“Plattsburgh the land of Squandered opportunities”

       My name is John Seiden I live  in Plattsburgh New York I have been a redeveloper of real estate since 1987 putting most of my energies in the redevelopment of downtown Plattsburgh. Most notably converting “Skid Row” on City Hall Pl. four buildings thirty Apartments seven store fronts, the old Merkel Department Store building at 43 Durkee St. conversion of 15,000 ft.² of high-end office suites which sat vacant for four years, converting the old grand union grocery store at 159 Margaret St. into 30,000 ft.² medical suites. Moving Plattsburgh City Court out of City Hall to a brand new state of the art facility at 22 US Oval are just a few of these projects. In all these developments were in the spirit of a win win win collaboration between myself , city officials, lending institutions And countless building professionals was in the better meant of our community.

           I served on two downtown commissions under two different mayors, and was on the city zoning board for nearly 20 years.  I was on the Plattsburgh City Revolving loan fund committee  as well. I was appointed by Governor Cuomo to the DRI committee through Mayor Colin Read to facilitate the BEST and highest use of the $10 millions awarded to Plattsburgh . So I believe that I have the experience , knowledge and standing to point out a few observations and my total dismay and heartbreak to what our community is witnessing with the “Durkee Street Scam” . The hijacking of what could be an opportunity of a lifetime for our city and its residents.

         The project as being presented is  in no way in the spirit of what the DRI program was meant to be used for in the reimagining and renaissance of our downtown. This project as presented is nothing more then what I will refer to as a “gated community” for high-end renters and provides almost zero amenities and creativity for the proposed residence and our community as a whole. The over-utilization of the template of land borders on the bazaar in no way  does it fit into the character of our downtown . Not only in the visual aspect with the five story Behemoth but in the holistic spirit and soul of our historic roots. The lack of sensitivity of Prime Development Corporation to this fabric shows their interest is solely economic to maximize their profits . Which by the way , all city residents should be up in arms of the giveaway of our tax dollars not only by the city of Plattsburgh but the $4 million dollars that we are giving them will create not any real jobs. The fact of the matter of them paying no taxes to a city in such dire straits magnified by this pandemic loss of city jobs borders on criminal.

           Over the last several weeks I have witnessed the dog and pony show from their high-priced Prime lawyers telling Plattsburgh we have it all wrong and they have all the answers we are to trust them. If we have learned nothing from all our squandered missed opportunities  of the past I don’t believe these snake oil salesmen now. They have nothing invested in our community and we will witness them taking the cream off the top and put nothing back in . If this project goes belly up who then will be holding the bag??

             First and most important issue is parking , it’s parking ,it’s parking ,it’s parking .I have paid into the special parking district tens of thousands of dollars for many years for a reason, tenants need a place to park where they live and work. Folks going to the downtown restaurants need a place to park where the restaurants are located. That has been the success of this  Durkee parking lot . Wait  and see the next Mayor’s Cup celebration or battle of Plattsburgh celebration , do you want everyone to park at the million dollar parking lot down where the hotel never came?The on going manipulation of parking calculations of needing parking to this day is still a moving target. It appears that no one can give me an honest answer.

           Now let me share something [personal.My](https://protect-us.mimecast.com/s/2bhZCW6zB4cjzD5F66RVp?domain=personal.my) building that I own at 43 Durkee St. ( which is directly across the street of this proposed development) daily uses 50 parking spaces for my tenants.  I have noticed in the current Prime plan there is not enough parking just for my building what about the other buildings ?and the other tenants what are they to do. What are the Clinton County employees supposed to do about parking?

           This Administration is bending backwards to accommodate this miss guided scheme with the notion that this development is going to be  the economic catalyst . They are  missing the fact of all the harm that it’s going to do, to all the existing businesses and people that utilize this parking lot. I have already been given notice by several tenants that lease in my 43 Durkee St. building if this project goes forward they will not have a place to park and consequently will not renew their leases with me . How is that good for economic development explain that to me? I hear the Prime lawyers talk  of the minimal adverse effect they are delusional they are greedy pigs at the trough only worried about themselves and could care less of the harm they’re doing to the existing fabric . The existing needs of that parking lot is not only for my business but to  the following other businesses as well ;Affordable Furniture The Co-Op ,Irises Resturant ,The Smoked Pepper Resturant , Hobies and Our House Bistro just to name a few.

            Zoning and  Planning  boards you must hold Prime accountable!! Do not put our existing  businesses out of business for the sheer greed and the over use  of this template of land for Prime’s   own financial gain this is not economic development this is economic disaster! Remember this is a blank piece of property and certainly can be redrawn, reimagined and represented to truly benefit our community and not at our peril. I’ve been listening to Prime and their presenter utilizing all the buzz words like” walkable city” but yet in their plan they they are providing a minuscule walkway from Durkee Street to the river by their dumpster this is bordering on sad . They want to take  the 8 foot sidewalks and reduce the size to 4 feet. Once again, just showing nothing more than their contempt of being questioned and sheer lust for greed. Our Gateway to downtown at the intersection of Bridge and City Hall and Durkee street at peak hours in the morning and at 5 PM has traffic jams already . This development presses the boundaries to unacceptable levels and should be addressed. The west edge of the Bridge Street bridge will be a crosswalk connecting the river trail, the over congestion at this location will certainly create unnecessary additional chaos. At this same location the underground parking entrance and exit  still needs to be looked at with a fine tooth comb. The proposed sidewalk on the south end of Bridge Street being only 4 feet once again shows their insensitivity of the true nature of our downtown and missed opportunity for wider sidewalks to create outdoor cafés etc. etc. Which again boils down to the overuse and lack of creative design. Prime whines about wanting residential units at ground level because of the incline on Bridge St . Also saying that commercial  at street level would not work but let’s remember years ago that was all commercial and by the way across the street has the same elevation . The Co-Op etc. works just fine with the same elevation so don’t fall for that crap. Creating residential at street level is beyond the norm and should never take place ever. All city planners would tell you that. This alone creates a very dangerous precedent and will dramatically affect  the new streetscapes . Remember our downtown is for commercial at street level period. And as far as the gateway to downtown this will be the first thing you see.

            At the last zoning presentation on Zoom we kept hearing from Prime about the economics it’s all about the economics for them to maximize this template of land. No that’s incorrect it’s all about greed. Remember they’re  not paying any taxes ! They have a pilot program no money is going into the city coffers or the Plattsburgh city school district is not getting any fair share either. The planning and zoning boards have a duty to preserve the integrity of our community by no stretch of the imagination is this five story gated community have any place being put in the center of our downtown . It overshadows every historic building it should not be allowed and has failed the DRI mission. We should demand Prime to go back to the original DRI and allowing only half of the residential units be built that would alleviate the parking nightmare this will create . I believe this would visually be more in tune to what we already have in our existing downtown.

           Let’s remember we’re in the middle of a pandemic we do not have the luxury of our old reality.  Truth  of the matter is that this DRI money should be reallocated for more meaningful projects and try to save what we might be losing with the downtown businesses after  this pandemic.The city finances were in dire straits before this pandemic now it has been multiplied, remember departments have been closed  and now most recently laying  off many of the city workers , this project at best is delusional. Now we need city leadership so desperately but unfortunately they are blinded with this current “Durkee Street scam”.

            This current pandemic crisis is being described as the worst calamity to hit the global economy since the Great Depression. But hey, “it sure is a great time to build the largest, riskiest boondoggle this city has ever seen”.

           In closing I have sat exactly where you are sitting and it’s hard sometimes to do the right thing. It’s also hard to make a determination when to date Prime has not provided a full set of plans. I’m tired of hearing the Prime lawyers disrespect ,discount and belittle the citizenry of Plattsburgh with our concerns . We are unlike them , we have a much greater vested interest in the outcome of what happens in our community Because this is where we live, they don’t.

          Hey Prime , I don’t want to hear your outdated analysis and comparing us to Saratoga Springs or Burlington ,Vermont or anywhere else in New York this is Plattsburgh we’re not buying your BS!

           I am for Redevelopment for the city of Plattsburgh. I’ve proven that over a lifetime of commitment. But only the kind  of development that is responsible and is truly a benefit for the citizens.

I am asking all my friends and neighbors to  please contact Mayor  Colin  Read , the Common Council, the Planning and Zoning Board members and demand to stop this madness, what’s the rush. Don’t we all want to get this one right .

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