

## OUR COMMUNITY VISION: A “Sustainable” Burlington<sup>1</sup>

A plan for future land use and development must be based on a vision for the future of the community. Such vision rarely offers a great level of detail, but provides an essential framework and a set of benchmarks or objectives that help to articulate where a community is headed. This section of Burlington’s municipal development plan outlines that broad vision for the future of the city. Each of the sections that follow offer an increasing level of detail regarding what this vision looks like and a set of strategies intended to turn this vision into reality.

As noted earlier, perhaps the most significant change from the 1996 Plan is the completion of a community-wide visioning process known as the *Burlington Legacy Project*. Through *The Burlington Legacy Project* people from all of Burlington's neighborhoods came together to build a vision of the future.

Five major themes emerge in the common vision that Burlington residents hold for the future of the city as articulated in the *Burlington Legacy Project Action Plan*:

- **Burlington is at the heart of a regional population and economic center that offers meaningful jobs at liveable wages; where a diverse housing stock serves all income levels; with a growth rate that balances jobs and housing; offering high quality arts, entertainment and recreational opportunities of interest and benefit to all residents; with concentrations of higher density, mixed-use development surrounded by residential neighborhoods and open space;**
- **Neighborhoods provide a rich quality of life with diverse households in both type and income; offer basic goods and services to residents, and areas of open space interconnected with public transit, bike paths and trails;**
- **Active and meaningful participation in community decision-making; a responsive, pro-active government;**
- **High-quality education and social supports for our youth; lifelong learning opportunities for all residents;**
- **Clean air and water; a protected network of natural systems; a legacy of cultural and natural amenities to be enjoyed and nurtured by current and future generations.**

Burlington’s greatest challenge in the years ahead will be to balance the benefits and burdens of growth. Balance is the essence of sustainability, and creating a sustainable community is at the center of the city’s vision. Elements of a “sustainable community<sup>2</sup>” include:

- **Ecological Integrity:** including satisfying basic human needs such as clean air and water; protecting ecosystems and biodiversity; pollution prevention strategies.

<sup>1</sup> This section is largely excerpted from the *Burlington Legacy Project Action Plan*, May 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Developed by the Institute for Sustainable Communities, 27-28 June 1995.

- **Economic Security:** including local reinvestment; meaningful employment opportunities; local business ownership; job training and education.
- **Empowerment and Responsibility:** including respect and tolerance for diverse views and values; a viable non-government sector; equal opportunity to participate in decision-making; access to government.
- **Social Well-Being:** including a reliable local food supply; quality health services, housing and education; creative expression through the arts; safety from crime and aggression; respect for public spaces and historic resources; a sense of place and making a contribution to the community.

A sustainable city is one that meets its current needs without reducing its capacity to meet its needs in the future. A city is sustainable environmentally only if it consumes its natural resources at the same rate as it replenishes them. It is sustainable economically only if it derives the maximum benefits possible from local wealth and resources, and invests that wealth back into the community. It has sustainable government only if its citizens have equitable, just, and full access to decision-making. It is sustainable socially only if it meets the basic needs of residents for food, shelter, clothing, health care, child care, and transportation.

**SUSTAINABLE**  
**DEVELOPMENT**

**Decisions and choices made  
today should not limit the choices  
and opportunities of future  
generations**

In order to support such hallmarks of sustainability as efficient, economical alternative transportation systems and a thriving business sector that offers skilled, high-wage jobs, Burlington must grow. But the need to concentrate growth in the region's urban core raises conflicts that are inherent to any effort to attain sustainability:

How do we provide adequate housing for a growing population and still preserve open space? How do we encourage new businesses to locate in Burlington, spurring high-quality job growth, yet minimize the amount of traffic in the city? How do we maximize our use of local food and other resources, yet assure that people have access to affordable basic goods?

**If we succeed,** Burlington in the future will remain at the core of a regional population, economic, and cultural center with concentrations of high density mixed-use development surrounded by residential neighborhoods and open space; a diverse housing stock that serves all income levels and family situations; high quality arts and recreational opportunities.

**If we succeed,** significant public and private investment will have improved the quality of our environment, and public acquisition and creative site planning will have permanently protected significant natural areas and important natural and recreational systems for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations.

**If we succeed,** Burlington's built environment will reflect a legacy of moderately scaled buildings, high quality urban design, and a rich architectural heritage. Unique design characteristics of each neighborhood will have been retained, while new construction and public investment respects the city's historic character and architecture while effectively meeting the demand for continued growth.

**If we succeed,** Burlington will be served by a regional transportation system that offers a range of mode choices that are safe, affordable, efficient, and convenient for residents, employees, and visitors. Rail, transit, cycling, and walking are increasingly more competitive with the automobile as the dominant mode of choice. Burlington's residential streets will have been reclaimed as attractive public spaces, and a series of trails and paths provide access between neighborhoods and areas of protected open space.

**If we succeed,** Burlington is the core of a regional educational, health care, commercial, cultural, and governmental center. A diverse mixture of businesses sustain the city's economic base including vibrant neighborhood centers served by neighborhood-oriented local businesses like grocery stores and doctor's offices; the Downtown and Waterfront abound with cultural and recreational opportunities while serving as a retail and financial center for the region; the Intervale abounds with agricultural entrepreneurs; while the South End offers well-paying and high quality jobs. Burlington's economy has become more self-reliant through significant increases in local ownership and control of businesses, and reinvestment of local resources. Burlington residents, who were not fully participating in the city and regional economy, now have access to meaningful jobs paying a livable wage, job training, and job retention services.

**If we succeed,** Burlington will place a priority on maintaining and upgrading existing facilities and infrastructure over new construction. City services and facilities will be managed in order to maximize efficiency, conserve resources, and support increased levels of development without degrading the natural environment or unnecessarily burdening the taxpayers.

**If we succeed,** Burlington is a leader in the development and implementation of energy efficiency measures that reduce energy costs, enhance environmental quality, improve security and sustainability, and enhance economic vitality.

**If we succeed,** Burlington is part of a region that has been successful in balancing employment growth with that of housing, and finding equitable solutions to sharing the responsibility of providing affordable housing. In Burlington, all people have access to safe, decent, and affordable housing. Burlington's housing needs are being met through rehabilitation and conservation of the existing stock, and creative high density infill.

**If we succeed,** Burlington's educational institutions, in partnership with families and the community, educate and inspire students to influence and shape the future. The City's educational system prepares our youth to be contributing members of our society and their communities, trains them in the skills necessary to be successful in the workforce, and develops the skills for a lifelong commitment to learning.

**If we succeed**, Burlington’s residents participate meaningfully in decisions that affect them. The youth of the community have been empowered to be active participants in local decision making. Neighborhood and citywide groups, as well as individuals and adjacent communities, have a clear voice in a city policy-making process that is open and accessible.

The *Burlington Legacy Project Action Plan* recognizes that we cannot bemoan sprawl, traffic congestion, a stagnant population, or the erosion of families in Burlington—unless we’re prepared to grow as a city. If we are to succeed in creating a truly sustainable community, future development within the City of Burlington must further the following principles:

- Support and strengthen our **neighborhoods**.
- Concentrate **mixed-use, high density development** within **growth centers** including the center city, neighborhood activity centers, and institutional core campuses.
- Long-term protection and stewardship for **natural areas and open space**.
- **Lessen the dependence on the automobile** by offering a range of transportation choices.
- Respect for the city’s **architectural and cultural history**.
- Support **long-term solutions** over short-term fixes to community needs and problems.
- Promote collaboration and cooperation through **working partnerships** between governments, non-profits, institutions, and businesses.
- Increased **participation in decision-making**.

