

Dear Mayor Weinberger, Director Spencer, and City Councilors,

Thank you for implementing the Shared Streets initiative and for creating a safe bike path detour on Pine Street. Providing recreational spaces has been very important over the past couple months, and both of these initiatives are very beneficial to the community.

As we prepare for the re-opening stage of this crisis, and for what will likely be a drawn-out process of finding a new normal, Local Motion and the Burlington Walk/Bike Council believe that new reallocations of street space and adjustments of infrastructure will be required to move Burlingtonians safely and support our city's recovery. While we believe they will yield many benefits, these recommended adjustments to our streetscapes are primarily intended to achieve two objectives: **to provide safe transportation for populations who rely on GMT busses, and to create the spaces needed for people and businesses to resume economic activity.**

Create safe bike routes for people who rely on GMT busses

Local Motion and the BWBC are extremely supportive of Green Mountain Transit. However, it is clear that coronavirus spreads rapidly when people are forced into confined spaces such as a bus. In order to provide important safe bike routes for Burlingtonians who normally rely on GMT as their sole mode of transportation, the City should implement rapid improvements to Burlington's existing bike network. This will encourage bus riders who are physically able to ride a bicycle for transportation to do so, which will reduce the risks of riding the bus for those who have no other choice.

This is also an opportunity for the City to pilot new infrastructure and encourage the formation of new transportation habits among all residents as we strive to meet mode share and sustainability goals. Mayor Anne Hidalgo of Paris said that, for her city, returning to streets dominated by cars after lockdown ends is "out of the question." Let's be bold in Burlington, too.

Pine Street

With the southern Greenway closed, it is imperative that the City maintain the Pine St. bike lane as a safe recreational connection to the bike path and as a low-stress transportation route between downtown and the South End. The protected bike lane on Pine Street should be reinforced with barrels or other larger vertical elements at key locations. We know there will be challenges to this, but we believe businesses will embrace the greater public good of providing this essential recreational and transportational access, and will appreciate the increased bike traffic along the corridor. The southbound side should be restriped as soon as possible.

North Avenue

Install protection for bike lanes on North Avenue where space permits. While we acknowledge that infrastructure improvements on North Avenue have been met with controversy in the past, the Red Line has the highest ridership of all of GMT's routes, and is thus a priority corridor for bike infrastructure, especially given the crowding issues on the Greenway. Installing protection along North Avenue will also reduce illegal speeding and thereby improve safety and quality of life for all users—people driving, people walking, and people rolling—and would not require any changes to the traffic pattern.

Winooski Ave

Accelerate installation of new bike lanes and other improvements identified in the Winooski Ave Corridor Study to the greatest extent possible. The City should take advantage of current lower traffic volumes to pilot quick build installations. This could include experimenting with closing the Bank St. garage entrance (possibly in tandem with turning Bank St. into a pedestrian zone, as outlined below) to simplify the Winooski/Bank intersection, which would allow for enhanced pedestrian infrastructure at the busy Bank St. crossing.

Union St. & Sherman St.

Reinstall the protected bike lanes as soon as possible.

Restriping

Restripe bike lanes and crosswalks as soon as possible. Priority should be given to Colchester Ave., Pine St., Union St., North Ave., Pearl St., and Winooski Avenue. Colchester Ave. is an especially important high-volume link between Essex/Colchester/Winooski and Burlington and currently has essentially no markings. This, along with almost no parked vehicles, has resulted in high speeds which are unsafe to the many people who bike or walk this route.

Create the spaces needed for people and businesses to successfully and safely resume economic activity

Deactivate “beg buttons” and switch pedestrian signals to regular intervals

People walking should not have to touch potentially contaminated surfaces in order to cross the street. While RFBs should remain button-activated, “beg buttons” should be deactivated at key signalized intersections, and the walk signals timed as part of the regular signal rotation. This change will require signage on the adjusted signals, as well as a public outreach campaign that could include Local Motion volunteers standing at signals and alerting people to the change. Maintain audio/tactical cues on buttons for accessibility.

Revise and expand the parklet program

Parklets could be an important way for restaurants and businesses all over Burlington to add the capacity they need to be financially viable this season. Last year’s parklet pilot was a huge success, and could be easily implemented. However, some of the requirements set out in the current program will need to be adjusted to make this option more accessible to businesses in the current fiscal climate.

Our recommendations include lifting or decreasing the restrictions on the number of parklets per block and number of spaces repurposed, and reducing or eliminating permitting and meter encumbrance fees. Perhaps most importantly, design requirements should be reconsidered for now to allow businesses to implement parklets more simply and quickly, and at a lower cost. These changes would encourage adoption and also signal that city leadership is doing all it can to help local restaurants, cafes, and bars—the heart and soul of our downtowns—weather this economic crisis.

Enhance pedestrian access in the downtown

Many of our sidewalks are not wide enough to accommodate social distancing. In order to make people feel safe visiting downtown businesses, the City should consider partial or complete car traffic closures on streets like St. Paul, Bank, and others. Where full street closures are not possible or appropriate, parking should be removed in order to create additional walking space on the busiest pedestrian streets.

Greenbelt beautification

Many Burlingtonians have gardening on their minds and many have more time to devote to this. Encouraging residents to plant in city greenbelts would improve the experience for people walking, add color and beauty to our neighborhoods during the pandemic, and provide families with a healthy and educational activity.

Other recommendations

Expand and consider making local traffic only designations permanent

Reclaiming streets as public spaces that can be used for neighbors, and not just cars, will facilitate the social bonds that will help us weather this crisis and become stronger and more vibrant in the future. The need for local residents to use the streets will not expire any time soon, so the existing Local Traffic Only signs should be retained, and more should be purchased for use in other neighborhoods. The City should consider making some of these partial street closures permanent.

Enforce speeding and other traffic laws on major roads

There are many reports of increases in illegal speeding during the shutdown, which is likely due to lower traffic volumes permitting higher speeds. Many of the recommendations outlined in this document will effectively reduce the design speed of the adjusted corridors, which will in turn reduce illegal speeding. However, enforcement is still an important component and should focus on areas with the most reckless behavior, including North Ave., Colchester Ave., Pine St., and Route 127. The City could also consider implementing a speed camera enforcement program, which could generate income for the City while making our streets safer with less potential for enforcement bias.

Sincerely,

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