

From: **Spencer**

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Subject: Rethink Pleasant Street

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Good morning,

Spencer Batchelder – Ward 2

I am writing today to express my support for the proposed Pleasant Street renovation project. Due to the aging infrastructure underneath Pleasant Street, we are presented with a unique opportunity to make a lasting, transformative change to our downtown, which has been and without investment will continue to be an eyesore and a source of shame for this community. This investment will cost us, the taxpayers, pennies per thousand on our property tax bill.

I grew up in Claremont as did my parents and grandparents; my Grandfather has a street named after him, but like so many kids in the community I couldn't wait until my first opportunity to leave. What I saw around me was a city in decay and a population that would not invest in young people, public spaces, or itself. A dying community. Decades later, after the military and college, when my Boston employer offered me the opportunity to work remotely, it made me think about where I wanted to live and what life I wanted to lead. The natural beauty of the Connecticut River Valley, access to cities, and lifestyle ultimately made me choose to move back. One of the prerequisites to selecting a community to call home was a vibrant downtown area. Like many people of my age group, I wanted somewhere which supported the arts, walking areas, to be able to support local businesses, to grab a meal and walk to do some minor shopping or see a show, and most importantly vibrant community spaces. I was impressed coming back to town to see the investment made in the mills, the walking bridge, and the parking garage; however, the downtown was still an eyesore. Instead, I focused my efforts on home searches on areas which had those things such as Bellows Falls and White River Junction, communities that had made that investment and were flourishing because of it

What changed my mind?

My realtor mentioned plans to rehab that street and transform it. I then read the City's Master Plan, which discussed investing in areas to retain young workers like myself. Many of whom are no longer shackled to metropolitan areas due to increased adoption of work from home policies. This demographic of the American workforce will only increase as a result of COVID and adoption of enabling technologies <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/01/major-companies-talking-about-permanent-work-from-home-positions.html>. My current workplace is researching shifting a significant portion of its workforce to remote as the model has been proven effective and possible. The promise of investment and the master plan caused me to reflect and see the potential of this town. I thought about my previous community, Newmarket NH, which, shortly prior to my move there was nothing more than empty mills and a derelict downtown.

That town made an investment in rehabbing that street, widening sidewalks to make them walkable and creating outdoor spaces. Ten years later that downtown is unrecognizable. Every storefront is filled; people are walking around enjoying those spaces, new restaurants, and even a small grocery store, something the town had been lacking. You can't get a home in that community close to that space for under \$400k. This model of deliberate public investment has been proven time and time again to attract young people, business, and to increase property values. This rings true for massive cities like Seattle, who began their downtown revitalization in the '70s to smaller towns like WRJ (the '00s), Rochester, NH (ongoing), Newmarket, NH ('00s), and the list goes on.

This bond money is temporary, interest rates are low, and we need to take advantage of this opportunity. We need to start creating a town where people want to live and are proud to be from. We have tried the "sit around and wait for things to get better" model for decades, which has only cost us our young people, the heart of our community. Investing in ourselves works, it's what got me back here, and so many others I have spoken to who have made those same moves. These people, like myself, saw potential in this place, it's time we deliver and make Claremont a town we all can be proud of. We need to stop being a community which continues to throw Band-Aids on things and hopes someone will care enough to rescue us when we have the tools to work towards a better future ourselves. We need to take the next step and create a downtown which will draw young people here. Thank you for reading this, and I urge you to vote in favor of "Rethinking Pleasant Street."

Have a good day,  
Spencer