

MEMORANDUM

Date: November 15, 2021

To: Melisa Tintocalis, Town of Burlington

From: Kathryn Madden

Project: Burlington 128 District

Subject: Community Forum #1 – Summary of Community Discussion



A total of 85 people participated in the Community Forum via Zoom on November 2, 2021, in addition to ten members of the consultant team and Town staff. Another 45 people expressed interest by registering but did not attend. The following is a summary of the discussions that were held in the eight breakout groups. Each facilitator recorded notes. The comments have been organized by topic, including groupings of comments within each topic.

Town and District Identity

- Burlington has always been a hub of services to everyone in the region and continues to be.
- Burlington doesn't really have a town center (like other nearby towns); a town center would help with a sense of community
- Burlington is sprawling, built around the car; there are a series of business centers and housing built around them
- Burlington is a unique place – that should be reflected better in the built environment
- Historically, the Town's zoning created "two towns" (commercial area vs residential)
- A divide exists in Burlington between residents and businesses; steps have been made to "repair" relations but would be good to continue these actions
- The south side of 128 is the "forgotten side" of Burlington near Mary Cummings Park.
- Lots of "nooks and crannies", no easy migration between sub areas
- Area has changed dramatically since the 70's
- Area greatly important for tax revenue
- What is this place trying to be? Articulate both with the principles that underpin the plan and with marketing
- Think about "ecology"; this is an opportunity to rethink suburbs with this lens

- Should be looking to create a small city within a town.
- Area would benefit from areas being more integrated. It's "forbidding"
- Move buildings to the sidewalk
- Putting the parking behind rather than along the street

Approvals

- Be prepared for what's coming and don't just react
- Zoning needs to be looked at to create more cohesion (example Town Center Overlay)
- Updating the zoning would be helpful to unlock development
- Need to think about zoning in a more holistic manner
- Zoning was written in 1970; it's outdated for today
- Existing zoning is good because it has limited things we don't want to see happen in the community
- Developers haven't "given back"
- Have concerns that developers are taking advantage of zoning loopholes force their projects
- Although we have Planned Development Districts (PDD), we don't seem to be successful with it. Why do we keep ending up with condos but not mixed-use development?
- Have seen how difficult it is for the people who are in the area in trying to get various approvals
- Signage shouldn't be "one size fits all"
- There has been a lot of growth in the Western portion of the study area and public safety measures need to keep up. In general, the change is happening as fast as ever, but codes seem to lag a bit

Mobility

- Concerned about transportation in the area and congestion around the mall.
- Want to reduce number of "drive alone" people who are coming to the medical center. Hoping remote work will catch on more.
- Traffic in the area coming back, afternoons are especially bad
- Residents in adjacent areas are concerned about cut through traffic on residential streets
- It's hard to change the roads because the state has control [of some of them]

- Lots of areas work well, but they aren't interconnected
- There are dead ends that prevent connection
- It's hard to walk and connect different places safely
- Need to dodge cars to cross roadways
- Crosswalks don't always exist or are not where they are needed
- Walkability is critical. Must find a way to break down the walls between the siloed properties within the study area
- Improve walkability
- Opportunities for walkability
- Desire to be able to walk more through the area.
- Likes being able to walk safely rather than drive
- Concern for Middlesex Turnpike and the lack of safe pedestrian networks
- Sidewalks in town are not great; speeding vehicles make walking difficult; some neighborhoods have no sidewalks (Fox Hill); other places the sidewalk is right next to the curb
- Bicycle safety and pedestrian environment need improvement
- Better bike connectivity or even a loop that was safe; frustrated because it never happens.
- No safe bike paths along Mall Road and Middlesex Turnpike
- Opportunities for electrically assisted bikes and scooters
- Noted the lack of bike racks
- Difficult to get from the District to mall on a bike without going out to Mall Road
- Need better transportation options
- Thinks better transit and better connections are important...and possible
- Create a place for all of the MTA/Burlington and Lexington buses to meet at one location to better coordinate transfers.
- Shuttles should be looked at – to Alewife or just a Mall Road circuit
- There was disappointment that a shuttle got discontinued. There were quite a few riders that worked in The District and in The Mall that would take shuttle.
- The B-line (transit service) used to exist, although it only sort of worked; for those on fixed incomes, it hard to get to grocery stores
- Hospital produces a lot of loud sirens

- Access for fire and public safety vehicles is critical. Right now, the eastern portion of the district is serviced by Carter Street, and the Western portion of the district is serviced by Station 2.
- There's a complaint that a lot of research has been done but almost nothing has been implemented when it comes to transportation. Everyone is concerned about transportation but there's no cohesive initiative, maybe need a transportation committee to work alongside the economic development department

Natural Environment, Open Space, Gathering, and Amenities

- Resiliency should be incorporated
- Riverwalk idea is excellent, could be a game changer
- Liked the idea of the waterways and natural systems
- Want to see a plan for developing additional green areas so they connect parts of the town and have a sense of the fact that we are a town not just a group of stores
- Wants to see green space preserved
- Attention should be given to flow and intent of where people are going – there should be more spots to linger longer and more to do
- Better public gathering spaces
- More gathering places for friends and neighbors
- Need a place for families to go
- Lacking arts and music.
- Need for more arts and culture, more authentic places rather than all chain stores
- Help seniors, improve art, culture, and nature
- Need outdoor recreation areas and playgrounds for children
- Need more spaces for recreation; the recent pop-up event in town center was amazing
- More pop-up events and small businesses
- Would like to see the incorporation of some sort of entertainment piece a la Lego Land or Meow Wolf
- Concerned about amenities that Lahey Medical Center employees and patients have access to
- Use Northeastern University as an entry point for bringing in different demographics.

Development, Uses, and Cohorts

- The 15-minute city is a very important concept. To some extent Burlington is already seeing the benefit of that at Northwest Park.
- Even with good income, it's hard to buy into Burlington because housing prices are nuts
- Need for different types of housing
- Need for housing that is convenient to the medical center
- There is a "missing middle" in housing stock
- Would like see "pods" of senior housing developments – small clusters of housing with a central gazebo, green space etc. be dispersed across the town and be interconnected to give them access to all of the amenities without them having to get into the car.
- Residential neighborhoods surrounding the district are very important and should not be changed.
- Rethink retail, more mix of uses
- The best way to offset the predicted losses in retail would be to introduce development in the vein of Assembly Row, i.e., commercial on the bottom with housing and or offices above
- Wants to make the area pedestrian friendly, including providing retail along Burlington Mall Road
- Small businesses are hurting because of COVID
- Surprised by the employment and real estate market data
- Explosion in startup activity from the region and Northeastern
- Connect property owners and businesses that need space
- Excitement around Eversource opening a mobile transformer station on the turnpike; should be installed by next July 2022
- Don't put parking structure directly over Vine Brook
- Today there are two distinct groups: people that have lived here for a long time and people who work here.
- Seniors are forgotten, would like to see a focus on the aging population
- Can we provide for aging community?
- Question of why Northwest Park is not included in the study area

What Works Well Today?

- Lahey is important for area medical care
- Live, work, eat, play (well not so much live)
- Amenities: everything is there in one area; for example, coming from Billerica, one can do multiple things
- Places to eat
- Variety: restaurants of all types and price points
- New restaurants, but they are a different kind of restaurants so it's somewhat unique
- More beautiful of a walk at the Mall from a pedestrian standpoint; it's more green
- Availability of parking