

A Vision for Burlington

This shared Vision expresses aspirations of the community for Burlington's future. It informs all of the elements in this town-wide, comprehensive Master Plan. The Vision is accompanied by Guiding Principles that serve as the framework for the specific ideas and recommendations that compose the Master Plan. The Vision and Guiding Principles draw upon the many contributions of those who have been engaged in the planning process as part of community conversations, workshops, surveys and meetings. They reflect the perspectives contributed by the Master Plan Steering Committee. The planning process used hindsight to understand how the past will influence future choices. The planning process created insights regarding the key opportunities and challenges facing Burlington. The Master Plan then used foresight to set goals and strategies that will allow the Town to align the future with the shared vision.

Vision Statement

Burlington will continue to be a well-balanced community that is an excellent place to live within a variety of established, walkable neighborhoods linked to its protected, sustainable natural environment. Complementing its residential dimension, Burlington will continue to be an excellent, region-leading setting for successful businesses and services that contribute to the quality of life of its citizens and help support the superior public services they enjoy.

Offering a rich civic life, Burlington is a welcoming community that provides supportive lifestyle choices for its ethnically and racially diverse population of all ages. Through broad participation, citizens will be engaged in Town government and civic institutions, finding common ground for their interests and activities.

Burlington will continue to be an adaptable community that incorporates new technology and innovative approaches to its infrastructure, land use, open space and services so that it retains its balance in the midst of economic cycles and a changing region.

Hindsight: Foundations for the Future

Burlington's valued origins as a small agricultural community remain visible in prized historic buildings, open spaces and other remnant features of the community. The rural characteristics of the community, however, were transformed by powerful regional economic, demographic and transportation shifts during the twentieth century.

From a position of relative isolation, Burlington became directly linked to a dynamic regional economy as the expansion of Route 3 and Route 128 reached the town, providing access to fast-growing residential development of family-oriented neighborhoods to jobs and shopping. New schools and other town facilities kept pace with the growth.

Burlington became a magnet for commercial and retail development near the highway interchanges. Convenient, attractive and centrally located in the region, large parcels of land along the highways were converted to high value developments. The growth drew thousands of workers and shoppers driving to and from their destinations. Ultimately, however, easy access and open roads diminished as congestion increased.

In the early phases of its suburban growth, there were few limits on the conversion of open land and natural resources into residential or commercial development. But as environmental regulations began to take effect and remaining open space was preserved through public action, Burlington retained important natural land assets.

Insight: Taking Advantage of Opportunities to Overcome Challenges

Burlington today is an attractive and desirable place to live in the greater Boston region, which is reflected in high property values and high housing costs. The population is becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse, in keeping with the changing demographics of the region. As housing prices rise and as the age composition of the citizenry is shifting, some senior citizens have difficulty matching their needs with the housing stock. Unlike the past, many young families find Burlington's family-friendly neighborhoods unaffordable.

Burlington is also a highly valued location for commercial and retail enterprises within the highway-served areas, which have been largely developed with auto-oriented uses. There are more employees in Burlington during the day than there are residents at night. The proportion of high value commercial land to residential property provides a solid tax base that the Town has translated into excellent public services and facilities, providing amenity and resources for the residential population. However, most available land has been absorbed by existing development; new real estate investment will need to rebuild areas of the Town, as the private sector adapts to a changing economy.

Traffic congestion has become an unwanted by-product of the patterns of development and the transportation infrastructure that serves it. It effects the quality of life of residents and the competitive advantage of the businesses in Burlington.

The natural resources in Town vary in environmental quality and quantity. Bordered by highways, development and neighborhoods, the environment benefits and public open space opportunities associated with them have yet to be fully realized.

Foresight: Fulfilling the Vision

The residential neighborhoods that are at the heart of Burlington's identity need to be enhanced as places to walk and connected to the natural and civic assets of the community. Housing choices need to be available to residents as they change in age and lifestyle.. Shared places and civic activities should be expanded, including those clustered with a well-defined Town Center. Thoughtful investments and Town management should continue to translate the strong tax base into excellent facilities and services that the townspeople have come to expect.

New commercial and residential development must be balanced against the reasonable capacity of the infrastructure and natural systems. Innovative approaches should be sought and applied to low-impact redevelopment. This should include state-of-the art approaches to traffic management, traffic calming and expansion of walking and bicycling options to connect the town and limit traffic growth.

By coordinating its municipal policies and actions through planning and foresight, Burlington should manage that which must change, and preserve that which should not.

Guiding Principles

CELEBRATE THE DISTINCTIVE DIVERSITY OF OUR RESIDENTS and NURTURE LOCAL CULTURE to maintain our quality of life that is a strength of our community and economic competitive advantage and by supporting and advocating for the arts and non-profit organizations and encouraging the delivery of cultural programming and services. PROMOTE LOCAL BUSINESSES that enhance and contribute to Burlington's town-scale character.

SUPPORT ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP through municipal programs and actions that manage land and infrastructure for long-term benefit, reduce dependency on non-renewable fuels and consumption of resources without offsetting benefits, protect natural resources, and by improving our environment fulfills our responsibility to future generations. CONSERVE THE VALUE OF LANDS AND BUILDINGS including the protection of our natural resources and the prevention of blight or pollution. PRESERVE OPEN SPACE through acquisition or other measures to protect and link natural resources to contribute to the Town's character. PROVIDE CHOICES IN THE TYPE AND COST OF HOUSING to support a range of lifestyles, family sizes, and ages as the needs and preferences of Burlington residents change over time.

EXPAND AND ENHANCE AN ATTRACTIVE AND VIBRANT TOWN CENTER that boasts a mix of uses, services, civic and cultural destinations and activities that support the needs of Burlington and its residents

BUILD PARTNERSHIPS among residents, businesses, landowners, institutions and the Town for the long-term mutual benefit associated with sharing interests. PROMOTE HEALTHY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT by inviting participation and respecting multiple opinions. EXPAND TRANSPORTATION CHOICES by supporting the infrastructure for walking, bicycling, transit and improved connections among all modes of travel.

PROVIDE EXCELLENT EDUCATION AND ALL OTHER MUNICIPAL SERVICES with programs and effective facilities through responsible fiscal management of costs, revenues and debt that avoids undue burdening of residential taxes. SPONSOR AND PROMOTE MUNICIPAL PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES for veterans, senior citizens, children and teenagers, disabled and disadvantaged community members.