



# Burlington Neighborhood Code

## Neighborhood Character Analysis & Report

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# BTV Neighborhood Code

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For more information about the BTV Neighborhood Code, visit the Office of City Planning’s website:  
[www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityPlanning/NeighborhoodCode](http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityPlanning/NeighborhoodCode)



## Background

In December 2021, Mayor Weinberger released the [Housing as a Human Right 10-point action plan](#) that outlines a roadmap to double the rate of housing production and end chronic homelessness in our community. The Action Plan, developed in partnership with the Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO), Office of City Planning, and Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB), commits Burlington to redoubling its efforts to combat the housing crisis.

The Action Plan incorporated ten specific initiatives aimed at these two major commitments. Three of these initiatives involve changes to the city's land use policies to support the creation of new homes, at various scales and serving various populations, in order to increase the availability and affordability of housing in the city. The final initiative of this action plan—now referred to as The Neighborhood Code—was to “open new housing opportunities citywide through “missing middle” zoning reforms which will expand opportunities for new homes to be created in every neighborhood in ways that reflect the character of these parts of the city.”

### [The Neighborhood Code will:](#)

- Document how the city's neighborhoods have developed over time and how zoning policies have changed what can be built and where.
- Identify current barriers to allowing more and different types of homes within existing neighborhoods and opportunities to introduce new neighborhood-scale housing options.
- Explore zoning changes that build on neighborhoods' unique patterns while facilitating their ability to meet the needs of current and future households, both by providing more context-sensitive zoning tools for areas well-suited for “middle” housing, and by considering the scale of development allowed along major streets served by transit.

The reason this work is often referred to as “missing middle” housing is because it focuses on buildings such as ADUs, duplexes, fourplexes, and clusters of small homes on larger lots which were once created in many historic, walkable neighborhoods but that have become increasingly difficult or illegal to build since the mid-1900's.



## About This Report

The Neighborhood Code includes two phases. The first phase, which is summarized in this report, includes research and analysis related to the first two Neighborhood Code objectives. The second phase builds on the research contained in this report, and will involve the creation and testing of zoning policies that support more neighborhood-scale housing types across the city.

This report presents research conducted by the Office of City Planning. Where noted, it also summarizes research and recommendations from national experts that have consulted with the City through AARP's Technical Assistance program. In particular, this report:

- Summarizes how the city's neighborhoods fit into the overall land use planning framework in the City's comprehensive plan, and provides key housing data.
- Identifies existing zoning barriers to realizing additional middle housing.
- Provides an abbreviated history of major changes to the city's residential zoning standards.
- Identifies areas where there is a mismatch between what has been built and what current zoning standards allow.
- Documents basic elements of the built patterns across the city's neighborhoods.

The Neighborhood Code is being led by the Office of City Planning with financial support from a Bylaw Modernization Grant from the VT Dept. of Housing & Community Development and in collaboration with AARP-Vermont's Livable Communities.

Graphics designed for this project by Jodi Wahlen



# Executive Summary

## What is “missing middle” housing?

While much of the city’s housing policy work over the last decade has focused on areas identified for growth in planBTV—the downtown and other denser, mixed-use areas—the Neighborhood Code is about more neighborhood-scale housing options within the city’s residentially zoned areas. These neighborhood-scale housing types are often called “missing middle,” which refers to ADUs, duplexes, fourplexes, and clusters of small homes on larger lots which were once created in many historic, walkable neighborhoods but that have become increasingly difficult or illegal to build since the mid-1900s. Examples of these housing types can be found in many of the city’s neighborhoods, as illustrated in the photos on page 4.



## Middle housing and the city’s households

Middle housing types present an opportunity for more of the city’s households to live in its residential neighborhoods, and offer additional housing choices and prices beyond a single-family home or larger apartment building.

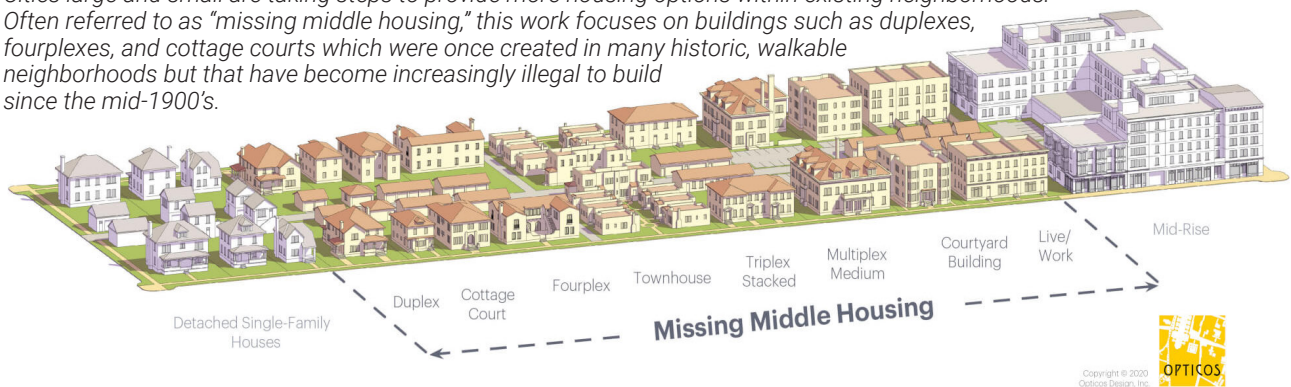
These housing types are important to provide more options that correspond with changes to the city’s households. Today, a third of the population is made up of early career adults, young homeowners, and residents at retirement age. Burlington’s households are increasingly made up of individuals and unrelated persons (unmarried partners, roommates, shared living arrangements, or senior housing). These households increased by 5% over the last decade, to include 62% of all households in 2020. While these housing types are not anticipated to dramatically change the city’s neighborhoods, enabling greater diversity in the housing types allowed across the city can provide more housing types that correspond with the city’s changing demographics.

This is important when considering that historic zoning and development patterns means that the housing types and neighborhoods where people can live closely correspond with demographic factors such as race and income. For example, while approximately 62% of the city’s households are renter occupied, 77% of single-family homes are owner-occupied. And in 2021, the median income for a renter household was \$59,331 compared to \$113,750 for an owner-occupied household. Some middle housing types—such as “cottage clusters”—closely resemble the sort of small single-family homes that are common in some neighborhoods, yet can offer more diverse housing choices in existing neighborhoods as well as new models for multi-generational housing, co-living, and even different types of homeownership.

## What is “Neighborhood-Scale” Housing?

Neighborhood-scale housing refers to certain “missing middle” housing types that will ultimately be enabled in Burlington. As we look ahead, this refers to types of homes that can fit alongside or within existing buildings in residentially zoned areas, and will vary across different parts of the city.

*Cities large and small are taking steps to provide more housing options within existing neighborhoods. Often referred to as “missing middle housing,” this work focuses on buildings such as duplexes, fourplexes, and cottage courts which were once created in many historic, walkable neighborhoods but that have become increasingly illegal to build since the mid-1900’s.*



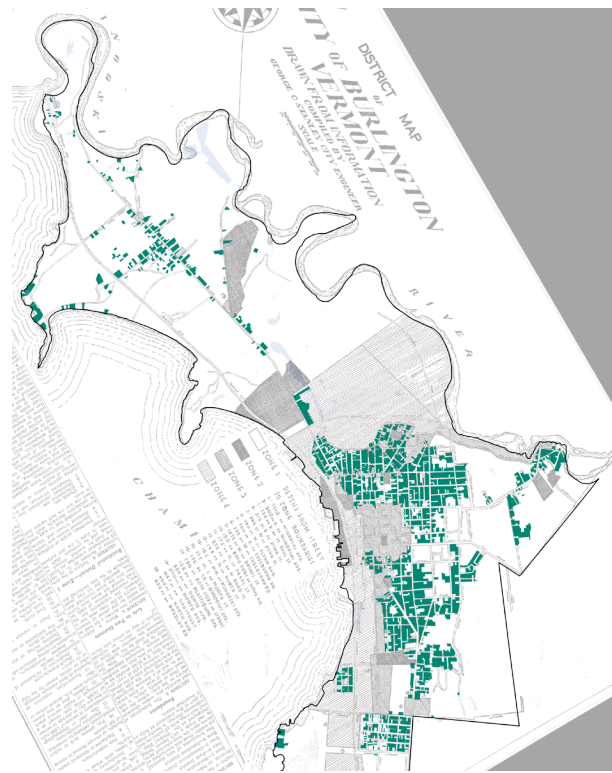
## Barriers to more neighborhood-scale housing

This report outlines how both common barriers to middle housing show up in Burlington, as well as specific aspects of the city's zoning ordinance that can make it difficult to create more neighborhood-scale housing. One of the most common barriers to more neighborhood-scale housing is, quite simply, to not allow it. In 1994, changes to city zoning laws essentially prohibited all but single-family homes for the vast majority of residential lots<sup>2</sup>. Subsequent revisions reintroduced some flexibility into the city's residential districts. While not as permissive as the original 1947 ordinance, which allowed diverse housing types within the same zone, all districts today allow for at least duplexes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in addition to single-family homes if certain minimum standards can be met.

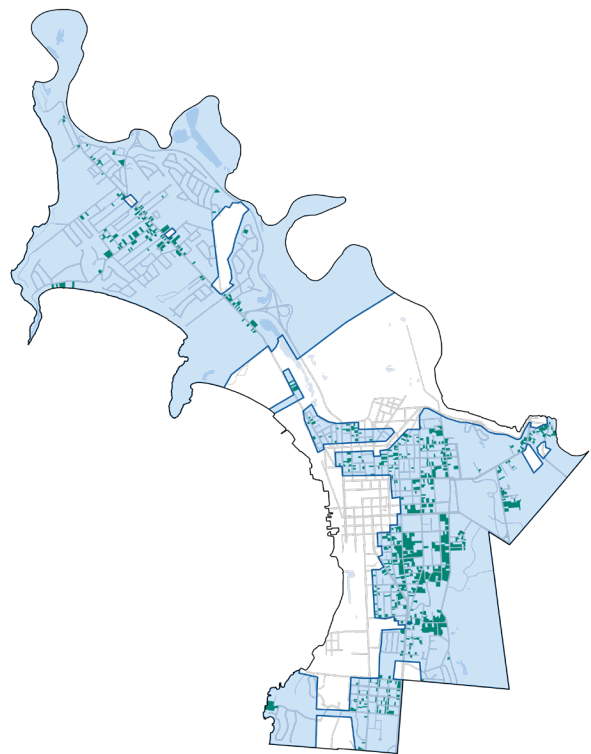
However, a mismatch between certain zoning standards and the characteristics of residential areas means that in some cases, the types of homes that are theoretically allowed cannot be created. For example, due to the very small lot sizes in many city neighborhoods, duplexes are effectively prohibited on many lots. This mismatch can also create widespread non-conformities<sup>3</sup> for existing homes and lots, in some cases impacting large swaths of historic neighborhoods. While the city's zoning laws do not require non-conformities to be remediated immediately, these non-conformities create limits for how properties can evolve over time.

This mismatch is common in many communities, and occurs because zoning laws have typically evolved to favor more suburban development patterns. Lot size requirements, density limits, setbacks, and lot coverage can converge in ways that limit both the reuse of existing homes as well as the inclusion of new homes that are similar to what has previously been built.

Another common barrier results from zoning tools that lack specificity and sensitivity to the type of building scale that is appropriate and desired in various neighborhoods. While standards such as density limits, lot coverage, and building height provide a rough proxy to control the scale of buildings, these standards can at once preclude small-scale middle housing types and in some cases encourage lot consolidations and bigger, bulkier buildings.



Parcels developed prior to 1947 overlaid with Burlington's original 1947 Zoning Map



Residential Parcels developed prior to and complied with the adopted 1947 Zoning Ordinance

## The evolution of residential zoning in Burlington

The evolution of zoning laws for residential areas has had a major influence on what has been built in these districts to date, and how well neighborhoods can adapt to the needs of current and future generations.

The City's first known zoning ordinance was adopted in 1947, and included just one residential zoning district. Nearly half of the properties that are used for residential purposes today had been developed prior to this first zoning code. Like in many cities, the earliest zoning regulations allowed for a mix of housing types, including single-family homes, rooming houses, and apartment buildings, which is why many of the city's historic, walkable neighborhoods feature a diversity of housing types. These "missing middle" housing types can, however, be found within most neighborhoods—from the variety of housing types in the Old North End to brand new duplexes on North Avenue in the New North End.

While there are many examples of these housing types across the city's neighborhoods, local zoning laws have increasingly made these types of housing more difficult to replicate. Major zoning changes in the 1970s and 1990s in particular were influenced by national housing policies, regional housing and development trends, and local growth pressures. These changes ultimately pared back the housing types that could be created in existing neighborhoods and introduced new standards that limited what could be built in areas that were not yet developed. This particularly impacted middle housing types.

Today, the city's neighborhoods areas are divided into five residential zoning districts<sup>4</sup>. The lowest density districts apply to both the greatest number of properties (71%) and the greatest proportion of land area (34%) of any other zoning designation. Single-family homes<sup>5</sup> occupy 22% of the land area in the city, representing the most wide-spread development type by land area citywide.

## The building blocks of Burlington's neighborhoods

The city's neighborhoods have unique patterns—in terms of the size of lots, the scale and pattern of buildings, and the mixture of housing types. Neighborhood identities are further defined by details such as the era in which they were built, architectural styles and landscape, as well as the demographics of residents and the social connections among them.

The Neighborhood Code aims to identify context-sensitive zoning solutions to enable more neighborhood-scale housing types in residential areas of the city. In order to do so, this report identifies some of the basic building blocks that define neighborhood's built patterns—the physical characteristics like how big a lot is, how far homes are set back from the street, how much of a lot is occupied by buildings, and how many homes are in a building.

These characteristics of residential properties<sup>6</sup> were evaluated at both at the citywide and neighborhood levels, and common characteristics are described in a series of 14 residential lot typologies which are discussed in detail on page 30. These range from small, narrow lots (often less than 6,000ft<sup>2</sup>) that have a relatively high proportion of the lot covered by existing buildings to lots of up to an acre in size with very low proportion of covered by buildings. Lots both small and large feature a mix of housing types, though some of the smallest lots in the city feature buildings with more than one unit in them while some larger lots feature only a single home.

This report provides information on the eras in which the city's residential lots were developed and their common characteristics as well as the basic dimensions of these lots and an assessment of how they conform to existing zoning standards.

### About Burlington's Residential Parcels

**35%** of Burlington's total land area (representing 59% of all lots) is zoned for low-density residential development.

**22%** of Burlington's total land area is occupied by single-family homes, representing the most wide-spread development type by land area citywide.

### What is Zoning?

Zoning regulates what and how much can be built. It subdivides the city into "districts" that define what types of uses can go where, and controls the intensity of those uses and the size of buildings and their placement on lots. Zoning also includes regulations for how properties are divided or combined in order to create individual lots. In Burlington, these regulations are called the *Comprehensive Development Ordinance (CDO)*.

## Why Middle Housing in Burlington?

More neighborhood-scale housing options can provide a range of land use, socioeconomic, and financial benefits. First and foremost, they provide different housing choices—these are often “house-scale” buildings that contain more homes than a single-family home, but are not as large as an apartment building. As a result, these middle housing types can more easily blend with existing neighborhoods, opening more housing choices particularly for the increasing number of small and single-person households in the city. These housing choices can also provide greater socioeconomic integration and create new models for multigenerational housing and aging in place. These units use less land per home and can be more cost-effective to build than single-family homes, and can help expand the tax base and address the residential tax burden in a largely built-out city. Additionally, as a result of this infill development, new homes can utilize existing utility and transportation infrastructure within the city as opposed to continuing the patterns of urban sprawl that have been seen in the region in the past decades.

### Planning for New Homes

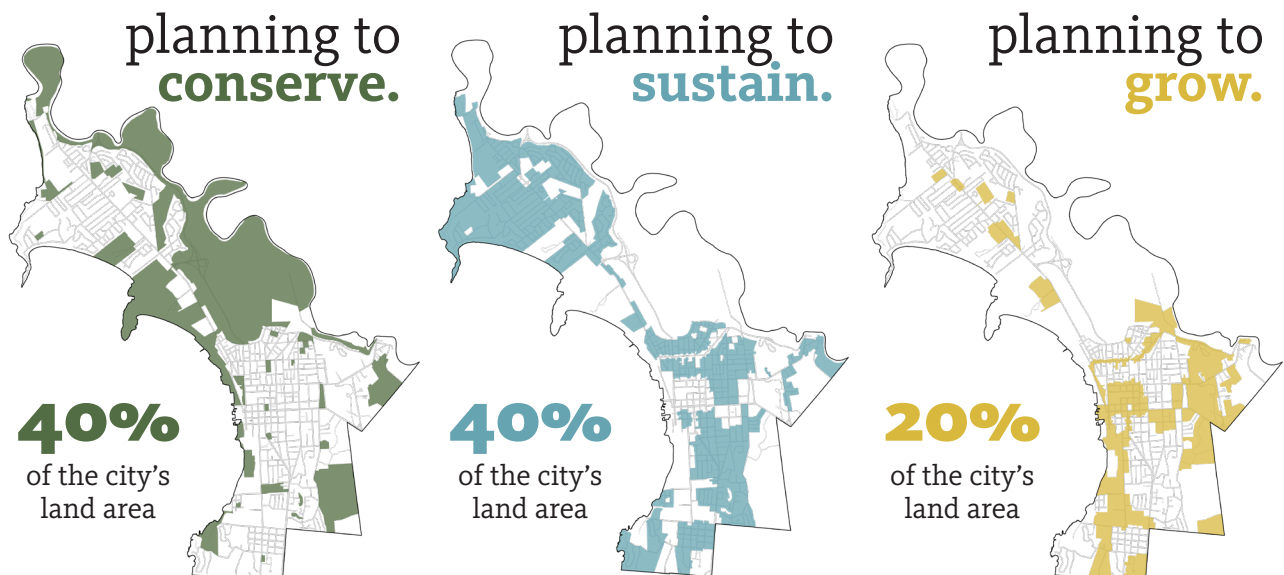
The 2021 Housing Action Plan established a goal of 1,250 new homes within the city by 2026, essentially doubling the rate of growth from the previous five years. This goal is one-quarter of the [regional housing goal](#), which has been established based on chronically low housing vacancy rates, the statewide Housing Needs Assessment, and other market and demographic factors in our area.

Burlington is a well-established city, with the vast majority of developable lots already being utilized, and a significant portion of land area dedicated to essential natural and recreational systems. While there is very little vacant land for new development, there are many opportunities to retrofit properties that have already been developed through infill and redevelopment.

[planBTV](#) provides a framework for what type and scale of development should occur in different parts of the city. While not the only factor, zoning has a major influence on our ability to meet our housing production goal and implement this land use framework. As seen below, *planBTV* guides changes to zoning laws by identifying areas that we are planning to conserve, sustain, and grow.

## What is Residential Infill?

Residential infill is a term that refers to the creation of new homes within and alongside areas of the city that are already developed, or on previously underutilized land within the city. In some of the most beloved historic neighborhoods in the city, residential infill explains the rich variety of architectural styles and building types that seemingly coexist. For example, along Willard Street buildings dating back to the 1800s mix alongside ones built between 1900 and 1940, and even some from as recent as the 1960s (see pg. 21).





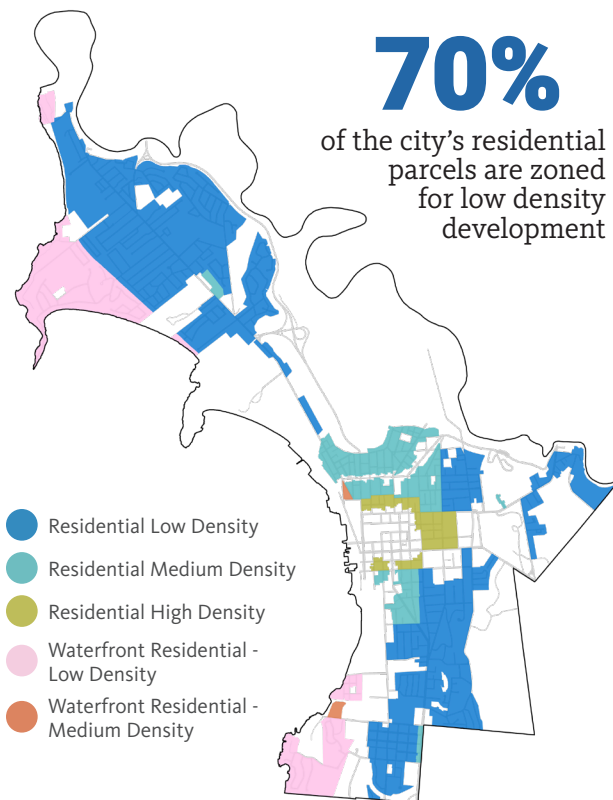
## What is a Non-Conformity?

A lot, building or the specific use of a lot can be non-conforming. This means it does not meet one or more of the current zoning standards, but most likely did when first established. For example, because 52% of Burlington's residential lots had been created before the city adopted its first zoning code in 1947, many were smaller than the new lot size standards, making them non-conforming lots. This doesn't mean that the owner of a non-conforming lot needs to try to make the lot bigger; however, this may limit the lot's ability to evolve—such as by accommodating another housing unit in the future.

Many of the changes to zoning laws over the last decade have focused on the areas identified for the most intensive growth—the downtown and other dense, mixed-use areas that make up about 20% of the city. However, not all of these areas are currently zoned for, nor would they be appropriate for, housing development. These areas include major academic and medical institutions, public schools, and areas like the South End's industrial and commercial district. A particular focus over the last decade has been on the zoning for downtown, which represents just 2% of the city's total land area. While there are many more opportunities for growth in these areas, new homes (where allowed) will mostly be in larger-scale multi-family housing developments and these areas cannot and should not accommodate all of our housing needs going forward.

The Neighborhood Code is about more small-scale housing opportunities within the city's residentially zoned areas, which account for about 40% of the city's area. *planBTV* anticipates that there will be incremental changes in these areas that are consistent with existing development patterns, but that will enable these neighborhoods to evolve to meet the needs of current and future households. Neighborhood-scale housing not only offers more choices for households within existing neighborhoods, but also helps meet local and regional housing needs within areas that are already developed, thus reducing some of the pressure for growth in undeveloped areas around the region. Enabling more homes in these areas will help support the city's sustainability goals, make better use of existing public infrastructure, and bring more homes to areas where people can walk, bike, and use transit.

Today, about two-thirds of the residential areas are in zoning districts where there a number of barriers preventing more middle housing choices today. Allowing more neighborhood-scale homes on its own will not achieve all of the city's housing, equity, financial, and sustainability goals, but is an important complement to other solutions. While it is likely that creating these new homes will be an incremental process that takes place over many years, particularly without programs and initiatives that will help overcome other non-regulatory barriers, the growth of these housing types will be an important part of the city's housing mix in the future.



### Burlington's Residential Zoning Districts

Zoning districts refer to different categories of development types and intensities. Districts are mapped, and apply to one or more areas of the city. For example, the RL district applies to many different neighborhoods throughout Burlington.

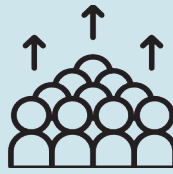
## Middle housing and the city's households

Middle housing options present opportunities for more of the city's households to have access to housing types that meet their needs within existing neighborhoods. Households' needs change over time, including how many people live together, requirements for space, and how much of its income can be spent on housing costs. Like many places in the country, the makeup of the city's households has been changing. As these needs change and evolve, diverse housing choices must be available to address the changing needs of residents and households.

### Burlington Households

Between 2010 and 2020, the city's population grew 5%, to 44,873 and was accompanied by some shifts in household composition – shifts that are not necessarily new, or unique to Burlington. In fact, as far back as the city's 1962 Comprehensive Plan, it was recognized that these household dynamics were changing—particularly that households were getting smaller. The last decade has seen an increase in single-person households and households with unrelated individuals living together. While increases in college and university enrollment is a part of this change, it's important to note that small and unrelated households include many early- to mid-career adults and older adults, many of whom middle housing types can be well-suited for.

### Burlington's Changing Households



The average household size in Burlington is 2.2 people. This is slightly higher than the city's 2.1 persons per household in 2010, but is still below the United States as well as the state of Vermont, which average 2.6 and 2.4 persons per household, respectively.

**60%** of households do not have children, which has increased from 52% in 2010. These include people living alone, unmarried partners, unrelated roommates of all ages, as well as shared living arrangements like senior housing.



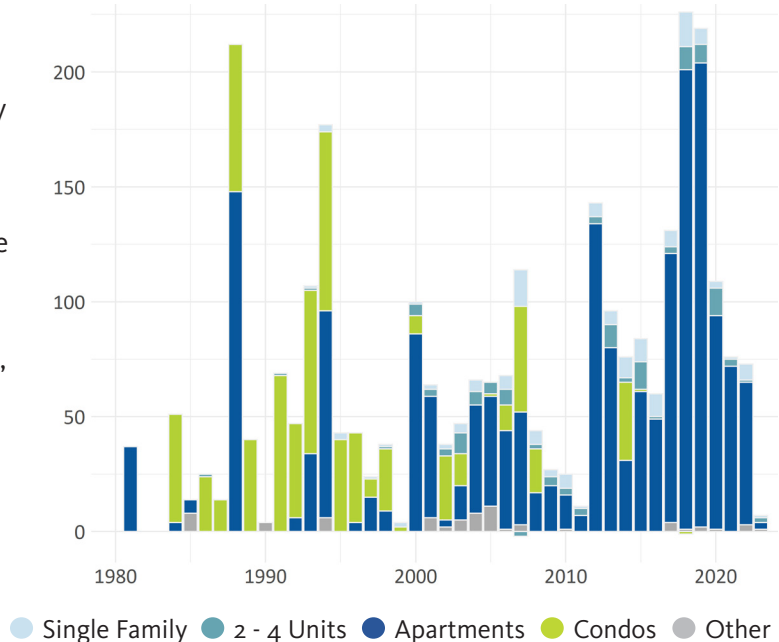
One-third of residents are early career adults and young homeowners (ages 25-39) and residents at retirement age (65 and older).

**38%** of the city's households include just one person, up from 36% in 2010. One-person households make up the largest share of Burlington households, and increased more than any other group in the last decade.

### New Housing Units

From 2012 to 2022, there has been an average of 120 new housing units created within the city every year, with the majority in new multi-unit housing developments in downtown and other mixed-use areas of the city. About a third of these units were in residentially-zoned areas, including some larger apartment developments such as Bayberry Commons. Citywide, during the same timeframe, 12% of new homes since 2012 were single family or "middle housing" type developments which included two, three or four units.

Net New Units by Type of Building



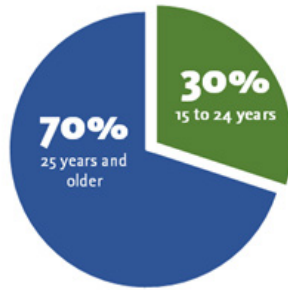
## Renter + Owner Households

The type of homes and neighborhoods that renters and owners live in can vary across the city. While the majority of households in Burlington—about 62%—are renter-occupied, approximately 40% of the land zoned for residential uses is occupied by single-family homes. And the overwhelmingly majority of those homes—about 77%—are owner-occupied.

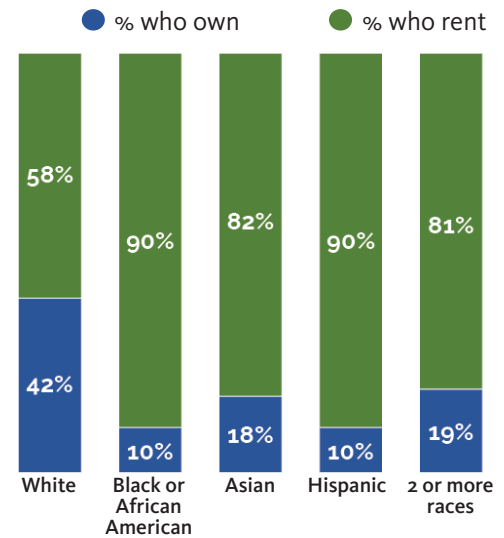
Combined with historic zoning and development patterns, this means that housing types and the neighborhoods where people live can closely correspond with other household demographic factors—particularly race and income.

The median income for renter households in 2021 was \$59,331, while the median income for owner households is \$113,750. Additionally, white households own their homes at higher rates than any other race. While many off-campus students live in rental households, 70% of rental households include individuals 25 and older.

**Age of Renters in Burlington**



**Burlington Renters & Owners by Race**



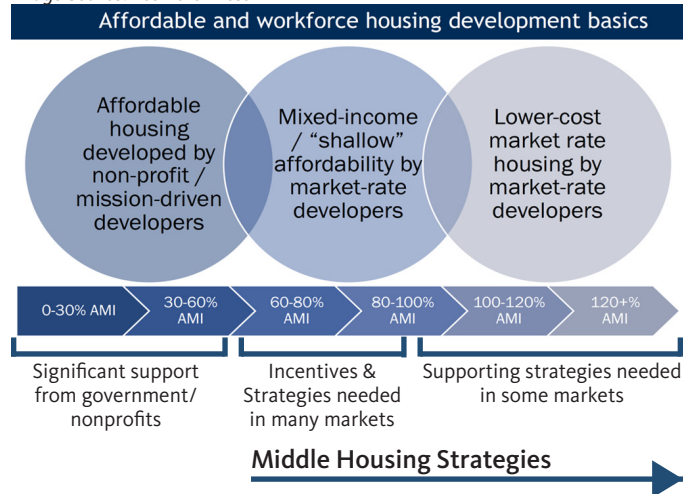
## Economic Benefits of Middle Housing

### Housing Cost

In 2022, the median single-family home price in Burlington was \$510,000, a 59% increase since before the Covid-19 pandemic. This cost is not affordable to the average two-person household earning a median income. Additionally, 57% of rental households pay more than 30% of their income for rent, with 33% paying more than half of their income.

While the city has inclusionary zoning requirements, that require a certain percentage of units to be permanently affordable within new multi-unit developments, and a Housing Trust Fund to provide financial support to create and preserve affordable housing citywide, middle housing can be a tool to expand more “naturally occurring” affordable housing. In some places, middle housing has been a tool to help incrementally expand owner and renter housing options for households that earn between 80-120% of the area median income, with less subsidy needed.

*Image Source: EcoNorthwest*



## Property Value

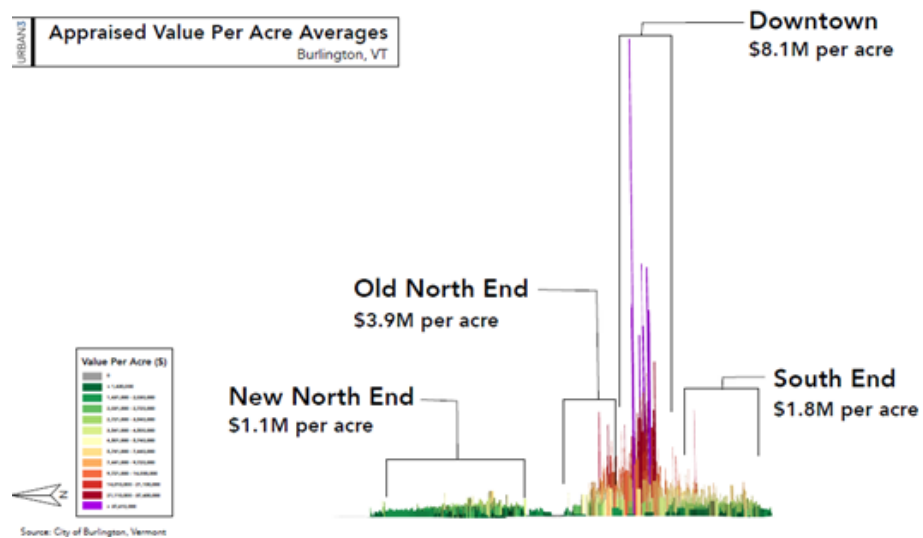
Enabling more middle housing types can help create more revenue from the limited taxable land within the city, as well as help more efficiently fund and utilize existing public infrastructure—the roads, sidewalks, and waterlines that have already been built.

Individual property values, and the amount of taxes paid, can vary greatly based on factors such as how large a lot is, how many units are on the lot, and the condition of the property. As a result, across the city, there are examples of single-family homes and small multi-unit buildings that can have similar assessed values.

However, a citywide analysis of property values based on value-per-acre highlights that some areas of the city that feature small lots and a mix of housing types actually generate a higher proportion of tax revenue compared to amount of land they take up. For example, the diagram below shows that properties in the Old North End average \$3.9 million in value per acre, compared to \$1.8 million per acre in the South End, and \$1.1 million per acre in the New North End. Further, this study found that single-family properties average \$1.77 million in value per acre, while multi-family properties average \$2.55 million per acre.

Incrementally adding more neighborhood-scale multi-unit buildings across the city can help modestly boost tax revenue and share the tax burden of the city’s public infrastructure and services across more homes. This can also support property owners by adding a new tool to earn revenue – such as by renting or selling a unit on their lot—to help them cover a portion of their housing costs.

**Value per acre analysis by Urban3.** Relative values are extracted into 3D bars to better illustrate the range of values of various areas of the city.



## Limits to more neighborhood-scale housing in BTV

In order to realize more neighborhood-scale housing types across the city, it is important to understand what is keeping them from being created today. This boils down to big-picture barriers—ones that are common across many cities that also impact Burlington—as well as nuances in the City’s zoning standards that can limit the ability for new homes to be created in ways that are consistent with its stated housing policy goals. The barriers discussed in this section have been identified through:

- *Enabling Better Places: A Coding Reform Roadmap for Burlington, Vermont*: This audit by the Congress for New Urbanism, on behalf of AARP-VT, identified recommendations to address current zoning barriers to realizing the city’s goals for more high quality, affordable housing choices that create a more livable and walkable Burlington.
- “Fit tests” prepared by Opticos Design to model the potential for middle housing types on city lots, and an analysis of specific zoning standards that would prohibit their creation.
- A workshop with local housing experts and stakeholders, facilitated by AARP-VT and EcoNorthwest, to discuss middle housing opportunities and barriers within the city. This workshop also flagged non-regulatory challenges.
- Discussions with multiple city departments regarding existing policies—including zoning, building, and other codes—which may make it difficult to permit more of these housing types.
- Research on common middle housing barriers and a review of specific issues addressed by other communities’ efforts to enable more middle housing types.

While these analyses and discussions highlighted a broad range of issues, it’s important to note that they may not all be addressed through Part 2 of the Neighborhood Code. In some cases, these barriers may relate to areas of the City’s zoning ordinance that would be best considered as a standalone issue, while others may be addressed incrementally or not at all. Some barriers relate to issues outside of the zoning ordinance for which other resources or partners may be needed.

Ultimately, this section is intended to provide a roadmap of zoning topics most closely related to how we regulate the types of homes that are allowed in residential areas. It highlights standards to explore as we work to identify solutions to enable more neighborhood-scale housing types in Burlington. Subsequent sections provide more detail about the evolution of the city’s zoning ordinance related to these barriers, and identifies key patterns of city neighborhoods in order to inform the sort of context-sensitive policy changes referred to throughout.

### Zoning districts that don’t reflect certain neighborhoods’ existing patterns

This barrier can show up both unintentionally, such as from zoning standards that aren’t finely tuned to a particular area’s context, or intentionally, based on the desired outcomes at the time a zoning standard was adopted or changed. In Burlington, about 38% of residential lots in the city don’t conform to the zoning standards in place today. While this may not be surprising given the wide range in age and home types across the city, nonconformity impacts some neighborhoods more than others.

For example, the RL and WRL zoning districts apply to about 70% of lots in the residential zoning districts, but the neighborhoods within these districts vary widely in terms of their age and the patterns of streets, lots, and homes. As documented in the the Conformity Analysis on page 27, properties in the eastern portion of the



Old North End, just to the northwest of UVM, and much of Five Sisters neighborhoods are zoned as RL. However, less than 20% of the properties in each of these neighborhoods conform to the RL zoning standards. In the case of the Old North End, properties in this neighborhood share many characteristics in common with properties in the RM and RH zoning districts around it.

The CNU report recommended changing the applicable zoning district for areas like this to one that better reflects what's already on the ground in order to enable these neighborhoods to evolve in incremental ways. The report also recommended that this be done in conjunction with developing more context-sensitive zoning tools in order to enable more housing opportunities while being responsive to neighborhood patterns.

### Zoning requirements that limit the use of existing lots and homes

The CNU report also found that some zoning standards are limiting how existing homes and lots can be used, thus restricting the creation of housing that reflects current neighborhood patterns and household trends. Burlington's decline in average household sizes compared to larger and historic housing stock has caused a mismatch in some parts of the city between the housing supply and needs of households seeking homes. Ultimately, these factors can contribute to the shortage of dwelling units available to buy or rent at prices affordable to residents. The city's existing natural and political boundaries leave virtually no vacant land for the construction of new single-family homes as an option to increase the housing supply, which means making more opportunities for homes within areas that are already developed is required to order to realize new homes.



The CNU report recommends a number of approaches to better utilize the existing lots and housing stock by addressing zoning standards that effectively prevent middle housing types. For example, while the city has long allowed duplexes in all residential zoning districts, approximately 64% of lots in the RL zone don't meet the minimum lot size required to have one. Such zoning changes could:

- Eliminate or modify the density limit and minimum lot size requirement for lots in RL & RL/W districts in order for more lots to host a duplex.
- Increase the allowable lot coverage permitted in the RM district. This district allows 40% lot coverage, which is only 5% more than RL. However, the RM zone theoretically allows nearly three times the number of units per acre, and these areas often have much smaller lots.
- Consider whether to make any changes to setback requirements, particularly for side and rear setbacks in neighborhoods where existing buildings are closer to property lines.
- In addition to the current lot coverage bonus for the rehabilitation of historic buildings, consider scenarios where the preservation of an existing building may allow other dimensional standards to be exceeded (i.e. to convert a carriage barn to a unit).

### Lack of specific, context-sensitive zoning standards for residential areas

CNU's report noted that despite the City's policies stating the importance of reinforcing existing development patterns, the zoning ordinance does not include standards that relate to those patterns. The ordinance instead relies on general development principles for all types of development; a design review process for many areas of the city; and tools such as density and lot coverage which together act as proxies to regulate the overall size, scale, and bulk of new buildings. Additionally, while the city's design standards appear to support middle housing types like duplexes, rowhouses, or small courtyard apartments, the zoning standards make these difficult to realize in many areas outside of the RH district.

Relying largely on density and lot coverage as the main tools to regulate scale, as well as requirements that all lots have a certain amount of frontage on a road and precluding lots from having multiple structures, can at once make it more difficult to build neighborhood-scale housing options while also encouraging lot consolidation, tear downs, and development of larger buildings.

The CNU report, therefore, recommends that the ordinance instead include “clear and objective standards” that allow the incremental addition of homes at an appropriate scale to ensure new middle housing types blend well with the existing fabric of neighborhoods. This should be based on defining a series of housing types and associated standards for the character, mass, and form of buildings that are sensitive to and appropriate for various neighborhoods and the transitions between them. This could also include standards for how buildings are located on lots, how they are responsive to the street, and, in cases where more than one building is allowed, how the buildings relate to one another. In some communities codes, zoning standards address the most significant features that define an area’s patterns, while others take the form of highly detailed form codes.

These standards could address, at minimum, details such as:

- Describing the height, width, and/or overall footprint of new buildings to be consistent with the patterns of neighborhoods.
- Prescribing desired building elements (such as roof forms or porches) in certain areas.
- Establishing minimum requirements for windows on building facades.
- Considering how to scale different housing types up or down depending on the location, while maintaining consistency in their overall form.

## Discretionary review processes for middle housing types

If specific, context-sensitive standards have been defined, the CNU report recommends simplifying the development review process for smaller housing types; as is, the current zoning rules allow very little development “by-right”. Except for single-family homes in the RL zoning district, most developments within residential areas must go before the DRB for discretionary Site Plan Review, Design Review, or sometimes both. The city’s current approach aims to achieve high quality design outcomes, but can also create a highly subjective process for some projects which increase both the cost and risk associated with taking on these small projects.

Reducing the number of projects that must go before the DRB by incorporating objective, measurable, and quantifiable standards into the City’s development requirements would make neighborhood-scale buildings easier to build, and help save time and money for these new homes. To address concerns related to how these standards “limit creativity” in building design, CNU recommends that the City maintain a discretionary design review process that applicants can opt to use if they wish to pursue alternatives to objective standards that may be established.

The CNU report recommends the following changes in conjunction with one another:

- Amend lot, dimensional, and PUD standards within the existing residential zoning districts in the CDO’s Article 4 to explicitly identify the types of lots and contexts where neighborhood-scale housing would be allowed.
- Incorporate specific, objective form standards for neighborhood-scale housing types into CDO’s Article 6, Parts 2 and 3, and enable these housing types when the standards are met.
- Remove portions of the city in the RM zoning district from the Design Review Overlay map.

Based on the City’s research, another option could be to pursue a more prescriptive, standalone code for residential areas, similar to the CDO’s Downtown Code (Article 14), which creates new districts and standards for middle housing types within those areas. Like Article 14, such a prescriptive code should enable an administrative review process for projects that conform to the standards.

## Existing zoning provisions that are difficult to utilize

The City's research identified several other specific challenges in existing zoning for which solutions will likely be needed in order to facilitate the implementation of many of the middle housing types that may be desirable. Many of these are technical details that illustrate how housing types that the ordinance seems to allow can be very difficult to implement:

- Within the RL zone, district-specific regulations enable densities of up to 7 units/acre. However, the CDO's Appendix A- Use Table prohibits buildings of 3 or more units throughout this district. This means that for some larger lots, despite the appearance that more homes would be permissible, a duplex is the maximum that can be built.
- The ordinance recognizes that some buildings and uses existed prior to current zoning standards, and attempts to provide some flexibility for those cases. One example in the RL district is a provision for the DRB to allow an additional unit to be added to buildings that contained 2 or more units as of January 1, 2007. But because all other standards must still be met—for example, a nearly 19,000 sq.ft. lot would be required to add a third unit to an existing duplex—very few properties have been able to use this provision.

## Middle Housing in BTV

These models, prepared by Opticos Design Inc., demonstrate what Missing Middle Housing could look like on two existing parcels in the RL zoning district in Burlington. The purpose of these models is to showcase examples of context-sensitive housing types that feature multiple housing units, and include many features of the buildings and lots that are desirable in residential areas. While both of these examples feature lots in the New North End these can be informative for other parts of the city, particularly when scaled up or down.

### North Avenue Fourplex

This site, located on North Avenue, currently houses a large parking lot and duplex on a quarter-acre corner lot. In this concept, a fourplex is located at the corner on part of what is the existing parking lot. This is an example of how to create new homes along one of the main GMT bus routes and near the neighborhood-serving amenities in the Hannaford Shopping Center. Because it is a corner lot, building entries are able to be placed facing both streets which provides for an active street frontage, ADA accessible entrance, and off-street parking largely hidden from North Avenue.



#### Key Features

- Provides transition between North Avenue and quieter residential area
- From street view, building height, width, and features such as porches are similar to buildings in area
- Creates four new homes of nearly 850 ft<sup>2</sup> each
- ADA accessible entry to ground level units, on-site parking, access to transit



#### Key Barriers

- Maximum dwelling units per acre in RL is too low
- Lots in RL are not permitted to accommodate 3+ unit buildings



- Some desirable middle housing types will be best suited to free-standing buildings. However, multiple detached structures on a lot are only permitted under the City’s PUD standards—a tool reserved for lots of 2 acres or more. While there are very few remaining lots this large in residential areas, this is an example of where the zoning standards could incentivize lot consolidation. Consideration should be given to whether this 2-acre requirement should be lowered.
- Existing frontage standards require all lots to have minimum widths along a street or waterbody. This limits flexibility in how existing lots can be used, subdivided to create new fee-simple homeownership, or how examples such as Cottage Court developments can be created. Consideration should be given to whether to allow flag lot subdivisions or other subdivisions that don’t require each lot or building to have direct access to a public street.

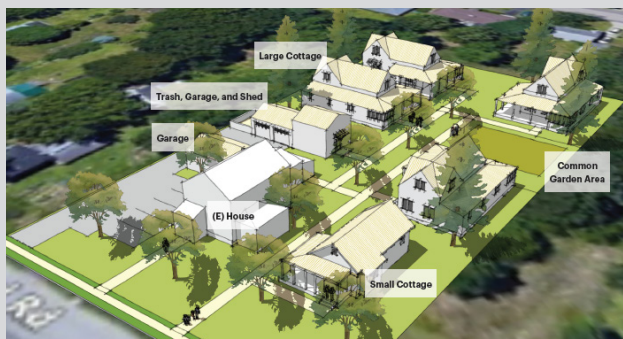
## Standards that don’t allow well-designed neighborhood-scale housing

Ultimately, this section demonstrates a number of ways that it can be very difficult to incorporate new neighborhood-scale housing options into existing neighborhoods in ways that could be compatible with existing patterns. What’s more, in some cases, the existing standards inadvertently enable new developments that are not necessarily consistent with neighborhood patterns which reinforces some residents’ concerns that new homes won’t fit.

To address these challenges, the CNU report recommends identifying specific middle housing types that would be appropriate for residential areas of the city, and then aligning zoning policies to more explicitly allow them. In the examples below prepared by Opticos Design, two New North End lots in the RL zoning district have been studied for their potential to host new neighborhood-scale buildings, based on their location and surrounding context—one on North Avenue and the other on Staniford Road.

### New North End Cottage Court

This site, in the New North End, currently houses a single-family house on a one-acre lot. The proposed design arranges new free-standing homes in various sizes around a central green with the existing house as an anchor, and includes parking and a resident amenities. Cottage courts, sometimes called pocket neighborhoods, offer smaller homes with communal amenities. The new small, detached homes reflect the pattern of small to mid-sized single-family homes throughout the neighborhood.



#### Key Features

- Creates additional housing choices in buildings that are similar to nearby single family homes
- Creates options for rental or homeownership, as well as for extended family, multi-generational living, or intentional communities
- Includes mix of 1,200 ft<sup>2</sup> 2-bed homes and 675 ft<sup>2</sup> 1-bed homes
- On-site parking, resident garden, and shared garage/garden shed

#### Key Barriers:

- This number of free-standing units are not permitted in the RL zoning district
- Requirements for minimum frontage and arrangement of new lots do not allow for subdividing into fee-simple homeownership
- Lot is too small to utilize existing PUD standards to develop as a condo/rental community.

Both CNU and Opticos independently identified Cottage Courts – a group of small detached dwellings on a single parcel, often organized around a central open space – as a middle housing type highly suitable for Burlington. One rendering illustrates how a Cottage Court can be compatible with neighborhoods that today feature predominantly single-family homes—and includes off-street parking, generous open space and a large garden, and a shared storage shed. Notably, Cottage Courts have also been identified as an opportunity to support older adults with a more affordable housing option that supports an independent lifestyle while reducing the maintenance responsibilities typical of larger lots and homes.

Opticos also identified the opportunity for a 4-unit building on a portion of an existing surface parking lot near the Ethan Allen Shopping Center along the North Avenue bus line. This opportunity was identified as a way to create a transition between a range of existing buildings types and sizes in all directions—an infill opportunity along a busier street that transitions to the quieter residential area behind it. This example also shows how this lot could host parking and an ADA-accessible entry for the ground floor units, while still maintaining “house-scale” elements.

However, both of these middle housing examples run into a range of zoning barriers, some of which have been described above. In the case of the Cottage Court, the biggest barriers are lot coverage limits, standards that prohibit multiple detached buildings on a lot, and the requirement that homes each have a minimum amount of property along a public street. In the case of the Fourplex, the biggest barriers are density limits and standards that prohibit multiple detached buildings.

As a result, both the CNU report and the analysis by Opticos recommend that Burlington identify specific types of middle housing types, and then create site and building design standards that explicitly enable them. This would allow types of housing in certain residential areas that are not currently allowed as long as specific standards are met. This approach is very similar to changes that the City made in 2021 to enable more ADUs. In the example of the Cottage Court, this could include defining a maximum number of homes and how big individual homes can be, how they are oriented to each other and the public street, and how much open space is maintained on a lot.

# Zoning in the City's Residential Areas

## The (Abbreviated) History

As previously noted, half of all residential buildings in the city were originally developed several generations ago, prior to the adoption of the city's first zoning ordinance in 1947<sup>7</sup>. Many of the city's oldest residential properties were built to suit the needs of households at the start of the 20th century, such as to accommodate large or extended families or as housing for workers as the economy grew. When the first ordinance was adopted, it included just one residential zoning district. Like many cities, this district allowed for a mix of housing types, including single-family and multi-family homes, rooming houses, and apartment buildings.

These factors are foundational to the city's historic neighborhoods and shed light on why many feature a diversity of housing types that seemingly coexist within and define their vibrant character. While middle housing types were an original element of some of the earliest neighborhoods, they can also be found throughout the city today—from the abundant variety of neighborhood-scale housing types in the Old North End to brand-new duplexes on North Avenue in the New North End. While there are many examples of these housing types in the city's neighborhoods, modern zoning laws have increasingly made these types of housing more difficult to replicate.

## Burlington's Early Urban Development

Burlington's early urban residential growth can be seen in the areas radiating around the downtown core, predominantly within the Old North End as well as south of downtown in the Lakeside, East of Downtown, and South of Downtown neighborhoods (page 21). During this time period, Burlington joined dozens of other municipalities across the U.S. in utilizing horse-drawn and then electric trolley systems as a mode of public transportation. Trolley routes spread north from Pine Street, through downtown, and branched northeast along N. Winooski Avenue into Winooski and northwest along North Avenue to Lakeview Cemetery.

Development in this era included a mix of single and multi-family dwellings whose design pre-dated the automobile, resulting in dense and walkable neighborhoods. With limited regulations, blocks could consist of multi- and single-family residences mixed with commercial businesses. These often-

detached residences were built on small lots, tended to lack front yards, and were located along grid-pattern streets extending from the city's downtown core. While some of the characteristics of these early developments have evolved, these older core neighborhoods retain many of these basic characteristics: many are narrow, detached buildings located on lots typically 30 – 60ft wide; the vast majority of buildings are placed less than 10 feet from the public right of way resulting in shallow front yards; and only about 38% of lots developed before 1900 are used for single-family dwellings today.

The start of the 20th century was a unique period for Burlington's development. The trolley system continued to grow and prosper during the start of the century, providing a link between homes and the businesses that were located on what was then the fringes of the city. This became instrumental in the growth of the South End. As the automobile began to rise in popularity during the 1920s, Burlington began to see new residential development spreading away from the downtown, specifically south along Shelburne Road and South Prospect Street, as well as northwest along North Avenue.

One unique development from this period is the Lakeside neighborhood, initially built as a self-contained neighborhood for factory worker housing during the 1890s to support the growing industrial hub in the South End<sup>8</sup>. This neighborhood was accessible via the electric trolley system and contained two twelve-family tenements, nine fourplexes, twenty-five duplexes, and interspersed commercial uses. This is an example in which middle housing types were original to the neighborhood's foundation and remain a character-defining part of its modern-day use.



## The City's First Code

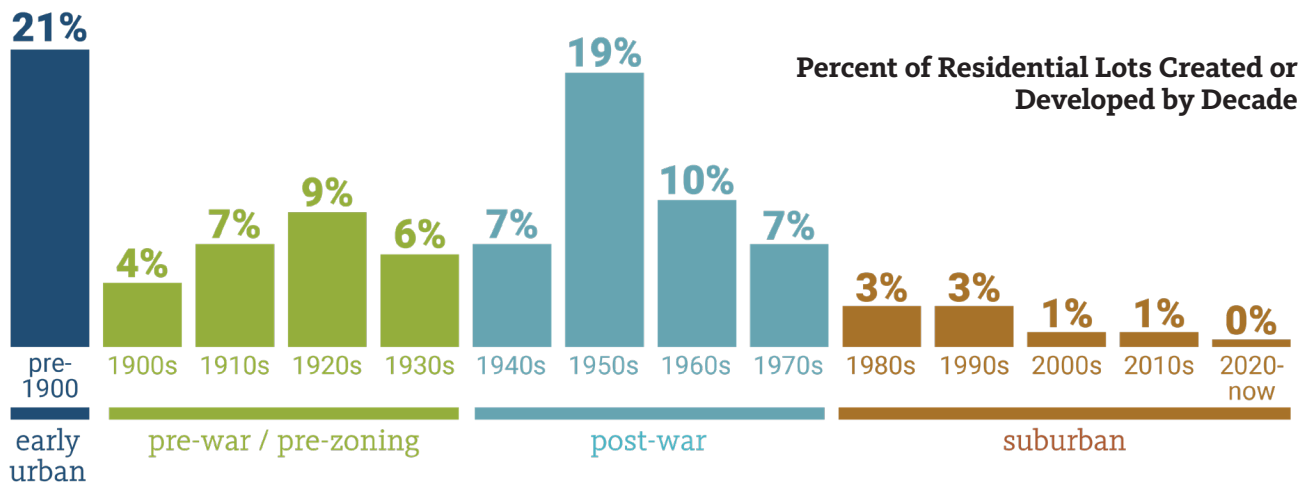
The 1947 zoning ordinance included four zoning districts: Residential, Parks, Commercial, and Industrial. The residential zone allowed for various housing types and tailored some typical zoning standards—like lot size and building height—to the housing types themselves rather than all development within the district. When the code first went into effect, nearly 80% of the residential properties that had already been developed became non-conforming. This was primarily due to the new requirements for minimum lot size and width, which were larger than what was already created. Despite this, the earliest zoning ordinance still provided some flexibility for residential lots yet to be developed.

The adoption of the first zoning ordinance also coincided with the beginning of a significant post-World War II housing boom in the US<sup>9</sup> and Burlington. The city experienced another residential development boom in the 1950s and 1960s—during which close to 1,250 residential buildings were constructed. Like much of the US in the post-war era, much of this growth was in the New North End and primarily comprised of single-family homes and development patterns that provided convenient access by car. Development in this era is characterized by detached, single-family houses located on wide lots with deeper front yard setbacks, typically away from primary thoroughfares. With the rise of the automobile, these homes often featured attached garages and front driveways. Street patterns within these neighborhoods had curvilinear roadways and long blocks. This housing type continued to be developed into the 1980s and 1990s in Burlington, and has continued well into the 2020s in Chittenden County.

## Social and Political Influences on Housing

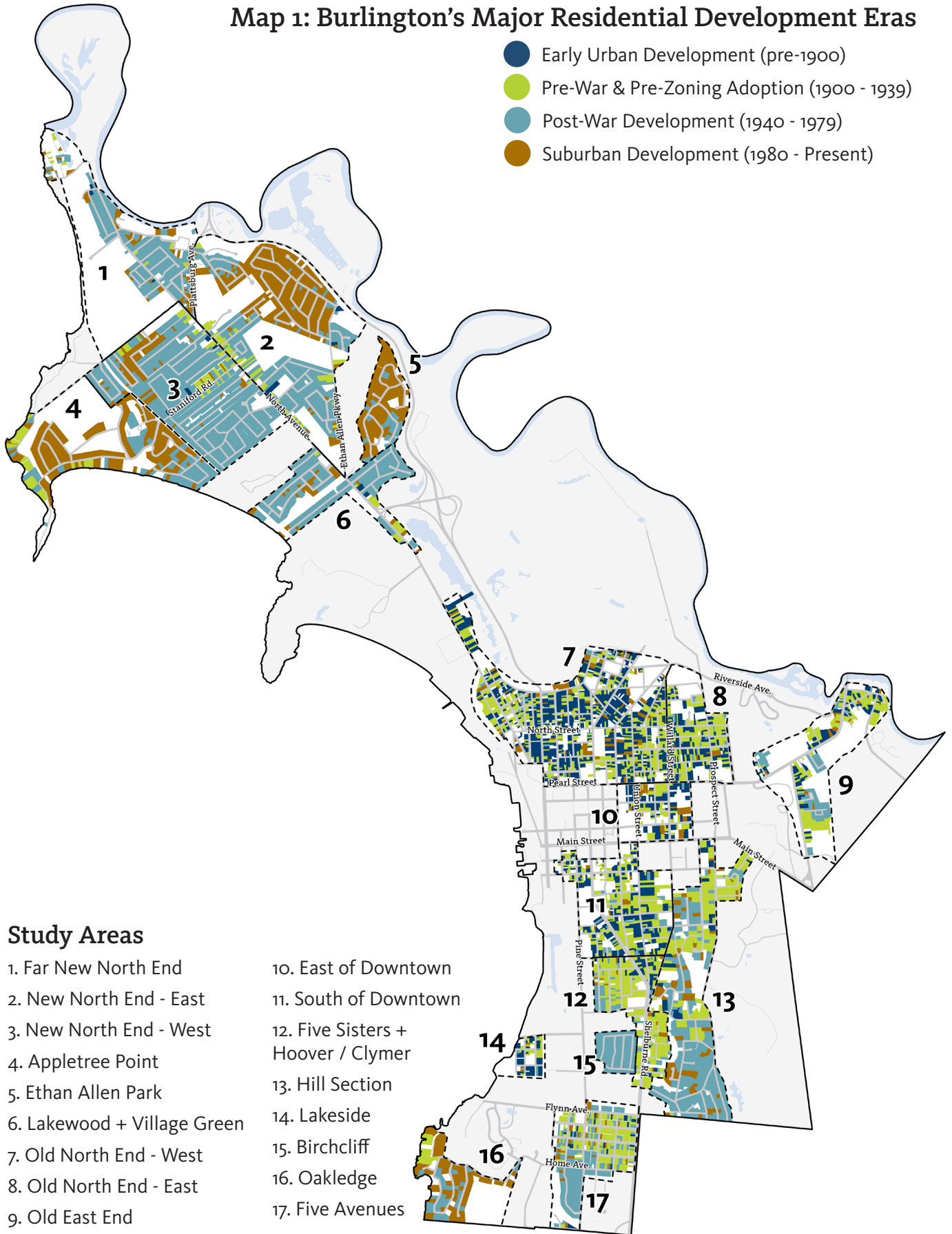
Intertwined national policies, regional housing and development trends, and local growth pressures influenced major zoning policies across the U.S. and in Burlington throughout the 20th century. Subsequent changes to the city's zoning laws throughout the latter half of the 20th century ultimately pared back the housing types permitted in existing neighborhoods and introduced standards that limited what could be built in those yet to be developed. These factors contribute significantly to why certain neighborhood-scale housing types are now primarily considered “missing.”

It's impossible to chronicle the history of any city's zoning laws and housing development patterns without acknowledging the role of federal and local governments in advancing redlining and urban renewal programs. Redlining<sup>10</sup> became widely adopted by the federal government, private lenders, and insurance companies, resulting in (*de jure*) segregation in the US housing system. There is no evidence of Burlington being formally redlined, nor has exhaustive historical research been done to identify whether any zoning policies were advanced for explicitly discriminatory purposes. However, it is important to recognize that some common zoning tools, including ones used in Burlington today, gained prominence in the US partly as a proxy for redlining and race-based zoning that had been ruled unconstitutional<sup>11</sup>. For example, designating zones for only single-family development and establishing large minimum lot sizes were employed in some cities to exclude people without the means to afford them.



# Map 1: Burlington's Major Residential Development Eras

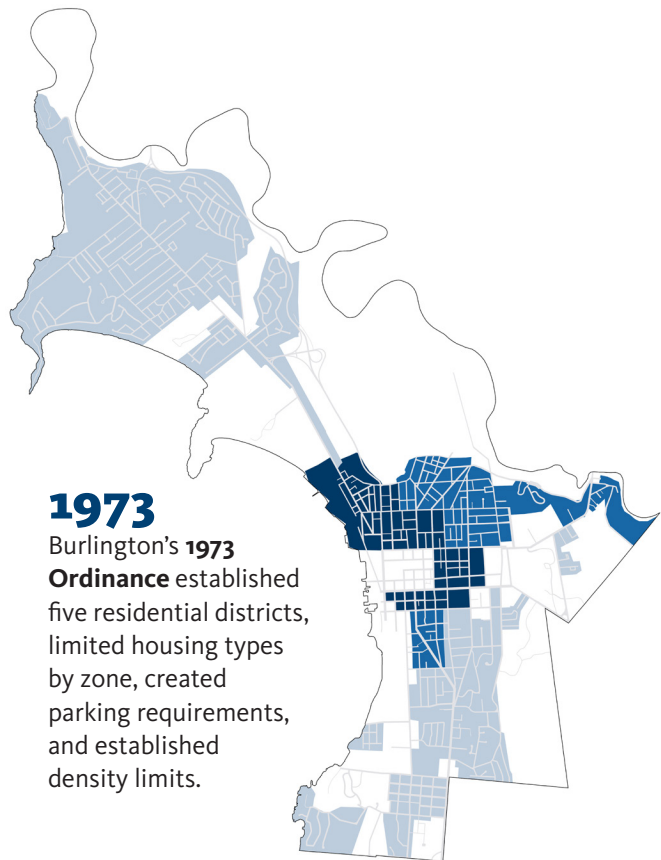
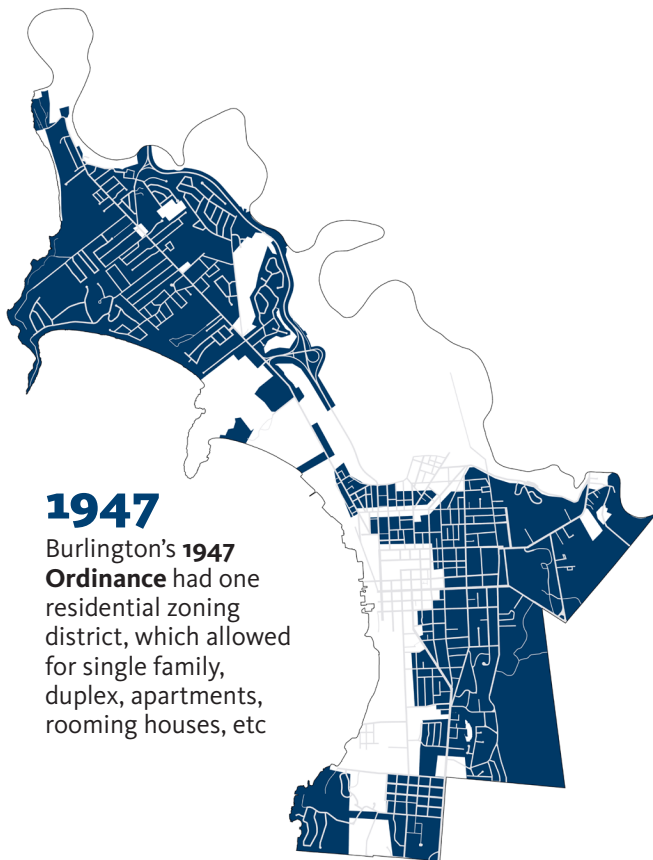
- Early Urban Development (pre-1900)
- Pre-War & Pre-Zoning Adoption (1900 - 1939)
- Post-War Development (1940 - 1979)
- Suburban Development (1980 - Present)



## Study Areas

- |                             |                                    |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Far New North End        | 10. East of Downtown               |
| 2. New North End - East     | 11. South of Downtown              |
| 3. New North End - West     | 12. Five Sisters + Hoover / Clymer |
| 4. Appletree Point          | 13. Hill Section                   |
| 5. Ethan Allen Park         | 14. Lakeside                       |
| 6. Lakewood + Village Green | 15. Birchcliff                     |
| 7. Old North End - West     | 16. Oakledge                       |
| 8. Old North End - East     | 17. Five Avenues                   |
| 9. Old East End             |                                    |

## Changes to intensity and mix of home types allowed in residential zones



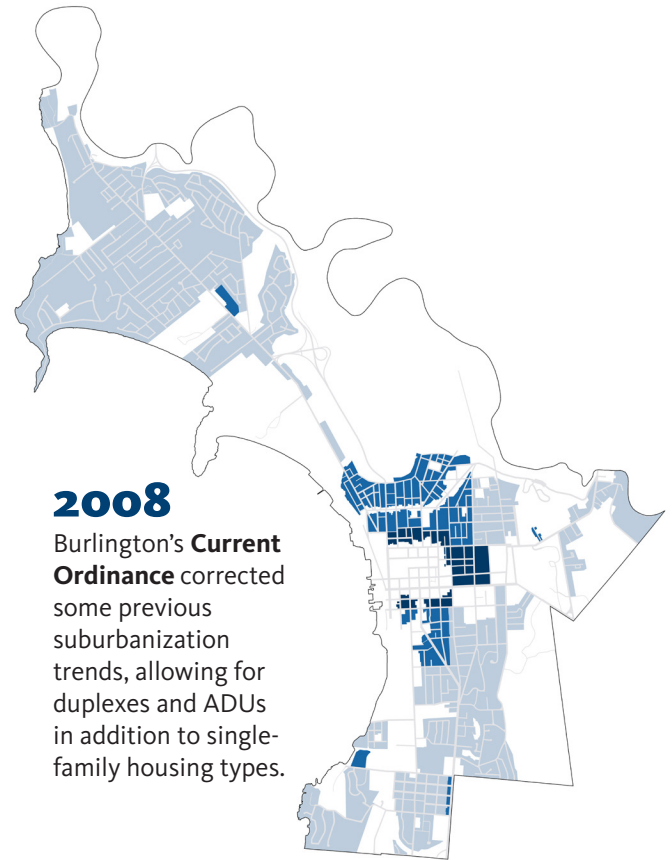
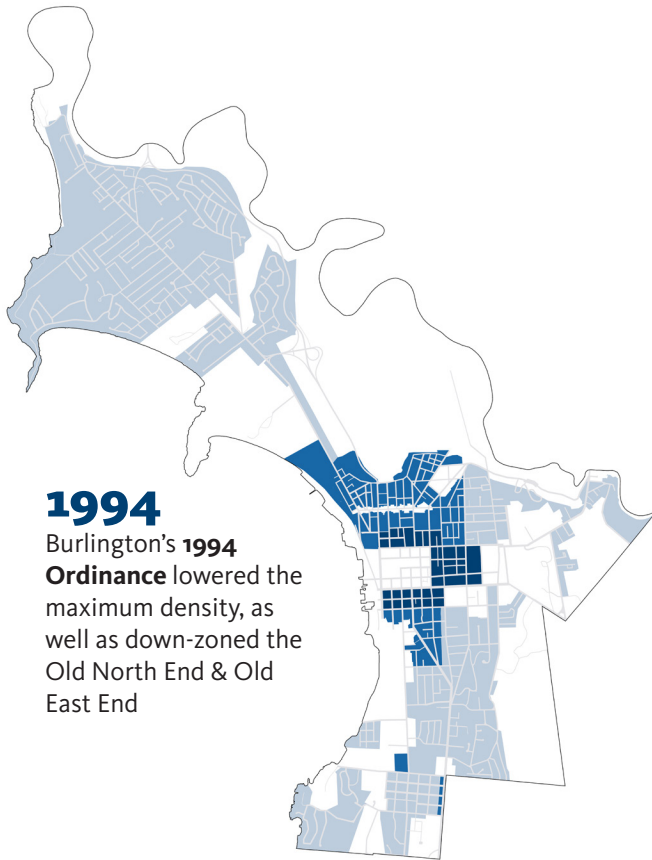
Similarly, urban renewal was a widely adopted federal program implemented in many cities. At the time, supporters of urban renewal, and the federal government, were believed to be visionaries advancing large-scale urban and economic development solutions; yet, prevailing attitudes toward the value of different neighborhoods and housing types can be observed in Burlington's historic urban renewal plans<sup>12</sup>. In Burlington, 300 buildings, including 157 households, in one of Burlington's working-class immigrant neighborhoods were removed to make room for downtown development that was implemented over several decades. Other plans from the city's urban renewal era also identified similar neighborhoods around downtown as appropriate for replacement with new apartment and mixed-use developments while other areas of the city were prioritized for single-family growth.

Other significant influences included a concern for maintaining a stable tax base, particularly with the growth of the hill institutions and communities around Burlington, and the condition of the city's aging housing stock. Trends including the decreasing size of households, a growing older population, and young families moving to nearby

towns date back to the 1960s. By mid-century, the city needed building and housing codes to address safety and property maintenance concerns. By the latter part of the century, some residents wished to curtail larger multi-unit developments and renovations that were perceived as out of scale even in areas with historically diverse housing types. Others sought tools to protect against nuisances in the neighborhoods around the growing hill institutions. In the absence of appropriate city ordinances to address these issues, zoning laws were often looked to as a primary tool to do so, which typically resulted in "downzoning," or decreasing the intensity of allowed development.

### Zoning in the Late 20th Century

The 1973 zoning ordinance first split the city's residential areas into five individual residential zoning districts—a framework still in place today. These districts distinguished the types of homes allowed in different neighborhoods, ultimately limiting most residential areas to single-family homes and duplexes. This ordinance also introduced the concept of maximum density standards (which limit the number of homes on a lot based on the lot's size) and began to apply lot



coverage and setback standards to all development throughout an entire district. This ordinance also introduced a requirement to have at least two parking spaces per housing unit.

A major zoning update in 1994 resulted in downzoning large swaths of the city and included standards that incentivized buildings on the very low and high ends of the housing density spectrum, virtually outlawing all middle housing types in large portions of the city. Notable changes included:

- Very high minimum lot sizes of 9,900 ft<sup>2</sup>, up from 6,000 ft<sup>2</sup> for a single-family home as had been the standard for the nearly 50 year history of the city's zoning
- Prohibited duplexes in low-density districts
- Reduced the allowed densities for medium and high-density districts (including a reduction by almost half in the high-density district)
- Reduced the overall area of the city that was within the medium and high-density zoning districts, expanding the RL zone
- Introduced standards that enabled building multi-unit buildings through PUDs on lots of 2 acres or more

These changes incentivized building on the low and high ends of the housing density spectrum, leaving behind middle housing types for large portions of the city.

### Zoning in the 2000's

Subsequent zoning revisions have reintroduced some flexibility into the city's residential districts. While not as permissive of diverse housing types as the 1947 laws, Burlington's 2008 ordinance corrected some of the twentieth century's suburbanization trends. Notably, all districts now allow for at least duplexes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in addition to single-family homes.

City housing action plans from the late 2010s and early 2020s identified actions that the city would implement to address both chronic and emerging housing challenges. For nearly a decade, the city has implemented a number of changes to its zoning standards in order to support the creation of new homes. Among the most notable changes as it relates to middle housing types were updates to standards for ADUs to make them easier to create on more single-family lots citywide and the elimination of minimum on-site parking requirements citywide.

# An Analysis of Current Residential Zoning Districts

Today, the city’s neighborhoods are divided into five residential zoning districts as showcased in the map on page 25. These districts include Residential Low Density (RL), Waterfront Residential Low Density (WRL), Residential Medium Density (RM), Waterfront Residential Medium Density (WRM), and Residential High Density (RH). Specific neighborhoods in RL districts are within a special zone with more restricted development standards called the Residential Large Lot Overlay District (RL-LLO).

This section outlines some basic standards associated with the City’s existing residential zones and analyzes how well those standards reflect what is on the ground in those areas today. This assessment is meant to identify significant mismatches between current residential zoning standards and built patterns in each district and illuminate the extent to which non-conforming properties may have limited opportunity to evolve in the future.

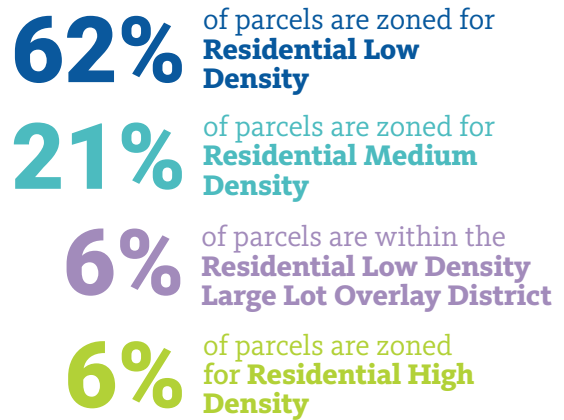
The primary focus of this analysis is on lots within residential districts<sup>13</sup> that don’t conform to today’s zoning standards. While many zoning standards can impact how homes are developed, this analysis focuses on three key standards foundational to neighborhood development patterns: minimum lot size, minimum lot width, and maximum density. Ultimately, properties are assessed based on their conformity to one or more of the standards reflected in table on page 26.

## Residential Density Limits

Density is a zoning tool that regulates the number of dwelling units allowed on a lot based on the gross size of the lot. It is often used as an indicator of or tool to control the intensity of residential development, usually in areas where more than one home is allowed on a lot. Essentially, the larger the lot, the more homes can be built. However, regulating the intensity of development through density limits is not a perfect science. It can result in a mismatch between what is allowed to be built and the residential patterns that may exist within a specific neighborhood’s fabric, particularly in neighborhoods where small lots are the norm.

Burlington has been regulating density in its zoning ordinance since 1973. Some long-established neighborhoods fail to meet the density limits in today’s ordinance despite other nearby residential structures appearing to be similar in form and patterns—an explicit purpose of the residential zoning districts themselves. For example, below are four similar residential structures in the Old North End that appear identical yet differ in their conformity to existing density standards. While the buildings themselves, all of which appear to be single-family homes that have been converted to duplexes, are nearly identical in their overall scale, the size of the underlying lot these homes are on creates a wild variation in the resulting density and whether they are considered to be “legal.”

## Burlington’s Residential Parcels by the Numbers



**15** units per acre  
2 units

*Permitted to be built in RM and RH districts*



**80** units per acre  
2 units

*Not currently permitted in any residential districts*



**53** units per acre  
2 units

*Not currently permitted in any residential districts*



**10** units per acre  
4 units

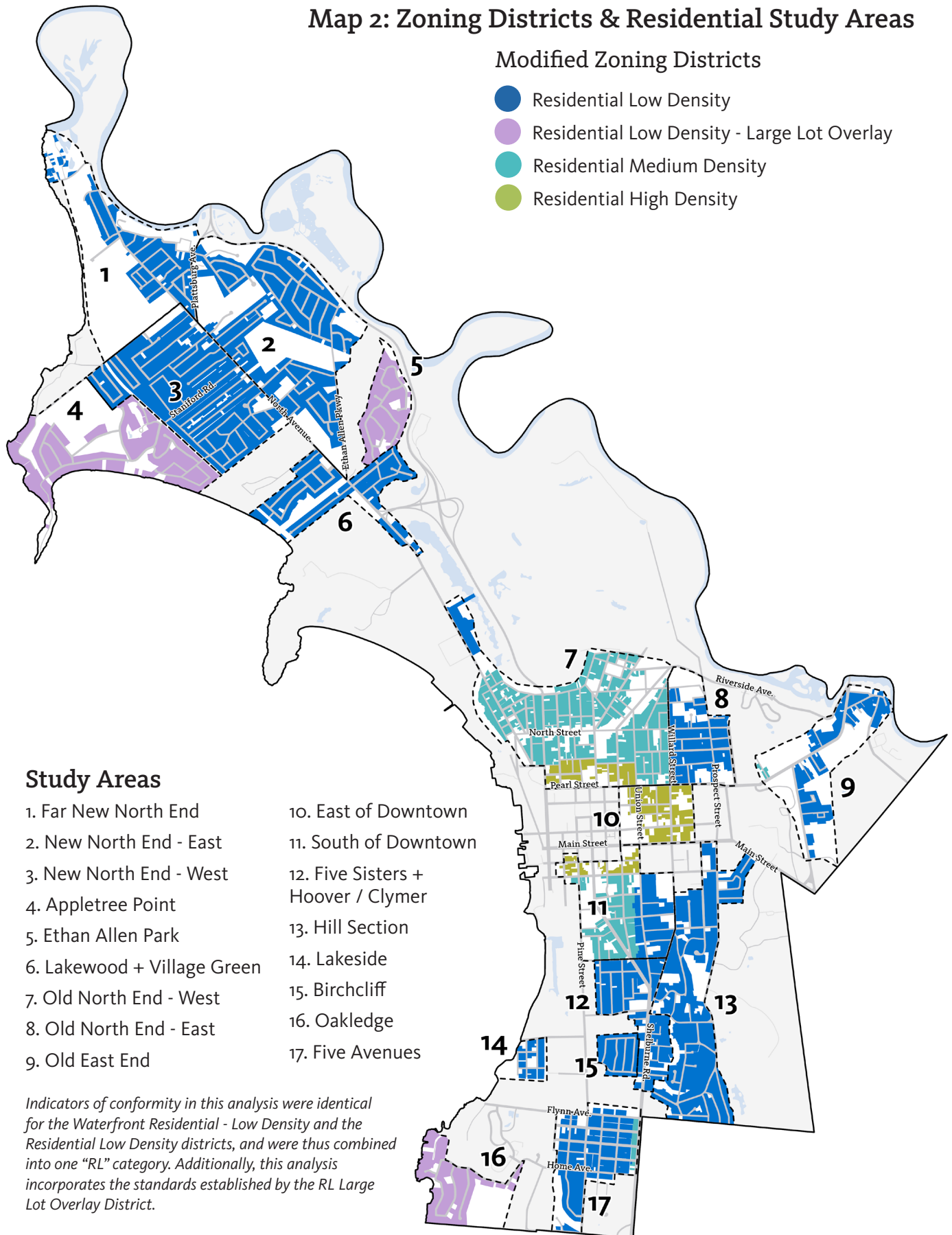
*Permitted to be built in RM and RH districts*



## Map 2: Zoning Districts & Residential Study Areas

### Modified Zoning Districts

- Residential Low Density
- Residential Low Density - Large Lot Overlay
- Residential Medium Density
- Residential High Density



### Study Areas

- |                             |                                    |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Far New North End        | 10. East of Downtown               |
| 2. New North End - East     | 11. South of Downtown              |
| 3. New North End - West     | 12. Five Sisters + Hoover / Clymer |
| 4. Appletree Point          | 13. Hill Section                   |
| 5. Ethan Allen Park         | 14. Lakeside                       |
| 6. Lakewood + Village Green | 15. Birchcliff                     |
| 7. Old North End - West     | 16. Oakledge                       |
| 8. Old North End - East     | 17. Five Avenues                   |
| 9. Old East End             |                                    |

*Indicators of conformity in this analysis were identical for the Waterfront Residential - Low Density and the Residential Low Density districts, and were thus combined into one "RL" category. Additionally, this analysis incorporates the standards established by the RL Large Lot Overlay District.*

## Base Dimensional Standards for Residential Zones

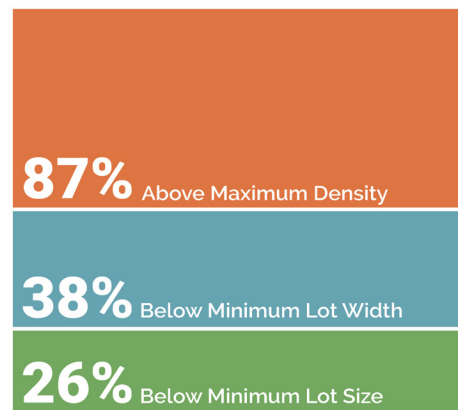
	Minimum Lot Size	Minimum Lot Width	Maximum Density
<b>Residential Low Density</b>			
Single detached dwelling	6,000 ft <sup>2</sup>	60 ft	7 units per acre
Duplex	10,000 ft <sup>2</sup>	60 ft	7 units per acre
<b>Residential Low Density - Large Lot Overlay District</b>			
Single detached dwelling	9,900 ft <sup>2</sup>	75 ft	4.4 units per acre
Duplex	15,840 ft <sup>2</sup>	100 ft	5.5 units per acre
<b>Residential Medium Density</b>			
Single detached dwelling	n/a	30 ft	20 units per acre
Duplex and above			
<b>Residential High Density</b>			
Multi-Family dwellings	n/a	n/a	40 units per acre

### Dimensional Standards: Minimum Lot Size & Minimum Lot Width

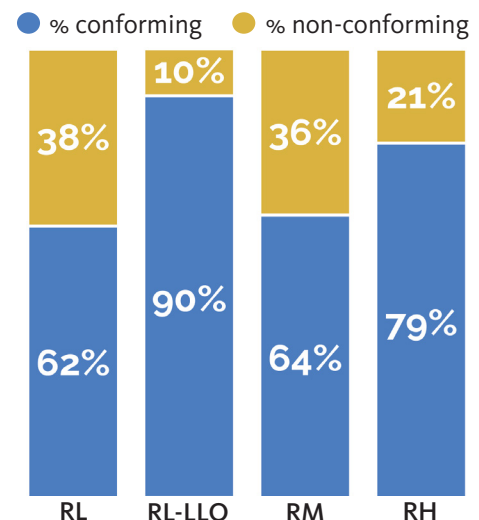
One foundational dimensional standard that regulates development in residential districts is minimum lot size. This standard drives the size of individual lots when land is subdivided and can be used to control the number of homes built on a lot in some districts. This is often used as a tool for regulating the pattern of neighborhoods—small, dense lots with buildings set close together or larger lots with more room between buildings. When used in conjunction with density limits, this can also significantly impact how many homes are allowed on a lot. For example, in the districts zoned for Residential Low Density, while a single-family home is permitted on a lot as small as 6,000 ft<sup>2</sup>, a duplex is only permitted on lots of at least 10,000 ft<sup>2</sup> (or nearly a quarter of an acre). While the median lot size in residential districts in Burlington is just below 8,000 ft<sup>2</sup>, lot sizes range across the city from as small as 1,000 ft<sup>2</sup> or less to as large as 4 acres or more.

Lot width, sometimes referred to as lot frontage, refers to the dimension of a lot along a public street. Like lot size, these standards aim to ensure that a proposed development is consistent with existing neighborhood patterns. Although some zoning standards have changed significantly over time, standards for lot width residential development have remained relatively consistent. However, areas within the Large Lot Overlay district have much larger frontage requirements, resulting in a much greater distance between the respective single-family structures. While this is largely a tool for regulating the pattern of a neighborhood, in some cases, it can also preclude creative options for enabling middle housing types in existing neighborhoods.

### Percent of Residential Parcels Not Conforming to Specific Indicators

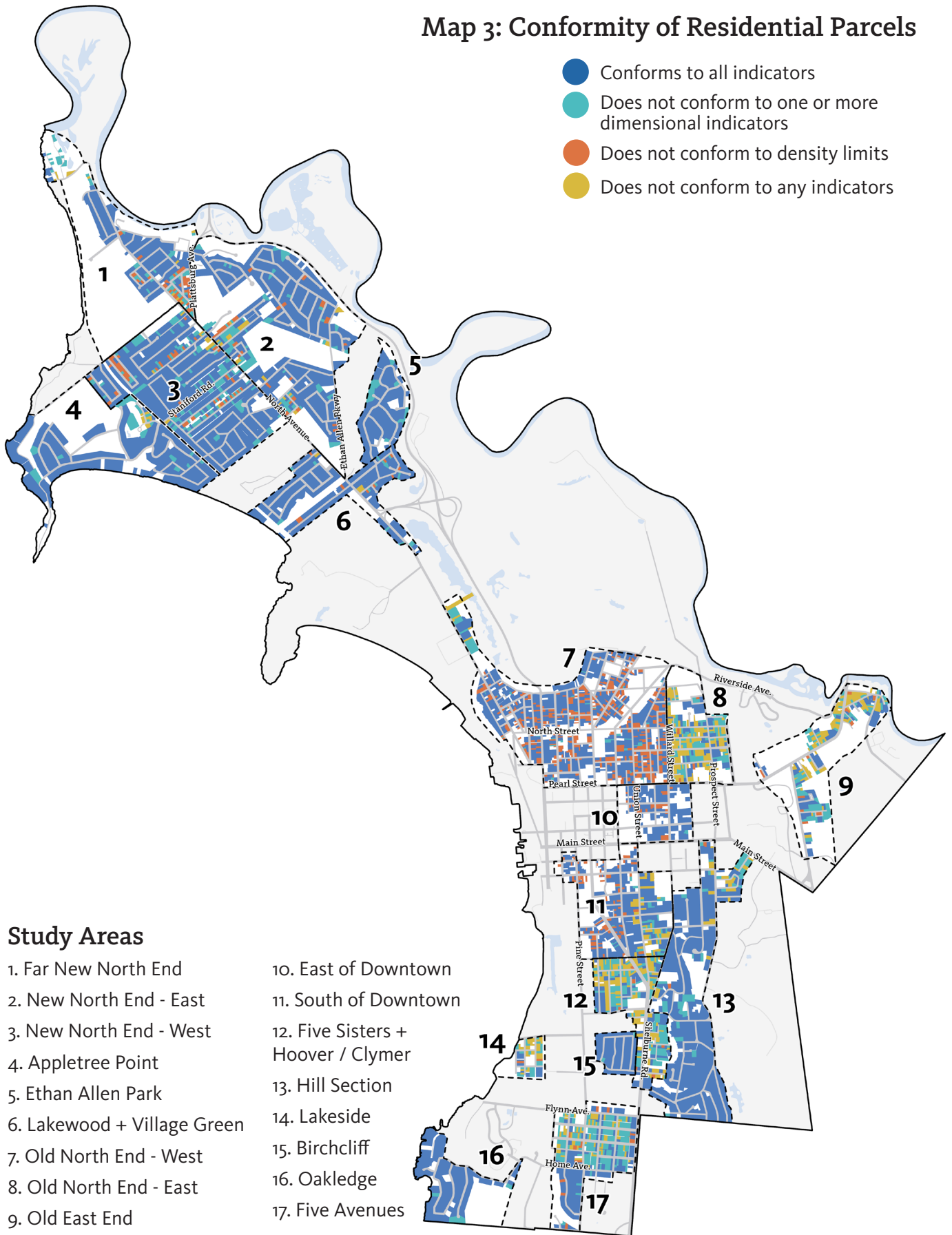


### Percent of Conforming Residential Parcels by Zoning District



### Map 3: Conformity of Residential Parcels

- Conforms to all indicators
- Does not conform to one or more dimensional indicators
- Does not conform to density limits
- Does not conform to any indicators



#### Study Areas

- |                             |                                    |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
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| 9. Old East End             |                                    |



*The above images showcase the range of housing types found in the Residential - Low Density zoning district.*

## RL – Residential Low Density

65% of Burlington’s residentially zoned parcels are in areas zoned Residential Low Density (RL). The RL district is intended primarily for residential development through single detached dwellings and duplexes. This district is typically characterized by cohesive residential development patterns with lots of varying sizes and buildings in a range of sizes and styles reflecting each neighborhood’s history. Each neighborhood’s development era has a significant influence on the level of non-conformity. Of these low-density residential parcels, 38% of parcels across the district do not conform to the current dimensional and density standards, where nearly 80% of parcels located in the New North End neighborhoods conform to all three indicators of conformity. This is primarily due to the New North End’s development in the decades following the adoption of the first zoning ordinance with minimum lot size and width standards very similar to those in place today.

In contrast, RL-zoned neighborhoods south of downtown have high rates of non-conformity, particularly in Five Sisters + Hoover/Clymer and Five Avenues, where 80% and 62% of properties, respectively, are non-conforming. Though close in distance to one another, Five Sisters is largely non-conforming in both dimensional and density measures while Five Avenues conforms more to density measures. These differences are primarily due to the development trends—Five Sisters grew when the nearby streetcar was heavily

used between 1920 and 1930 and Five Avenues was developed in the following decades as the personal automobile became more popular.

Both the eastern half of the Old North End as well as the Old East End neighborhoods see high rates of non-conformity due to a combination of density and dimensional standards. These areas were primarily developed at the same time as the western half of the Old North End, but later zoning changes began to apply different standards on the east and west of Willard Street. The 1973 ordinances first differentiated density limits by area, allowing Medium Density on the east side of Willard St. and High-Density on the west side. Both neighborhoods were again re-zoned in 1994, resulting in these areas changing to Low Density and Medium Density, respectively. These changes to zoning standards, nearly a century after the neighborhoods were built and after they have undergone many decades of change, are the primary reason the development is inconsistent with any of the RL standards used in this analysis.

## Large Lot Overlay

The RL Large Lot Overlay District (RL-LLO) is intended to maintain a development pattern of larger residential lots than in the rest of the RL zone, primarily in neighborhoods near the waterfront and Ethan Allen Park. This zone maintains standards similar to ones in place for the entire RL zone in the mid-1990s, despite other areas of RL becoming more flexible again in the last 2000s. Just 6% of residentially-zoned parcels are located in the RL-LLO, representing just over 3% of the city’s land area. The median lot size of these parcels is 18,150 ft<sup>2</sup>, which is over twice as large as the city’s median of 7,863 ft<sup>2</sup>. 67% of these lots are greater than the required minimum lot size of 15,840 ft<sup>2</sup> for a duplex, and thus at least have the capacity for another unit from a lot size perspective.



*Example of a house in the Large Lot Overlay district.  
Image Source: Google Earth*



*Examples of residences found in Burlington's Residential - Medium Density zoning district.*

## RM – Residential Medium Density

The Residential Medium Density (RM) district is intended primarily for single-family detached dwellings and attached multi-family apartments. This district primarily applies to the western Old North End and South of Downtown. While the district applies to just 5% of the city's total land area, it includes nearly 21% of residentially-zoned parcels that accommodate 16% of the city's total dwelling units.

This district does not require a minimum lot size and lots are permitted to be narrower. The minimum lot width of 30 feet is half that of the RL zone. Despite these relatively flexible standards, only 64% of parcels zoned RM are conforming, largely due to many exceeding the required 20 dwelling units per acre density limit. The majority of the parcels within the current RM district were originally built towards the end of the 19th century; however, the district boundaries have changed throughout the latter half of the 20th century, with both the maximum density in RM decreasing over time, as well as areas that are zoned RM today having originally been in the RH district.

## RH – Residential High Density

The Residential High Density (RH) district is intended primarily for attached multi-family buildings. Development is intended to be intense, with high lot coverage, larger buildings, and buildings placed close together. The RH zone is included in this assessment as it is one of the city's residential zoning districts; however, it applies to relatively few residentially-zoned parcels, has fewer applicable zoning standards, and the majority of the barriers identified in the "Limits to more neighborhood-scale housing in BTV" section of this report are not applicable in this district.

Just 2% of the city's land area is in the RH district, but about two-thirds of properties feature the scale of middle housing that the Neighborhood Code is focused on. These properties account for 7% of the city's total housing units, demonstrating that middle housing types can have a meaningful impact in terms of providing homes throughout the city. The RH contains some of the city's oldest housing stock, with nearly all having been originally built before the city's first zoning code was adopted. The only standard in this analysis that applies to the RH parcels is the maximum density requirement of 40 units per acre, to which 20% of parcels do not conform.

*Examples of residences found in Burlington's Residential - High Density zoning district.*



# Burlington’s Residential Lot Typologies

The city’s neighborhoods have unique patterns—in terms of the size, scale, and pattern of buildings, where buildings are located on lots and the mixture of housing types. Neighborhoods’ identities are further defined by details such as the era in which they were built and architectural styles and landscapes.

The Neighborhood Code aims to identify more context-sensitive zoning tools and a range of neighborhood-scale housing types that could be appropriate for various parts of the city. To do so, this section focuses on the basic building blocks that define neighborhood patterns—the physical characteristics like lot sizes, how far homes are set back from the street, how much of a lot is occupied by buildings and other impervious surfaces, overall building height, and how many homes are on a lot. This analysis aims to describe a more holistic picture of how these basic characteristics can be found across the city. Some neighborhoods share similar patterns due to the time period in which they were developed or due to the zoning standards that were in place to guide new development, while others feature a mix of typologies. In some cases, these characteristics reflect buildings as they were created, while others have evolved due to changing laws and renovations to original properties.

This analysis focused on properties in residential zoning districts with between one and four units today. Ultimately, 14 residential lot typologies have been identified that represent 82% of the lots in residential zoning districts.

## Small Lot Typologies

In this analysis, lots are considered to be small if they are below 6,000 ft<sup>2</sup>. The five different Small Lot typologies identified represent just over 20% of the residential parcels. Many of these lots were developed before Burlington adopted zoning and were built towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. Despite being in lively, walkable neighborhoods, these residential typologies are largely non-conforming to current zoning standards due to their small lot sizes<sup>14</sup> and subsequent high density – with these typologies having median densities ranging from 9 to 27 dwelling units per acre. Of these five Small Lot typologies, the most common types have lot widths of less than 60ft, and buildings on the lots are typically two story structures located less than 10 feet from the public right of way.

The *Narrow Lot, Medium Coverage* typology is the most frequently occurring small lot typology. In addition to being found in the Old North End and areas surrounding downtown, this lot typology is also found in the Lakeside, Old East End, and the Five Sisters + Hoover/Clymer neighborhoods. Most of these typologies were built in the early 1900’s, before the adoption and consistent enforcement of the city’s first zoning ordinance, and typically feature single-family residences.

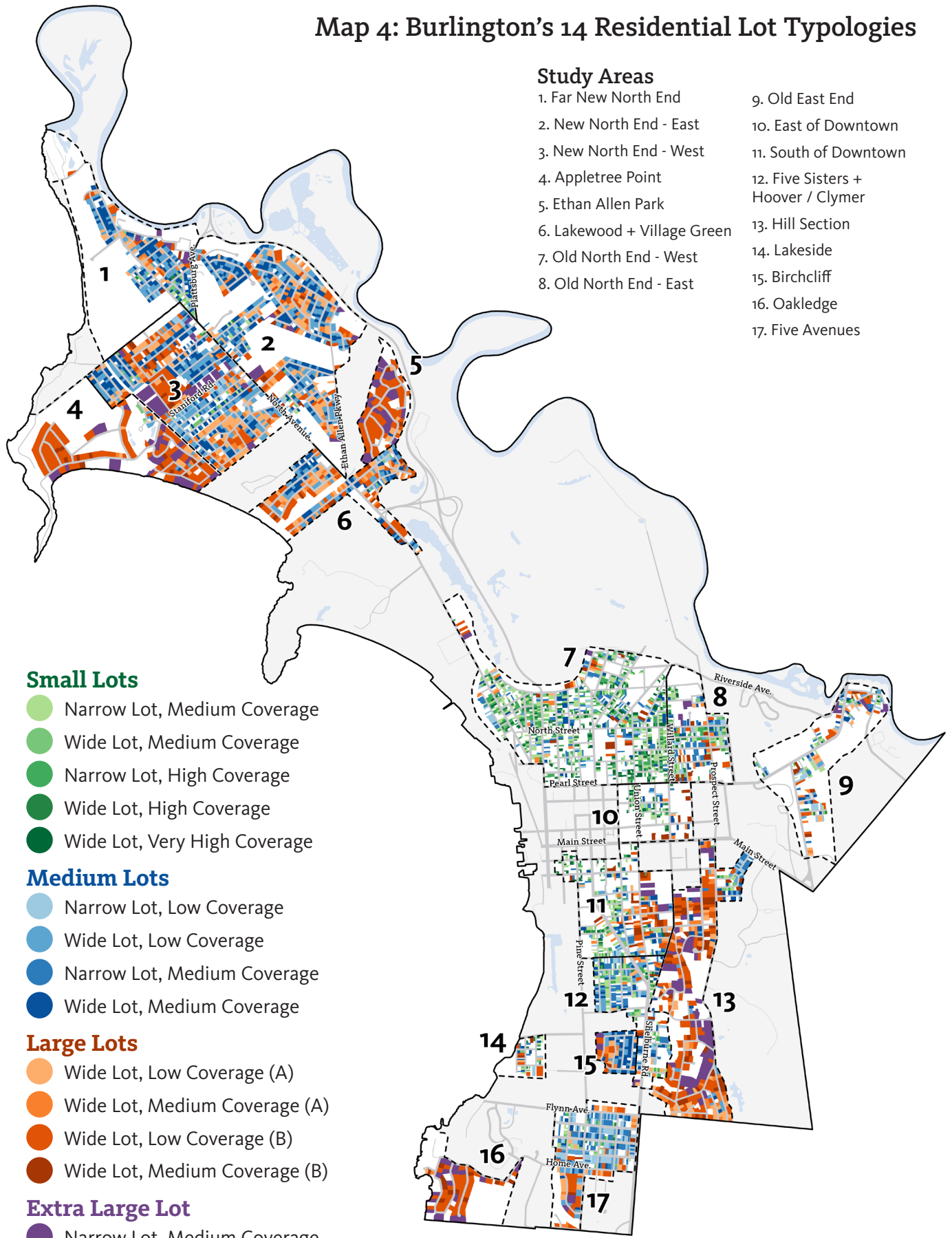
The second most common Small Lot typology is *Narrow Lot, High Coverage*. These parcels have a median lot coverage of 70%, and are located both south and east of downtown as well as throughout the Old North End, and are typically multi-unit structures. Built between the late 1800s and early 1900s, these typologies came into existence before both the adoption of the 1947 zoning ordinance and the popularization of the car.

Lot Size		Lot Coverage		Lot Width	
Small Lots	< 6,000 ft <sup>2</sup>	Low Coverage	< 35%	Narrow	30 - 60 feet
Medium Lots	6,000 ft <sup>2</sup> - 10,000 ft <sup>2</sup>	Medium Coverage	35% - 60%	Wide	> 60 feet
Large Lots (A)	10,000 ft <sup>2</sup> - 12,500 ft <sup>2</sup>	High Coverage	60% - 80%		
Large Lots (B)	12,500 ft <sup>2</sup> - 21,780 ft <sup>2</sup>	Very High Coverage	> 80%		
Extra Large Lots	21,780 ft <sup>2</sup> - 43,560 ft <sup>2</sup>				

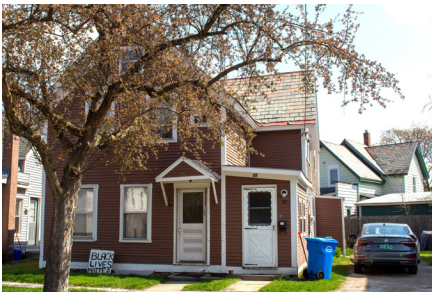
### Determining Residential Lot Characteristics

This table explains what characteristics were used to determine the lot typologies, and how those characteristics were categorized.

# Map 4: Burlington's 14 Residential Lot Typologies



Small Lot



Medium Lot



Large Lot



Extra-Large Lot



## Medium Lot Typologies

The four Median Lot typologies identified make up just over 30% of the city’s residentially zoned parcels, and are some of the city’s most common typologies. Typically featuring single-family homes, many of these lots were developed between 1950 and 1980 when national housing development trends and local zoning standards made this type prolific. The two most common Medium Lot typologies are the *Wide Lot, Medium Coverage* and the *Wide Lot, Low Coverage*, which together make up 25% of the city’s residentially zoned parcels. These two typologies are very similar, with the primary difference being the lot coverage. These two typologies are both set back between 15 – 20 feet from the public right of way, are more than 60ft wide, and are found throughout the New North End, Lakewood + Village Green, Birchcliff, Lakeside, and Five Avenues neighborhoods.

The two less common Medium Lot Size typologies are the *Narrow Lot, Low Coverage* and the *Narrow Lot, Medium Coverage*. These typologies are 30 – 60 ft wide, and together make up almost 10% of the city’s residentially zoned parcels. The majority of the *Narrow Lot, Low Coverage* parcels were built prior to the adoption of the city’s 1947 Ordinance, and are found primarily in the Five Avenues neighborhood. Structures are typically set back 10 – 15 ft from the public right of way, and have a median lot coverage of 27%. Though similar to the *Narrow Lot, Low Coverage*, the *Narrow Lot, Medium Coverage* typology has a much higher lot coverage (43%), and is located in the Five Sisters + Hoover/Clymer, Old North End – East, and South of Downtown neighborhoods as well as Five Avenues.

## Large Lot Typologies

There are two different categories of Large Lot Typologies. Parcels fall into the Large Lot – A typology if they are between 10,000ft<sup>2</sup> and 12,500ft<sup>2</sup>, while parcels between 12,500ft<sup>2</sup> and 21,780ft<sup>2</sup> are considered to be Large Lot – B<sup>15</sup>.

Large Lot – A parcels are not only smaller than Large Lot – B, but they are also narrower, and structures are typically 15 – 20

feet from the right of way. Large Lot – A parcels make up just under 10% of all residentially zoned parcels, and are primarily found in the Lakewood + Village Green, New North End – West, New North End – East, and Hill Section neighborhoods.

Large Lot – B parcels make up 13% of the residentially zoned parcels, are 20 – 25 ft from the public right of way, and have median lot widths of 100 ft. *Wide Lot, Low Coverage* is the most commonly occurring of the four Large Lot typologies and can be found in the Appletree Point, Hill Section, Lakeside, Lakewood + Village Green, Oakledge, and Van Patten neighborhoods.

## Extra Large Lot Typology

There is one typology that falls under the Extra Large Lot category, with parcel sizes between one half to a full acre. Buildings on these lots typically feature colonial revival or ranch styles built during the latter half of the twentieth century, and are set back from the public right of way between 30 to 40 feet. This typology has the largest lot size in the city. Parcels are greater than 60ft wide, have a lot coverage below 35%, and buildings are typically set back 30 – 35 feet from the public right of way. The neighborhoods that this typology can be most commonly found in are the Appletree Point, Hill Section, Oakledge, and Van Patten neighborhoods.



## Burlington's 14 Residential Lot Typologies

	Typology	Median Features of Lots					Illustrative Diagram
Small Lots	Narrow Lot, Medium Coverage	<b>8%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1910</b> Year Built	<b>12</b> du/acre	<b>4,808</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>45</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Wide Lot, Medium Coverage	<b>3%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1925</b> Year Built	<b>9</b> du/acre	<b>5,311</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>102</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Narrow Lot, High Coverage	<b>6%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1905</b> Year Built	<b>17</b> du/acre	<b>4,021</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>45</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Wide Lot, High Coverage	<b>2%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1910</b> Year Built	<b>19</b> du/acre	<b>4,486</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>119</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Narrow Lot, Very High Coverage	<b>4%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1899</b> Year Built	<b>27</b> du/acre	<b>3,512</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>41</b> Lot Width (ft)	
Medium Lots	Narrow Lot, Low Coverage	<b>4%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1932</b> Year Built	<b>6</b> du/acre	<b>7,731</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>50</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Wide Lot, Low Coverage	<b>12%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1955</b> Year Built	<b>5</b> du/acre	<b>8,516</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>72</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Narrow Lot, Medium Coverage	<b>5%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1922</b> Year Built	<b>7</b> du/acre	<b>7,216</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>50</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Wide Lot, Medium Coverage	<b>13%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1956</b> Year Built	<b>6</b> du/acre	<b>7,933</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>73</b> Lot Width (ft)	
Large Lots	Wide Lot, Low Coverage (A)	<b>6%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1957</b> Year Built	<b>4</b> du/acre	<b>11,089</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>80</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Wide Lot, Medium Coverage (A)	<b>3%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1953</b> Year Built	<b>4</b> du/acre	<b>11,021</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>83</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Wide Lot, Low Coverage (B)	<b>10%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1961</b> Year Built	<b>3</b> du/acre	<b>15,513</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>100</b> Lot Width (ft)	
	Wide Lot, Medium Coverage (B)	<b>3%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1950</b> Year Built	<b>3</b> du/acre	<b>14,824</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>100</b> Lot Width (ft)	
XL Lots	Wide Lot, Low Coverage	<b>3%</b> % of Parcels	<b>1959</b> Year Built	<b>2</b> du/acre	<b>26,115</b> Lot Size (ft <sup>2</sup> )	<b>109</b> Lot Width (ft)	

## Endnotes & Citations

1. Opticos design has coined the term “missing middle” to refer to the middle range of buildings that were once created in many walkable neighborhoods, but have since been outlawed.
2. The 1994 ordinance also allowed for multi-unit developments on lots larger than two acres. This provision enabled the creation of large condo and apartment developments on the far ends of the city. However, the vast majority of residential lots were limited to single-family developments.
3. Non-conformity refers to a situation in which an existing land use or building does not meet (i.e. conform) to one or more provisions of current zoning laws.
4. These districts include Residential Low Density (RL), Waterfront Residential Low Density (WRL), Residential Medium Density (RM), Waterfront Residential Medium Density (WRM), and Residential High Density (RH). A Large Lot Overlay zone applies to portions of each the RL and WRL zones. The lowest density districts refer to RL and WRL.
5. Based on land use categories at the parcel level in the City Assessor’s data. While the “Exempt” use category applies to a similar proportion of land area, this includes a mix of educational, government, medical, open space, and other land uses which are categorized as tax-exempt due to land ownership. Single-family residential uses are the largest category by land area for a single use type.
6. The Neighborhood Code is focused on housing types between single-family homes and mid-size apartment buildings. Unless otherwise noted, the term “residential lots” refers to properties that are located within the city’s residential zoning districts, and are listed by the Assessor’s Office as R-1, R-2, R-3, R-4, RA, or RC. These use types are proxies for single family, duplex, triplex, fourplex and small apartments. This analysis does not include residential condos or commercial apartments of 5 units or more, as many appear in larger, multi-unit developments that are outside the scope of this project.
7. See #6
8. Glenn M. Andres and Curtis B. Johnson, “Lakeside”, [Burlington, Vermont], SAH Archipedia, eds. Gabrielle Esperdy and Karen Kingsley, Charlottesville: UVaP, 2012—, <http://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/VT-01-CH38>.
9. The trend of suburbanization in the United States refers to the mass migration from urban to suburban areas following World War II and subsequent reliance on automobiles. This trend was a result of the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration home loan programs that funded single-family home suburban construction, as well as the simultaneous creation of a 41,000-mile interstate highway program. Source: Duany, Andres., et al. *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*. New York, North Point Press, 2000. pp. 7 – 8.
10. The practice of redlining—categorizing neighborhoods based on their relative lending risk—was developed by the FHA in the 1930’s to provide underwriting criteria for federally-backed mortgages. De jure segregation refers to “segregation by law and public policy”. Source: Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. First edition. New York ; London, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2017. pp. 48.
11. Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. First edition. New York; London, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2017. pp. 53.
12. Urban Renewal, a term that refers to the federally subsidized redevelopment of postwar American cities, was a national movement that aimed to address issues related to overcrowding within urban areas in an effort to make cities more appealing to the growing number of suburban residents. Source: Digital Scholarship Lab, “Renewing Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/renewal/#view=0/0/1&viz=cartogram>.  
  
This program enabled local municipalities to demolish “blighted” tracts of land, ultimately demolishing low-income, non-white neighborhoods in cities across the country at a disproportionate and alarming rate to make room for highways, commercial spaces, and industrial development. Burlington was no exception to Urban Renewal, razing 27-acres of the city’s downtown core by 1968. This area included Burlington’s “Little Italy” neighborhood, which was home to working-class residents for nearly a century (“Looking Back, Looking Forward”, *CityPlace Burlington*) and included an estimated 157 homes and 47 small businesses (“CCRPC 50-Year Timeline”).
13. See #4
14. While each zoning district has a minimum lot size, Section 5.2.1 of the Burlington CDO enables lots that were existing in 1973 that are at least 4,000 ft<sup>2</sup> and has minimum dimensions of 40 feet to be developed. Development on these lots must conform to other standards of the district they are in, in which case, many would be limited to building a single family home.
15. Large Lot A reflects lots that are between 10,000 ft<sup>2</sup>, which is the minimum lot size for a duplex in RL and RL-W, and 12,500 ft<sup>2</sup>, which is the approximate size lot one would actually need to have a duplex per density limits in those zones. Large Lot – B includes lots above this size up to a half acre.



For more information about the BTV Neighborhood Code, visit the Office of City Planning's website:  
[www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityPlanning/NeighborhoodCode](http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CityPlanning/NeighborhoodCode)

