



## Office of Mayor Miro Weinberger

September, 10, 2021

To: Superintendent Tom Flanagan  
CC: Burlington School District Board of Commissioners  
RE: Support for Advancing the Memorial Auditorium/Gateway Block to Next Round of Analysis

*VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY*

Mr. Flanagan and Commissioners,

Thank you all for your service to Burlington during this remarkably challenging time. As Mayor and the parent of two children in the Burlington School District, I am grateful for the outstanding public health record you achieved while continuing in person schooling through the most acute stages of the pandemic, and for the dramatic, decisive action you took to convert the former Macy's into a temporary high school last year.

Thank you, also, for the urgency with which you are working to establish a new, permanent Burlington High School. I am closely following your progress and I fully support the aggressive timeline you have outlined for creating this essential facility. My understanding is that next week you will be making a critical decision on this project as you narrow down the long list of initial site possibilities to a short list of sites for much deeper analysis. **I am writing to strongly recommend that the Memorial Auditorium/Gateway Block (hereafter: Gateway Block) be advanced to this next stage.**

I believe there are numerous, significant ways in which the City can partner with the BSD if the Gateway Block is ultimately selected by you for the new high school and I hope that we can have the opportunity to explore that potential in the next phase of assessment. While the Gateway Block also has unique potential risks that would need to be faced directly, a more focused effort may show them to be manageable.

**As you enter deliberations in the coming days, I wanted to first highlight where I see the potential for the City to support the district in its goal of expediently resolving a new, future home for BHS at the Gateway Block.**

1. Land swap: The City is open to a land swap in which the BSD would receive, without acquisition cost, rights to the Memorial/Gateway Block and the City in return takes on a to be determined level of responsibility and use of the polluted current high school site (less the athletic fields which would remain with the BSD). The City may be

better positioned than the school district to return this land to productive use given our experience accessing environmental clean-up funds and managing remediation efforts.. In a further due diligence period the City would work with BSD to explore whether such an arrangement could significantly reduce the \$20 million of remediation costs that are estimated currently for a new project at Institute Road.

2. Partnership with the Fletcher Free Library: The Gateway Block abuts the Fletcher Free Library and the City would be happy to explore operational and programmatic changes that would integrate this facility with a new high school and preclude the need to build a new high school library.

3. Dual use of Memorial Auditorium: A partnership between the BSD and the City in which the BSD had primary use rights of a redeveloped facility while the City retained certain public assembly and community use rights has the potential to give the high school an outstanding quality gym/auditorium in an uplifting, historic space. As a partner, the City would be in position to bring funding sources to share the renovation costs. Recent Memorial Auditorium redevelopment analyses should make it possible to determine the conceptual viability of a dual use plan in the next stage of the BSD's site analysis.

4. Use of existing parking resources: I believe that the current Downtown BHS experience has demonstrated that a downtown high school has lesser parking needs than the Institute Road site and it may be possible to largely accommodate the needs of a Gateway Block site within the City's existing garages.

5. Potential storm water and site utility savings: The City has active plans to redevelop Main Street with substantial TIF and federal infrastructure investment. This may create low-cost, efficient opportunities for storm water mitigation, as well as water, and electric service upgrades for a new high school at the Gateway Block.

**From my perspective the Gateway Block offers a number of promising opportunities for cost-saving and value adding collaboration, totaling potentially tens of millions of dollars, that will not be possible on any other site in the city.**

Moreover, I feel a downtown high school offers numerous environmental and community advantages for our students, families, businesses, and cultural institutions that could be properly assessed if the Gateway Block is advanced for further, focused study.

My enthusiasm for a consideration of a new downtown high school does not extend to the BTC Mall Associates parcel (CityPlace) that is planned and permitted for a multi-use development. The CityPlace plan includes over 400 badly needed homes, with 20% permanently affordable. Further, the CityPlace site is already one of the largest property taxpayers in the City, and when redeveloped that will expand dramatically. Converting the development plan for the site at this late stage to a high school use would dramatically negatively impact our efforts to address the housing crisis and generate major new revenues for both the City and the Education Fund.

Thank you for your diligent and quick work toward finding a new, safe, and permanent location for a Burlington High School that will serve many generations of our community, and for your consideration of the proposals I have presented here.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Weinberger', written in a cursive style.

Miro Weinberger  
Mayor