keeping many of the features proposed. She noted that this was previously mentioned to be a \$23M building, which would add approximately \$231,000/year in tax revenue to the City.

John Livadas in partnership with RODE Architects, stated that the goal of their response is to create a public/private partnership, with residential housing, but also direct public access. There needs to be some balance between the housing program and the placemaking. The residential program needs to be supportive of a public park, which allows people to gain access to the River.

Eric Robinson, RODE Architects, stated that the group did an exhaustive amount of analysis to help inform the proposal. This site shows a civic aspect to the downtown urban plan. The proposal considered how to enhance the quality of existing nearby spaces to work together as a unified whole. The movements through this section of the City were analyzed, from the river up to Colburn Park. These existing movement areas were outline on a diagram to define where pedestrian and vehicular movement should take place. This connection should be not dissimilar to the previous concept, where Court Street is the major connector from Colburn Park and the mall. The proposal also looks to enhance the connection through the pedestrian mall space to ensure that it is active and thriving. The plan pulls some of the vehicular movement out of that zone to allow for a clear pathway. This potential development is proposed to enhance the quality of the entire downtown area while inviting connectivity and movement. This will provide for different opportunities for retail and respite for gathering.

Ruthie Kuhlman, RODE Architects, stated that this proposal tries to balance density, retail space and covered parking. The proposal prioritizes a pedestrian-centric space, opening up to a larger park space near the river. There are opportunities to integrate retail around the first level area of the site. The entire development of the parkscape area near the River would be pedestrian and bicycle only. The plan looks to take the existing footprint of the parking and place much of it below grade, creating a better pedestrian experience. The City's affordable housing program could potentially come into play for this development. The group can next review the potential sizes of this proposal and potential public benefits. This plan can be worked on to create an intersection of housing, retail, park space, and access, in a way to connect it to downtown.

Ms. Smith asked if there is a better view of the proposed building. Mr. Robinson stated that no details on architecture of the building have been drafted at this point, aside from the approximate size and massing.

Councilor Liot Smith stated that this proposal was helpful to see how much can fit on this parcel. She noted that the groups envisioned at least 50% recreational active green space for this space, and less than 50% mixed use. Mr. Livadas stated that it will be helpful for all the developers to get a clear picture as to what is wanted for this space. If it is to be a large park, the groups must consider where parking will go.

Mr. Schuster asked about access from Hanover Street. Mr. Robinson stated that the group considered how to clarify movement for cars and pedestrians in this space. The intention is to reroute Taylor Street to Flynn Street.

Councilor Whittlesey stated that the takeaway for the boards is that an RFP needs to clearly emphasize the key concepts desired. Chair Dunn agreed that an RFP will need to be very clear and concise.

Mr. Purcell stated that the massing for this proposal is quite large. He noted that the proposal should consider how the public will get direct access to the riverfront. He stated that he would like to know the net effect of the parking change for this proposal. He also noted that he would like to see more office and retail space included.

Kyle Murphy of KaTO Architects of Manchester, Vermont, stated that his group is working through a number of other projects in Vermont which deal with a balance of housing, public space, and the missing middle. This proposal gives the chance to depart from the conventional ways of thinking about how buildings and green space work together. Architecture for this site could be much more organic, as opposed to blocks of buildings. There is a tug of war for this site between green space and an amount of developed space, and what this means in terms of economics. There is a way to make the existing recreation, City Hall, and commercial spaces around the property mix in with this site. There is approximately an existing 20' spacing between each of the parking areas, which lends itself well to a structural grid. A beautiful cut through is proposed, to pull people from the center of the City, through the site, to intersect with the tunnel leading over to the Rail Trail. The group wanted to be sensitive to the height of existing buildings around this site. The proposal considers a mix of commercial/retail space with residential space. The building is proposed to be stepped back to soften the height of the building from the surrounding areas. Each residential unit could include its own balcony, with a view towards the River or the City. This proposal looks to maintain virtually all of the existing parking. The idea is to create an elevated park to achieve the goals of maintaining as much parking as possible without making the site feel like a parking lot. The proposed parking layout will make it easy for all people to access the buildings. The number of existing parking spaces proposed to remain are 300+/- . In, addition to the existing parking the proposal looks to add 175 spaces using levels of parking. The amount of parking is important, as this is an area traveled to and also proposed for housing. The proposal includes approximately 125 units, at a total of approximately 125,000 s.f. The proposal also includes approximately 45,000 s.f. of mixed-use area. This could include restaurants, retail, and office space. It could also include community space, a vocational center or artist galleries. The proposal looks to create a vernacular, or an architectural aesthetic for the site. He stated that his group tries to approach projects so that the architecture and landscape are unified into one design language. This proposal considers a mix of staircases, balconies, and other connections between different levels. These connections integrate with the green space in the center and blend down to the river. The proposal introduces a couple of bridges at the river to connect with the other side. The proposal looks to create an energy that pulls people to the river and into this public space. Near one of the bridge connection is shown a fitness center, an elevated bike path and a pool. The landscaping is proposed to come up onto the roofs, with green roofs and planters. This will highlight the units and allow each one to have its own rooftop terrace or a communal terrace area, allowing neighbors the chance to meet each other. The shared outdoor spaces allow a chance to meet people and socialize. The boards previously suggested softening the height and scale of the project, and this plan attempts to address this. This proposal is a pretty significant departure from anything around it, but the design is rooted in logic. The proposed height could be brought down, and the public space could be increased in a number of different ways. Creating a 3-tier roofline could reduce the overall height of the building by two stories. However, this would result in about a 20% reduction in the number of units available.

Mr. Sykes stated that this presentation makes him consider how to create a neighborhood in the Downtown area. He stated that he likes the idea of maintaining the existing parking and the balcony areas.

Councilor Liot Hill noted that this proposal is more consistent with a natural landscape, as opposed to a built landscape, however its approach to the River still feels a bit urban. She is interested in more green grass or landscaping to approach the River, instead of hardscape.

Mr. Purcell stated that he likes that this proposal attempts to maintain the parking. As the downtown grows, this will be needed. Mr. Murphy stated that his group would evaluate different performance scenarios to determine the best residential/commercial mix for the site.

Chet Clem stated that this proposal shows different types of access and public recreation. It allows for different types of passive and active recreation.

Ms. Smith stated that this proposal gives another idea as to what is possible for this site.

4. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

A. Review and Update of Master Plan Chapter 6: Economic Development
The groups agreed to discuss this at the next meeting.

Chair Dunn stated that he would like to see the groups discuss business and worker retention efforts at a future meeting.

Chair Schuster stated that he would like the next meeting to include a roundtable of the groups to discuss all of the presentations to work through a clear, concise list of key elements.

5. NEXT MEETING DATE: February 22, 2023

6. OTHER BUSINESS

None at this time.

7. ADJOURNMENT.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristan Patenaude