

December 23, 2019

Plattsburgh Common Council
c/o Beth Carlin, Mayor's Office
Plattsburgh City Hall
41 City Hall Place
Plattsburgh, NY 12901

Dear Councilors, Planning Board Members, Zoning Board Members, County Planning Board Members, Involved Agencies, Interested Agencies:

Please accept and enter into the public record the comments below concerning the Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement for the Plattsburgh Area Downtown Improvement Projects:

1. Page 9 – Table 3: Summary of Potential Significant Adverse Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures
 - This chart assumes little to no adverse environmental impacts, and does not take into consideration or offer mitigation measures for many adverse impacts that will occur as a result of the proposed projects. Please consider the following:
 - Land Use, Community Character, Zoning and Public Policy - There are several issues not considered or mentioned here. While the Potential impacts mention there will be deviations from the Zoning code for a PUD which require Zoning board approval, it assumes that there are no adverse impacts. There are many potential adverse impacts in terms of Land Use, Community Planning, Zoning, and Public Policy. The Durkee Street Parking Lot will be transferred from public ownership to private ownership. This alone has unknown and unexplored immediate and future impacts, severely limiting potential future uses. What limitations on community use and access will result from this transfer, and how can they be mitigated? The parking lot is not just used as a parking lot, but also as a public gathering space used for many public events and activities throughout the year. The proposed structure in the Durkee Street Parking Lot will require the allowance of residential units on the first floor as well, which is against city code for the downtown area, and out of character with the surrounding buildings. The size of the proposed building on the Durkee Street Lot is also unprecedented in Downtown Plattsburgh. The structure will be imposing and overshadow the small quaint character of the surrounding buildings. All proposed projects will undergo specific changes in land use as well, which all need to be considered for adverse impacts. What will be the adverse environmental impacts as a result of increased foot traffic and human population in the proposed repurposing

of the PMLD building adjacent to the sewage treatment plant? This statement assumes there are none, and I strongly disagree.

- Aquatic and Natural Resources – It seems outlandish to me that this statement suggests there will be no adverse environmental impacts to aquatic and natural resources. The statement appears to assume this simply because there are no water resources directly on the parcels of any of the proposed projects; however, several of the projects occur on land directly adjacent to both Lake Champlain, and the Saranac River. This warrants further investigation into what adverse environmental impacts might occur as a result – especially for the Durkee Street Mixed Use Development and the proposed new location of the Farmers market on Green Street. Increased foot traffic, vehicular traffic, and human population present in the area surrounding the former PMLD building should be investigated for negative impacts on both fish, bat, bird and endangered species populations in that area as well as their habitats. The imposing new structure proposed for the Durkee Street Lot should be investigated for the same impacts as well as potential adverse impacts on sunlight to the wildlife and vegetation surrounding and within the river itself.

- Municipal Utilities – This section discusses water and sewer resources and how they are adequate enough to handle the capacity needed for the proposed development in the Durkee Street Lot; however, there is no mention of projected electric usage and what the potential negative impacts on the community might be as far as electric rates for city residents. Please include this information as well. What electrical zone is the project(s) located in. Is the transmission and distribution to that zone adequate to support the additional load? What will the electrical load be for the project(s)? What type of heating is being proposed? Will the existing electrical infrastructure require any upgrades to accommodate the proposed project(s). If so, will the projects return on investment be able to justify such a capital expenditure within Public Service Commission regulations. Please explain the associated costs and return on investment in detail so that the potential adverse impacts can be properly and thoroughly understood and evaluated. In recent years nearby projects were told they could not install certain types of electrical equipment because the infrastructure was at or near its peak capacity (i.e. Plattsburgh Public Library, Catherine Gardens, Senior Center, etc.). How will the proposed project impact the at-capacity status of the electrical system in that neighborhood? What limitations will be required?

- Traffic and Transportation System - The Peak Hour Traffic generation numbers for each project are given in the chart, but not the current numbers. Please include those numbers for comparison. The traffic county data includes only vehicle traffic, however, pedestrian and bicycle traffic counts should be also be conducted. Typically, that data is

collected during spring summer and fall months as well as winter. Since walkability and bikeability has been identified in DRI documents as a key objective, it is imperative that data should also be collected for these modes of transportation so that the projects impacts to these concerns be thoroughly evaluated and understood. Within traffic and transportation systems, pedestrian traffic should also be considered and negative impacts on walkability and bikeability based on site plans for the proposed projects be detailed – some of which I discuss in the next section. I would also suggest that the council pursue implementing a Complete Streets policy prior to any further changes or improvements to streets, sidewalks, or parking lots as a mitigating measure.

- Parking – I disagree that the current plan is sufficient to replace all parking being lost as a result of the planned development at the Durkee Street Lot. There are also adverse environmental impacts to the walkability of the downtown area due to specific design features of the proposed Arnie Pavone Parkin Lot as well as the changes made to the County Parking Lot. Both lots seek to increase parking capacity by eliminating through lanes within the lots themselves and instead increasing the number of entrances/exits, thereby increasing the number of curb cuts – having a negative impact on walkability in the downtown area. I also object to the ommittance of the County Lot in the DGEIS as well as its construction without any review. The GEIS relies on the County Government Center parking lot renovation as the second greatest location for replacement parking to compensate for the parking lost at the Durkee public lot, the City participated in negotiations with the County Government Center for design of the County Government Center parking lot renovation including relinquishing a portion of the City Street Right of Way to the County for parking (in violation of City Code), the City entered into an agreement and provided financing for the County Government Center Parking Lot and yet omitted this parking lot from the GEIS. The parking lot design also did not receive a Building permit prior to construction, nor a Planning Board review as is required by City Code. The parking lot design is in violation of several City Code standards as well as NYSDOT Highway Design Manual Standards for pedestrian safety / access control. Not only did the city increase the number of curb cuts along Court Street in order to fit in more parking spaces, but these changes were made for the express interest of providing more parking spaces to accommodate the construction of the proposed development at the Durkee Street lot – and is therefore an example of segmentation as they are undeniably interrelated. Either those changes should have been included in the DGEIS before completion, or those additional parking spaces should not be considered in the count of replacement parking spaces displaced by the Durkee Street lot development.

- Fiscal and Economic Conditions – I disagree that the proposed development will not have any adverse impacts on the public-school system, as does the Plattsburgh City School Board. Please provide a complete analysis of potential costs and impacts which include the effects of the proposed PILOT agreement on the rest of the taxpayers. I also disagree with the assumed projected economic outcomes of this project. This statement shows that only 4 full time jobs will be directly created by the developers themselves. 35 jobs are expected to be provided by the tenants of the commercial and/or restaurant space created by the developers, but there is no guarantee of occupancy in those spaces. The inclusion of an additional 58 jobs, \$1.9 million in earnings, and nearly \$5.2 million in sales is highly speculative and optimistic. I strongly object to these assertions. Will the developer be held accountable for ensuring that these projections be met within the terms of their PILOT? What protections does the community have against economic downturn in return for the large investment we are making in terms of the DRI grant money, public land, and tax incentives being offered to this developer?

- Historic and Cultural Resources – I am glad to see that the city is consulting with the NYSOPRHP to determine if there are any adverse environmental impacts; though I would prefer it to be recognized that this is required by law, as the Plattsburgh Downtown Historic District is listed as “eligible” on the State Historic Registry and the NYSOPRHP should therefore be considered an “Involved Agency” rather than an “Interested Agency” as indicated in the GEIS. The project will receive significant amounts of State Funding. The project also has the potential to have a significant adverse impact on the Saranac River Trail (SRT) Phase 2 project which is funded by NYSOPRHP. SRT Phase 2 includes bike lanes or an accessible bike route along Durkee Street. The DRI project proposes to abolish this important aspect of the NYSOPRHP funded SRT Phase 2 Project. Furthermore, the GEIS provides virtually no analysis or evaluation of this important concern. Also, please note that bicycles are prohibited by law from travelling on sidewalks, therefore, the Riverwalk and sidewalk along Broad Street are not a viable alternative. A full alternatives analysis should be conducted to demonstrate how this NYSOPRHP funded project will not be adversely impacted. It should also be recognized that “The Point” historic district which includes the area directly across the Saranac River from the proposed development on the Durkee Street Lot is listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. As such, any negative impacts on the historic and cultural integrity of that area should also be considered, and the National Park Service should also be consulted as to impacts on that area. Specifically, negative impacts of the view from the area and its character due to the imposing nature and scale of the proposed project at the Durkee Street Lot directly adjacent should be considered. I also would ask the council to read the following Summary Statement of Significance from the State Registry, and consider

pursuing the suggestions made and add the Plattsburgh Downtown Historic District to the official registry list prior to development of any land within the district to ensure protection of the historic and cultural resources of our downtown area:

Summary Statement of Significance:

Previously identified by SHPO as a potential historic district, the Downtown Plattsburgh Historic District meets Criteria A and C at the local level in the areas of architecture, commerce, and community planning and development. The district is architecturally and historically significant as a largely intact city business core, reflecting the growth and development of Plattsburgh as a regional commercial hub and industrial center from the early nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. Preliminary boundaries were drawn based on the available desktop resources. The district is roughly bounded by Cornelia Street to the north, City Hall Place, the Saranac River, and Durkee Street to the east, Broad Street to the south, and Oak Street to the west. Further investigation would be required in order to identify all contributing and non-contributing resources. The district includes primarily commercial, institutional and religious buildings that were designed in a variety of styles including Greek Revival, Italianate, Colonial Revival, Renaissance Revival, and Art Deco. Attached commercial masonry buildings are primarily found along Clinton, Margaret and Bridge Streets. The district also retains free-standing buildings, which are occupied by religious and civic institutions. Key buildings that are listed in the National Register include: the Paul Marshall House on Cornelia Street, City Hall on City Hall Place, Clinton County Courthouse Complex on Margaret Street, the First Presbyterian Church and Strand Theater on Brinkerhoff Street, and the St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church and Rectory at the corner of Broad and Margaret Streets. The downtown district also includes the MacDonough Monument and Park located along the Saranac River, and Trinity Park between Trinity Place and Court Street. The City of Plattsburgh is located on the west shore of Lake Champlain at the mouth of the Saranac River. The potential water power of the Saranac and military bounty lands lured spectators and permanent settlers to the region after 1785. From this period to the middle of the nineteenth century, industrial and commercial development was concentrated near the river with residences dotting Margaret, Broad, and Brinkerhoff Streets, as well as "The Point" area east of the Saranac. Plattsburgh prospered as a lumber milling and lake shipping hub, and became a government center as the seat of Clinton County. The City's physical growth and economic expansion reached a peak during the second quarter of the twentieth century. Subsequent development has extended the City's boundaries to the west and north since the 1940s. The basic configuration of the City's nineteenth century

commercial and residential areas has changed little over time despite several devastating fires and subsequent redevelopment in the mid-nineteenth century, especially within the central business district. Two National Register-listed historic districts are immediately west of the Downtown: Brinkerhoff Street and Court Street. Both districts are residential and represent the City's major growth period from about 1800 to 1910. The buildings in these two districts are generally large and imposing in scale, although the Brinkerhoff Street district contains several modest worker dwellings.

- Environmental Contamination – I would disagree that there are no potential adverse impacts on environmental contamination. There is known remediation of asbestos in both the former Glens Falls National Bank and the former MLD building. While the chart states that hazardous materials will be handled according to regulations, it concludes that therefore there are no mitigation measures needed. I would argue that the measures needed to dispose of the hazardous materials are the mitigating measures, and therefore need to be specified and listed along with the projected costs of such remediation. This statement should also include the results of any environmental and ground soil tests completed at all proposed project sites.
- Recreation and Open Space – I strongly object to the conclusion made that there are no adverse impacts to recreation and open space as a result of the proposed project in the Durkee Street Lot. This area is currently public land that is often used for more activities than just parking. It also has the potential to be converted to more useable and attractive public space once the city's parking issues are resolved, which can be designed to better highlight the natural resource of the Saranac River and attract more visitors to the area as a result. Multiple public attractions such as a skating rink, garden, landmark or other public gathering spaces could be constructed in this lot to create a public destination, which was a core component of the DRI application and proposed plan to the State. This opportunity and resulting positive impacts on both the downtown economy and quality of life will be lost if we are to give the lot away to a private entity for one dollar. It is often used as a convenient and highly visible gathering and event space in the heart of the downtown, attracting many visitors to the area. The GEIS does not provide any comparative analysis of the economic impact of creating a public gathering space of interest to attract visitors to the downtown area, which was the stated goal of the DRI. It is impossible to evaluate the proposed project unless and until such a comparative economic analysis is performed. Using the 2009 Colin Read Study conducted for the Adirondack Visitors Bureau as a benchmark, it is clear that attracting visitors to this area (in that case fishermen) is guaranteed to result in over \$8 million impact annually. This GEIS provides a highly questionable study of the economic impact

that 114 residential units might have, but does not provide any alternative evaluation for the impact that attracting visitors to the downtown might have. Clearly a thorough evaluation is required before a reasoned elaboration can be conducted. The open space also provides for unmitigated views of the river and the Point Historic District which will be almost completely blocked by the oppressive size of the proposed structure. I also disagree that adding more residents to the downtown area does not increase the demand for open space. Adding residents will increase the demand for open space.

2. Page 13 – Comparison of Project Alternatives

- This chart only assumes two alternatives to the proposed development at the Durkee Street Lot. This is insufficient. I ask for the following alternatives to also be included:
 - a) The analysis should leave open the option of doing nothing at the lot and leaving it as is. Please include this in the chart for comparison
 - b) I would like to see a fourth option included in this comparison which - instead of allotting the \$4.3 million to a private developer and giving prime public land away for \$1 - the land remains public, and DRI money is instead put towards public open space improvements to approximately one acre of the space (or about 1/3 of the lot) as well as the construction of a new Farmers Market building in its current location. The remaining land would remain a public parking lot until the improvements made attract more interest in private development more scaleable to the downtown area without the need for such drastic monetary and tax incentives. We must first focus on improving the quality of life for those already living downtown and creating public space that is an attraction for visitors and tourists before adding more housing and storefronts to the market. This plan of action – investing DRI funds in the public land improvements first - was actually suggested in the Strategic Investment Plan for the DRI, and represents a much more lucrative and less risky plan of action for the city in the long run when compared to the costs and risks associated with the current plan and its necessary PILOT.

3. Page 39 – 2.2.8 Paragraph 4

- This paragraph states the following: The project site is zoned for industrial use and is located within the City's Harborside Area immediately west of the City's Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF). Per Schedule I of Permitted Uses of the City's Zoning Ordinance, a public facility is a

permitted principal use within areas zoned for industrial use. A farmers' market is not a specifically defined use in the City's Zoning Ordinance and thus it's classification as a public facility for zoning purposes is an appropriate substitute."

- a) I strongly disagree with this statement, and do not believe it is appropriate to classify the Farmers' Market as a "public facility" in order to allow it to be moved next to a sewage treatment plant in an industrial zone. A Farmer's Market selling fresh produce and crafts is more appropriately defined under Commercial Zoning, and should be surrounded by other commercially zoned sites, not industrial sites. This placement will have adverse impacts on the Farmers' Market itself as well as on the image and attractiveness of our city as a whole.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these matters.

Best,
Danielle Erb

Cc: Ms. Sylvia Parrotte, City Clerk