



**CITY OF BURLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS**

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MEMORANDUM

To: Burlington City Council
Public Works Commission
Fr: Chapin Spencer, Director
Re: **Champlain Parkway Project Update**
Date: February 1, 2017

In an effort to keep City leaders updated on the progress of the Champlain Parkway project, I have been providing a yearly written report to the City Council and Commission. The last update was provided at the December 7, 2015 City Council meeting.

Project Background:

The Champlain Parkway, formerly the 'Southern Connector' originated in the 1960's as a four lane limited access highway to improve vehicular access between downtown Burlington and I-89. Today's two-lane version, with a multi-modal design that includes significant stormwater, bike/pedestrian, and traffic calming components, represents a fundamental departure from the project's distant origins and will complement and foster the growing vitality of the South End well into the future. Specifically, this project will:

- Build a new 25-mph city street between Home Avenue and Lakeside Avenue that will expand South End connectivity.
- Construct 1.5 miles of new shared-use path in the South End – creating a continuous shared-use path from the border of South Burlington at Queen City Park Road to Pine & Kilburn where new buffered bike lanes will connect to downtown on Pine Street up to Maple Street.
- Reduce truck and commuter traffic through the Home Avenue, Flynn Avenue, and Champlain School neighborhoods – allowing for future street redesign opportunities in those areas.
- Install two major stormwater features that together with other project components will improve stormwater management over current conditions.
- Install new sidewalk, pedestrian signals, and transit shelters.
- Complement the Railyard Enterprise Project's multi-modal connectivity between Pine Street and Battery Street so that there will be more connections between downtown and the South End.

Recent Design Progress:

As mentioned in previous memos, this project isn't perfect. It has been challenging for many Administrations to work within the project's original Purpose & Need to re-create the Champlain Parkway into a more modern, pedestrian-oriented investment for the City's future.

Non-Discrimination

The City of Burlington will not tolerate unlawful harassment or discrimination on the basis of political or religious affiliation, race, color, national origin, place of birth, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, veteran status, disability, HIV positive status or genetic information. The City is also committed to providing proper access to services, facilities, and employment opportunities. For accessibility information or alternative formats, please contact Human Resources Department at 865-7145.

In 2015, we resolved the final Act 250 appeal, lowered future speed limits along the project corridor, and obtained VT Agency of Transportation (VTrans) consent to develop Pine Street design details that will further enhance safety for all transportation modes.

In 2016, we made additional progress in incorporating publicly-requested changes:

- **Pine & Lakeside:** Completed interim City-funded upgrades to the Pine & Lakeside intersection that are consistent with the final Parkway design including a new mast arm and traffic signals, crosswalks, pedestrian signals, signalized turn lanes, a realigned commercial driveway, and enhanced bike lane markings.
- **On-road bicycling:** VTrans agreed to allow on-road bicycling along the C2 section of the project and our consultants have updated the sign and marking plan accordingly.
- **Fencing flexibility:** Received flexibility from VTrans to adjust fencing plans along the C2 section between Home Avenue and Lakeside Avenue.
- **Path extension:** Added a short shared-use path segment connecting Industrial Avenue to the Parkway shared-use path along Home Avenue.
- **Pine St design details:** Worked with consultants to further refine the Pine St design based on previous public input to enhance safety for all modes along the project corridor. Features now include raised intersections, bump-outs, bike lanes, transit shelters and more pedestrian-friendly intersections.

Future Flexibility:

VTrans and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) have made clear to us that given this project's extensive timeline and pre-development costs, the City cannot make additional changes that would substantially affect the permitting, timing or cost of the project. That said, the City, VTrans and FHWA all acknowledge that this transportation corridor will need to evolve as the needs of the South End evolve. Ideas that can't feasibly be added into the Champlain Parkway project can be, and have been, pursued as separate projects:

- This was done with the community's desire to better connect Pine Street with Battery Street when the Railyard Enterprise Project was launched in 2012 (more information at www.ccrpcvt.org).
- It was done with the construction of sidewalk improvements and the installation of six crosswalks and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons along Pine Street in 2013.
- It was done with the Pine & Lakeside intersection improvements in 2015 / 2016.

We have received additional requests from the community that cannot be included in the Champlain Parkway project without re-opening permits, significantly delaying the project and increasing costs. These requests include:

- Reconnecting lower Pine Street to Queen City Park Road
- Adding additional street features along the Home Ave to Lakeside Ave (C2) section – such as mid-block crosswalks, bus pull-outs and shelters, on-street parking, etc.
- Installing roundabouts instead of signals at intersections

Given these and other issues, the City knew it was important for the community to have VTrans put their ongoing commitment to future flexibility in writing. VTrans agreed and the resulting letter is attached. As the VTrans letter demonstrates, the City will have the latitude to initiate new projects along the Champlain Parkway corridor once the project is completed. Our City is constantly evolving and its transportation and infrastructure needs will respond to these changes.

Public Outreach:

- **Project Website:** Updates on the project can be found at: www.champlainparkway.com.
- **Community Meeting:** We attended the December 8, 2016 public meeting convened by residents interested in maintaining connectivity between Pine Street and Queen City Park Road – and we shared the VTrans letter detailing the future flexibility the City will have in addressing this interest when the Champlain Parkway project is constructed.
- **Ward 5 Update:** We provided a project update to the Ward 5 Neighborhood Planning Assembly at their December 15, 2016 meeting and shared the VTrans letter there as well.

Next Steps and Timeline:

For decades the response to the question of when construction will start has been “in two years”. While we are actively managing a shrinking number of ongoing issues that have the potential to set this project back, we have developed and are following a realistic project schedule that for the first time has construction starting in less than two years. We projected a fall 2018 groundbreaking in my update to the Council in December 2015 and a year later we are still on schedule. Here are the key next steps:

- Develop a soil management plan for the project (a supplemental soil assessment is underway to better understand and manage soil liability issues and costs)
- Acquire any additional areas needed for right-of-way
- Reline Pine Street’s water line in the 2017 season through a separate contract because the Parkway project does not include upgrades to Pine Street’s subterranean infrastructure
- Complete Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Study (FSEIS) re-evaluation and permit extensions / amendments
- Refine project plans to construction level of detail (consultant currently working on semi-final plans)
- Bid project
- Construct project (estimated duration is two full construction seasons with a fall 2018 construction start) and will work with the community and businesses to have good communication and minimize disruptions.

RELATED PROJECT UPDATES:

While we are working hard to advance the Champlain Parkway, we are also advancing many other projects within or adjacent to the project corridor including:

Railyard Enterprise Project: The goals of this project are to improve connectivity for all modes between Pine Street and Battery Street, expand economic opportunities in the area, enhance the livability of adjacent neighborhoods, and improve railyard access. The Council agreed to advance three alternative designs on December 21, 2015. Based on the recent November 28, 2016 Council resolution, the City, CCRPC, and VTrans will evaluate whether Alternative 1B could be constructed quicker and cheaper as a local/state project without federal funding. We expect to return to the City Council in late spring to seek the Council’s direction on which state/local alternative to study in greater detail. <http://www.ccrpcvt.org/transportation/scoping/railyard-enterprise-project/>

King & Maple Neighborhood Traffic Calming Effort: After presenting conceptual plans for traffic calming / neighborhood enhancement at a neighborhood meeting and getting feedback, we are preparing final designs for traffic calming in this residential neighborhood. Construction of the traffic calming elements on King Street is scheduled for spring of 2017 in coordination with paving.

Champlain School Pedestrian Improvements: This Safe Routes to School grant funded project will improve pedestrian crossings at four neighborhood intersections on Locust Street and Birchcliff Parkway.

Many of these projects have been advanced with strong support from our partners at the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, the Vermont Agency of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration, and we thank them for their ongoing support.

Feel free to contact me (cspencer@burlingtonvt.gov) to discuss any of this in further detail.

CC: Michele Boomhower, Director of PPAID, VTrans
Wayne Davis, Project Manager, VTrans
Norman Baldwin P.E., Assistant Director and City Engineer, Burlington DPW
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September 30, 2016

Chapin Spencer, Director
Department of Public Works
City of Burlington
PO Box 849
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Dear Chapin,

As part of the ongoing dialog between the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the City of Burlington (City) regarding the development of the Champlain Parkway (Parkway) project, the City has expressed an interest in understanding the manner in which future transportation-system needs of the City will be addressed in regards to the Champlain Parkway roadway alignment. It is the understanding of VTrans that no future transportation system upgrades are planned at this time, but recognizing that cities such as Burlington are dynamic and growing entities, there is the need for better understanding of future potential transportation options which may be available to the City.

As we have discussed, the Parkway was conceived, planned for and designed over the span of several decades. Over that period of time the City has evolved, as has the project. What was conceived to be a high speed, limited access highway to deliver people quickly through low density neighborhoods in the South End of the City and into downtown Burlington is now going to serve an increasingly diverse and vibrant area of the City. According to the plan BTV South End website, the South End is home to **6,439 residents** and 472 businesses with 6,383 workers; it serves as a focal location for the arts, enterprise and innovation. Plan BTV South End articulates a vision for the future which is dynamic and evolving; the transportation system needs to address this vision, and needs to be flexible and forward leaning.

It is VTrans' understanding that the City seeks future flexibility along the Parkway corridor to support local planning goals, enhance economic development and strengthen the resiliency and diversity of the transportation system. To achieve this outcome, the City is potentially interested in requesting removal of the limited access designation of the C1 & C2 sections of the Parkway, or portions thereof, to allow greater flexibility in addressing future local interests and needs. To that end VTrans would like to provide guidance with regards to activities which would not impede the continued advancement of the project.

Items the City can advance now along Section C2 with the existing limited access designation in place:

- Design removal of fencing along C2 (location(s) to be determined).
- Allowance of on-road cycling along C2 (including associated markings and signage).

Items the City can advance along C2 after Parkway construction is complete, but with existing limited access designation in place; if funded locally these projects would not be subject to Federal or Transportation Board review:

- Sidewalks.
- Mid-block crossings.
- Transit stops.
- Bulb-outs.
- On-street parking.
- Street trees.

Items the City can advance along C1 & C2 after Parkway construction is complete, with existing limited access designation in place, following Transportation Board approval for break-in-access:

- Break-in-access for a public street to expand the street grid in areas such as the intersections with Pine Street/Queen City Parkway and Briggs Street.
- Break-in-access for a private access if supported by the City of Burlington and its municipal planning documents.

Regarding the process for achieving a break-in-access, or re-designation, of the limited access sections of the Parkway (C1 & C2), Chapter 17 of Title 19 addresses Limited Access Facilities. Under 19 V.S.A. § 1708(b), a break in limited access requires the prior written consent and approval of the Transportation Board, which may allow the break in limited access only if it finds that the public interest will be served. The Board must conduct a public hearing and consider the technical recommendations of VTrans before making its decision.

Under section 1703(a), the State may designate town highways as limited access only with the approval of the select board. It is VTrans' understanding that the City Council has approved the Champlain Parkway, which includes the limited access facilities. Therefore, a break in these limited access facilities would, under the current designation, be governed by section 1708(b), rather than by municipal law.

VTrans understands that prior to Parkway construction, the City will not seek any substantive change(s) to sections C1 or C2 that would have been prevented by the limited access designation, without the prior written support of VTrans. Should the City proceed with a request for break in limited access in the future, the City will be solely responsible for any costs that may be incurred in obtaining a break in limited access, including all permitting and litigation expenses. Depending upon the type of funding used to address future transportation system modifications, planning for projects would likely need to address issues such as project necessity, permitting, design, funding feasibility, as well as public interest and input.

As indicated above, all parties would like to stress the importance of initiating construction of the Champlain Parkway prior to contemplating the future matters addressed in this letter. VTrans has been a partner and supporter of the City over the decades and looks forward to the continued growth and success of endeavors undertaken by the City.

Please feel free to contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Michele Boomhower, Division Director

Cc: Chris Cole, Secretary
 Kevin Marshia, Highway Division Director/Chief Engineer
 Sue Scribner, Municipal Assistance Bureau Director
 Wayne Davis, Project Manager
 Matthew Hake, Division Administrator, FHWA
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