

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### New St. Johns development and future livability

Dear Editor,

I am writing today about the mixed-use development planned at the east entry to downtown St. John's and the associated road/traffic changes the city has attached to this project. This seems a significant undertaking that will greatly alter many features of life in the immediate area.

I want to express several caveats at the outset.

I am not opposed to development in St. Johns. When I moved here in 2006, I looked forward to the prospect of more diverse businesses and amenities in the community. The movement in that direction to date has been really promising: I love being able to walk to Tre Bone, Etcetera, City Farm, Ace Hardware, Leisure, Barrel, Proper Eats, and Affogatto (among others,) and the announcement that a New Seasons is on the horizon on N. Lombard was welcome news. Moreover, although I had uncertainty about an apartment building being erected next to the bridge, I think the Marvel 29 turned out better than one would have imagined. Its design and ecological focus make it a pleasing addition to the community and all the residents I've met are simply great people. I would also be remiss if I did not recognize that as the area is revitalized, my property value goes up, a welcome relief having made my first home purchase right before the recession fully hit. So I "get" that there is gain on all fronts when businesses and developers see our part of town as viable. And lastly, having had the opportunity to meet the architect of the new project at the most recent SJNA meeting, he seems a very likable, well-intentioned person. He noted he used to live in the area and wanted to be part of a project here, and his existing buildings, Signal Station and the building that houses The Parlour, and until recently Breathe Bodywork, are lovely additions that fit the community and are scaled appropriately. All this said, I believe there are features of this new project deserving of attention and review.

It is my understanding that three existing buildings - Weir's Cyclery/Huk Lab, the Finnish church, and the Hookah bar will be torn down to make way for a four story, 100+ unit apartment building with retail space on the ground level. The building will offer 80 underground parking spaces and the garage entry/exit will be created on N. Charleston adjacent to the library parking lot and across from James John School. In addition, at the city's request in accordance with the St. John's/Lombard Plan, the slip curve lane that allows drivers to head into the downtown corridor, and "ivy island" that hosts the area marquee, will be removed; new curb space will be created in their place for a plaza; and a right turn into downtown with a signal will be installed, making Lombard fully two-way into and out of downtown. This is about as big a change as I could imagine for this iconic entry to our downtown stretch.

I happen to like our atypical, curved entry that adjoins lovely shaded green space that community members worked hard to

create. It seems a shame to trade this for a straight entry point that will look identical to every other commercial area in the city. Further, as someone who lives on Charleston and exits it daily across Lombard by car and/or foot, I have not found it to be as dangerous an intersection as many claim, especially now that the awnings on the Weir/Huk Lab building are gone. Visibility is no worse than at many other intersections in the city and I have personally never witnessed a driver speeding into downtown; indeed I think the curve discourages that.

I do however have serious concern about the increasing pressures on traffic and parking that this project will likely create. As anyone who travels Ivanhoe, Richmond, Lombard, Germantown Rd., or the bridge on a daily basis surely knows, we are getting a bit crowded in these parts at rush hour. The traffic light at the corner of McMenamin's has made for daily back-ups in both directions and as pedestrians have found, they are not necessarily safer. When more than 100 new residents live between Richmond and Charleston at Lombard, won't traffic be monumentally worse? Where are the overflow of their cars that don't fit in the 80 allotted spaces going to go? Where will the teachers at James John park? How will parents and buses drop off and pick up students? How will library patrons be affected? These questions don't seem to be redressed in the planning for this new structure. And unlike Marvel 29 which sits right next to the bridge, the residents of this new structure will be placing significant load on travel in the heart of downtown.

Having spoken with city planners and based on the architect's own explanation at the neighborhood meeting, I now understand that the building itself fits city code for our area and therefore does not require public hearing or community input. Whether we feel a building of this size fits the scale and 'small town' feel of our area is therefore irrelevant. And truth be told, I'd much rather have someone with ties to the community design the

project than some hired gun who has no stake in the outcome, save the gain to his or her bank account.

However, the proposed changes to the roadway require the city to vacate parcels of their land to the developer, and this apparently means this portion of the project will come before City Council for review. It seems this is an opportunity for residents to have their voices heard by those in a position to influence project outcome. I hope the St. Johns Neighborhood Assn. or St. Johns Main Street can research when the project will be heard by City Council and let all of us know in advance. I also hope PBOT (Portland Bureau of Transportation) will complete a traffic study of our area and determine what mitigation needs to be done to accommodate the anticipated strain on our local roads. As a residential and business area with few entry points, increased occupancy means increased traffic headache and decreased livability. And as development in the Mississippi area proves, there is assuredly a tipping point for quality of life when too many people and vehicles are crowded into too small a space.

I am glad more people are finding out that St. Johns is a great community. I am glad that more small businesses want to plant their stake here and that more developers believe our area is worth investing in. And I want to have some say in how the changes in my community happen and how my quality of life is affected. When I shared with the architect that I hoped the sweet mural on the side of the Weir's/Huk Lab building could be saved as part of this project, he affirmed my interest and struck me as wholly genuine in so doing. I was grateful for his response. I don't want to be seen as an obstacle to progress but I do want my neighbors and community members to be informed about the forthcoming changes to our area in the hopes that our voices, diverse as they may be, can be heard.

Sincerely,  
Kristine Munholland  
North Charleston

### Keep Ivy Island

Dear Editor,

I would like to write about the current plan to develop the Charleston St/ Ivy Island lot. For those who are not familiar, the plan is for the city to vacate the Lombard slip lane and Ivy Island, to raze Ivy Island and to build a sharp right turn signal into St Johns. Where Lombard and Ivy Island are currently located, the developer plans to build apartments and an underground garage. The St Johns Neighborhood association is poised to approve this project. The authority for this project is the 2001 St Johns/ Lombard Plan. In the plan there were other proposals, one of which did not destroy Ivy Island and kept the Lombard slip lane.

I think a project that changes the face of St Johns so radically should have more community input and consensus. I don't think any of us really want another traffic light and its congestion, or to see Ivy Island razed. What we do want is for Lombard and the Lombard/Charleston corner to be

safe and pedestrian friendly. This can be done more elegantly than by destroying and changing everything. Let's keep what works, and there's a lot about the current easy, friendly, iconic, and lovely entrance to our business district that works. The reason why this is a dangerous and pedestrian unfriendly corner is the blind Lombard curve. It's blind because of the Huk Building. If you moved that building four feet, and with the extra feet built a flower planter and tree buffer, no more Lombard blind curve, Charleston/Lombard corner becomes safe, it's pedestrian friendly, we keep Ivy Island and we don't get a right turn signal that nobody wants.

The Huk Building is slated for demolition and the sight lines for new construction have yet to be designed. They could be designed to make this safe.

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