Burlington Image of the Town

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Introduction

The *Image of the Town* is an inventory of Burlington’s key physical typologies. The process was guided by urbanist Kevin Lynch’s methodology for imaging the city. The Cecil Group completed this study in partnership with the Town of Burlington in 2014 under the Comprehensive Master Plan Phase I process.

The depiction of Burlington on the first page is a “reading” of the Town’s form. The environmental image results from observations of the Town’s identity, spatial and pattern relation structure, and practical or emotional meanings. The environment’s legibility is analyzed through the lens of four elements: Path, Edge, District, and Landmark. Each category is explained in detail in the following pages.

Data were collected through several means. The authors drove through Burlington to understand the views, patterns and sense of place. Further information was extracted from aerial images, zoning bylaws, and land use regulations. At the public workshop on June 25, 2014, participants completed a neighborhood exercise, where they drew a circle around their neighborhood and described their feels about being there.

Overview

Refer to map on preceding page. Burlington is a town with prominent, defining features. The landscape is divided by the strong edges of Routes 128 and 3, from which Burlington also draws its regional commercial strength. Burlington’s four quadrants, as divided by the highways, each have important open spaces.

The commercial typology, oriented towards the highways, is found on both the north and south of Route 128. A smaller-scale commercial area, the Town Center district, lays within the residential heart of Burlington along with the Town Common and civic functions.

Burlington has several residential neighborhoods that come in different shapes and sizes. Residential neighborhoods are defined by edge conditions such as highways, power line easements, open space, and physical barriers installed during development.

Burlington has distinctive landmarks. Civic landmarks are schools and public buildings. Commercial landmarks are noticeable from the highways.
Path

Paths are the predominant elements of a Town. Paths are the streets, sidewalks, trails, and other channels in which people travel. In Burlington, the most important paths for mobility are all automobile roads.

Arterial Streets

Burlington’s prominent arterial streets are the Middlesex Turnpike, Burlington Mall Road and Cambridge Street. They are defined by deep frontage setbacks, intermittent sidewalk coverage, elevated utilities, four travel lanes, and a mix of commercial, residential and open space uses along the corridor.

Local Connectors

Local connecting streets include Winn Street, Bedford Street, and Wilmington Road. These roads are important connections between districts for local travel. They are defined by intermittent sidewalks sometimes separated by a vegetated buffer and two fast-moving travel lanes with a center stripe.

Neighborhood Streets

Quiet, two-lane streets are the vast majority of Burlington’s streets. They are heavily wooded with large setbacks. The streets are typically unlined, narrow, and windy, except for in the Fox Hill district, where long straight streets on an orthogonal grid were built.
Edges are linear boundaries such as separated highways, walls, buildings, and shorelines. Edges are continuous in form and impenetrable to cross movements.

**Highways**

Burlington is divided by routes 128 and 3. The long barriers are only able to be crossed at very infrequent intervals, especially for non-motorized travelers.

**Power Lines**

Power line easements divide the Kearns Road neighborhood from the Corporate Drive development; the Mountain Road neighborhood from commercial development along route 3; and cuts through residential neighborhoods around the Arboretum, Mill Pond, and Fox Hill. Power line easements are controlled and maintained by power company NStar.

**Neighborhood Dividers**

New and old neighborhoods are divided by buffers isolating individual developments. These buffers can be purposeful vegetation areas and disconnections in the town fabric, such as cul-de-sacs.
District

Districts are sections of the town distinguished by identity or character.

Open Space

Burlington is endowed with significant green open areas that form districts unto themselves. The large open spaces are distributed throughout the Town (which also means they are not linked by any kind of green network). Outstanding open spaces include the Landlocked Forest, Vine Brook Wellfields, Mary Cummings Park, Mill Pond, and the Town Common.

Commercial

Burlington continues to be a desirable location for commercial development, both office and retail. The Town has a fair share of conventional big box and strip mall developments, but it also has commercial districts with regional draw. Standout commercial districts are along the Mall Road and, increasingly, along the Middlesex Turnpike with developments like 3rd Ave. Burlington also has a commercial center for local services in its Town Center, which reads as a conventional strip mall with parking lots along the arterial road.

Residential Neighborhood

Outside of the business district and Town Center, Burlington is characterized by its residential neighborhoods. Development has occurred through many moments and trends in residential design. A survey of Burlington’s residential real estate reveals cluster development homes, multifamily homes, ranch homes, opulent single family homes, and single family homes interspersed with teardown-and-rebuild developments.
Landmark

Landmarks are readily identifiable physical objects that serve as external reference points.

Regional Attractors

Burlington Mall, Lahey Clinic, and Oracle are just a few of the regional attractors in Burlington that bring employees and shoppers into the Town. These attractors are located along the route 128 corridors, where they enjoy easy access and visibility from the highway. For most people in the region, this is the face of Burlington.

Schools

Within the residential and open space fabric of Burlington, important landmarks are the local schools. The schools define a sense of place in the neighborhoods they serve as well as define student catchment areas. The Town High School occupies a large piece of land saddled between the business district and Town Center.

Civic Landscape

Burlington’s civic center, focused around the Town Common, contains a number of important landmarks, including the Public Library, Post Office, Town Hall, and the recently renovated Grandview Farm.