

## Michael Miller

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**From:** Steve Sease <steve.sease@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, July 11, 2017 10:22 PM  
**To:** Dona Bate; Anne Watson; John Hollar; Jean Olson; Justin Turcotte; Michael Miller; William Fraser; Ashley A. Hill; rkreuger@montpelier-vt.org  
**Subject:** Comments on Matrix dated June 28, 2017, concerning proposed zoning ordinance

Dear Mayor, City Manager, City Councilors, and Planning Director:

I have recently returned from a two week trip that prevented me from attending the last City Council meeting concerning zoning.

I was disappointed to discover that a number of comments I made to the Council were omitted in the matrix submitted for your discussion and dated June 28. The matrices were supposed to capture comments by the public in order to drive substantive discussions of the proposed ordinance by the Council. The implication was that they would be complete and an objective capture of comments. In my case, at least, I feel the matrix is a failure. This certainly undermines my faith in this process, and it does not serve the Council well if you do not have a complete and accurate summary of public comments for your review.

I spoke twice at the Council's meetings. The points I made were ignored for the most part. My verbal comments can be viewed on the media archives for April 12 beginning at approximately 2:25, and for April 26 beginning at 2:01:33. I ask that you review these tapes yourselves to confirm the accuracy of this summary. I also suggest that you question the accuracy of the matrix in general. I will note that a speaker after me is not addressed in the matrix at all: its as if she never existed. This is very poor public service.

The points I made were:

April 12:

- I support Smart Growth. Increase density downtown. The Net Zero example shows how downtown can be developed for more density.
- Figure 30 - missing from proposal. This captures important public policy by showing the City growing outward in successive stages.
- Imagine what Main Street from School to Roundabout would look like under the proposal proposal. Setbacks, building heights and flat roofs are totally out of character with what's there now and not what Montpelierites want.

April 26:

- No setback on westerly side of Main St for new development from North Branch.

Overhanging balconies are not appropriate for the river corridor.

No setback from the river is the wrong way to treat a river. Suggested 20' setback where no buildings exist. This would be good for river health and aesthetically.

Growth Center. Proposal includes an old growth center map which the City subsequently shrank considerably at the request of the state. The new growth center map, as approved by the State, should be inserted in the plan.

The new Growth Center map is consistent with the reasoning in Figure 30 and concentrates growth in the downtown.

How the matrix dealt with my comments:

The only passing reference to my remarks in the matrix concerns balconies over the North Branch, hardly the most significant of my remarks.

I would ask that you revise the matrix by inserting the following statements verbatim where I have noted so that I can be sure that my ideas are captured for discussion. I do not appreciate having to do the work of the Planning Director, but this seems to be the only way to be sure the Council at least considers my ideas.

A section should be added to the matrix to discuss Missing Figure 30. The language in the figure addresses the very significant policy direction that the City will grow outward from downtown in successive five year stages. What is going to become of the figure? More importantly, how will the proposed ordinance address its language? It can hardly be ignored. If the language is dropped, it would amount to a substantive revision of the new plan without any foundation. I suggest language to the effect that Figure 30 be inserted in the Plan in its original form, and the zoning ordinance be revised to be consistent with its direction.

Another section should be added to address the evolution of the Growth Center as it was submitted by the City and approved by the state. The City committed to the State to shrink the Growth Center. How will this be addressed in the plan? My suggestion is to insert the new map and adopt the reasoning in Figure 30.

Note 16. The Planning Director conflates recommendations to concentrate growth in the downtown to restricting development to downtown. This is disingenuous at best. No one that I am aware of made such a recommendation, and it is obviously impossible. My request was to develop an ordinance that would concentrate density (not growth) in the downtown, and I cited the example of the Net Zero exercise. Figure 30 captures this concept. Growth will obviously be possible in the outlying regions under whatever ordinance is adopted.

Insert language: Zone in progressively less dense sectors from the downtown outward to preserve the character of neighborhoods in accordance with Figure 30. Use a walkability index of approximately a 1/4 of a mile (the figure found in much planning literature) to accomplish this goal.

Note 24. The Planning Director addresses only the part of the comments I made concerning the North Branch about balconies. I commented that there is a significant amount of green space behind the buildings from the on the west side of Main Street from the roundabout to School Street. Some historic structures directly abut the river, but the great majority of properties have some green space, with shrubbery, bushes, and mature trees. I requested that the zero setback from the river be dropped in favor of protecting the existing green space. This comment does not appear in the matrix at all. I herewith renew my request, and make the following suggestion:

Insert language: no new construction be permitted closer than 20 feet to the North Branch in UC-2, and natural vegetation and trees will be planted and maintained in this buffer. If a green space of less than 20 feet exists on a lot proposed for redevelopment, that space must be preserved. Existing properties with no setback may continue to have no setback.

This recommendation is based on preservation of the aquatic health of the river and aesthetics. Let's not have Montpelier be recognized as a city that canyonized the remaining green space along its rivers.

Note 69. This is out of numerical order, but notes 24 and 69 are related. I would suggest, in the example used, that if NECI were to be torn down, that development be allowed on the old footprint to the edge of the river, even though this flies in the face of good river conservation and environmentalism. Preserving existing green space in UC1 would protect the very attractive green area along the river by the Garage, for example. Even the thin fringe of trees on the eroding bank next to the parking lot behind Aubuchons adds color and vibrancy to this area, and, combined with the trees across the river, helps shade and cool the North Branch as it nears its confluence with the Winooski.

Insert: any existing green space less than 20 feet in width along the North Branch must be preserved in both UC1 and UC2 along the North Branch.

Note 25. I commented that proposed building size, roofs, and setbacks are out of character along Main Street from School to the roundabout. This may be Montpelier's most iconic historic street. It's quite lovely, and the viewer sees a great deal of green space in front and back yards and some side yards. There are a number of trees, a great deal of landscaping and shrubbery, and green lawns. The Planning Director only comments on density, when much of my concern was directed toward the egregiously out-of-scale building sizes that would be permitted there.

Insert: limit building heights to what exists now, only gable roofs of the same pitch as is found now be allowed, and front and side yard setbacks be limited to what exists now.

The large parking lots behind the buildings on the east side of Main Street present opportunities for development, as a number of contestants in the Net Zero project demonstrated. I recommend that these parking lots be considered for zoning for dense development, with the street front properties limited to what exists now. This would be consistent with practices in numerous other communities that protect aesthetic and historic values of street front property but allow larger and more contemporary structures behind, in a manner designed to protect the qualities of the street front.

Additional comments that I did not make previously:

Note 34. A 4000 square foot footprint in Res 9000 would be completely out of character with this zone - indeed, in the city at large. A three story 4000 square footprint building would be a monstrosity in any residential neighborhood, adding up to 12,000 square feet of floor space. I think it's important to know the average square footage of buildings in all zones. Present zoning, at 3000 square feet, is also out of character with residential neighborhoods. Direct the Planning Commission determine the average building footprint in all residential zones, and limit new buildings to a reasonable per cent of that number, or limit any new construction to 20% of the building existing on the lot.

Note 38. Change the City's playing fields on Elm Street to Mixed Use Residential. This is preposterous. The city is limited in its recreational opportunities now. Is the Planning Director seriously recommending zoning for development for the Mountaineers' ball field, the other playing fields, tennis courts and the swimming pool, thus eliminating those uses? Does he believe that there is a logical reuse for the playing fields other than recreation? This proposal should be dropped for the recreation fields. Keep it for Turtle Island and CCV. And certainly protect these and all other recreational and park facilities in the City with appropriate zoning.

Note 110. This addresses a proposal to allow the DRB to waive common open space for infill housing if the development is within 1/4 mile of a park, school, or the State House lawn. Has the School Board, the Recreation Commission, or the state, been consulted on this proposal? It appears to tell residents of these developments, if the waiver is allowed, to head over to the nearest school, park, or State House lawn to recreate. Does that include barbecues? Alcohol consumption? How would this play out if school is in session? As I noted above, the city needs more recreational opportunities, and providing open space at infill developments, and other

developments where this idea might apply, is good planning. The proposal, seemingly ill-thought-through, would lead to potentially incompatible demands of school yards, parks, or the State House lawn and increase pressure on our already limited recreational opportunities.

Thanks very much for reading. I hope you made it this far! And thanks for your commitment to the City, your hard work in general, and your thoughtful approach to the proposed zoning ordinance.

Yours very truly

Steve Sease  
603 North Street