

## X. EDUCATION PLAN

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### Vision Statement

*This Plan envisions Burlington as a city where...*

*...Burlington's schools, in partnership with residents and the community, educate and inspire students to influence and shape the future. The City's educational system prepares our youth to contribute to society and their community, trains them in the skills necessary to be successful in the workforce. All residents have opportunities to develop the skills for a lifelong commitment to learning. The abundance and diversity of educational opportunities serve to enhance the City's competitive advantage as an attractive place to both live and work. Examples include a commitment to early childhood education and neighborhood schools at the elementary level, high quality secondary and vocational education, and college-level opportunities ranging from a state-of-the-art university to small community colleges. Burlington's educational facilities are made available as a community resource and serve as neighborhood centers.*

### CITY POLICIES

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#### THE CITY OF BURLINGTON WILL...

- **Ensure excellent and diverse educational opportunities, services and facilities in order to facilitate a tradition of lifelong learning by Burlington residents, and support and encourage efforts by parents to be involved in their children's education.**
- **Support and maintain the use of neighborhood schools where children live in close proximity to their school, and schools serve a wide range of community and neighborhood functions.**
- **Ensure safe access to school facilities, and encourage walking, biking, and public transit to get to school.**
- **Use school facilities efficiently so that buildings and play fields serve multiple functions.**
- **Be responsible stewards of its educational facilities so that they continue to serve current and future generations.**
- **Provide educational opportunities and schedules that reflect residents' needs and provide flexibility in meeting future needs.**

## INTRODUCTION

In David Soucher's book *City Comforts*<sup>1</sup>, he characterizes children as an "indicator species for successful communities." If our communities are attractive to families with children, then they are more likely to be sustainable over time. This section discusses educational facilities and services offered within the City of Burlington, and focuses primarily Burlington's public school system and its facilities.

Burlington's schools, and the education of our residents, are essential components to the future health and vitality of the city. Not only do they improve our ability as a community to compete in the economic marketplace, but education helps us to better understand and appreciate differences in cultures, artistic expression, and responsibilities as citizens.

## Offering Diverse Educational Opportunities

Burlington's public school system maintains six elementary schools, two middle schools, one alternative school, an area Technical Center, Burlington High School, an administrative building, and a maintenance facility. In addition to public schools, Burlington is home to a wide range of private and alternative schools including three catholic elementary schools (St. Joseph's, Mater Christi and Christ the King), the Rock Point School, the Schoolhouse, YouthBuild, and the Richard Milburn High School.

Burlington residents also are afforded a wide range of pre-school and post-secondary educational opportunities making lifelong learning an available option for many. Examples of some of the post-secondary schools in the city include the University of Vermont, Champlain College, Adult Basic Education, Community College of Vermont, Burlington College, VT College of Cosmetology, and the New England Culinary Institute.



Champlain College

Burlington is committed to offering a wide range of educational opportunities that can serve the diverse needs of our residents, and instill a commitment to lifelong learning.

## SAFE ACCESS TO SCHOOLS

Whether it is public or private, elementary or post-secondary, schools are places where there are very high concentrations of pedestrians. Areas around elementary and middle schools have become increasingly congested with traffic from parents transporting children to and from school. This creates a cycle of dependence on motor vehicles to transport children as parents' concern for their children's safety grows along with more traffic and congestion. Areas of particular concern are the three schools in the New North End – Flynn, Smith, and Hunt.

<sup>1</sup> Soucher, David; *City Comforts: How to Build an Urban Village*; City Comforts Press, Seattle, 1995.

As a community, we have a responsibility to provide safe access to our schools. This includes providing sidewalks, mid-block crossings, bike paths, and trails that offer students an alternative to walking on the street. On a limited basis, Burlington Schools use CCTA buses to transport kids to school – primarily for middle school students. All are intended to minimize vehicular trips. The City will continue to provide these facilities and amenities to the greatest extent possible. (see also the *Transportation System Plan*)

### Schools are a Community Asset

Burlington's educational facilities are more than schools, but are an important community asset - each providing a focal point and meeting place within the city's neighborhoods. The City encourages a land use pattern where residential areas are within walking distance of neighborhood services. Schools are an essential element within a neighborhood. They serve to establish connections between families, and are focal points for neighborhood

interactions and communication. This communication and familiarity between people is one of the essential bonds that creates and maintains what we call "communities."

Schools should be located in close proximity to other community services and higher density residential areas, and on public transit routes, to facilitate access without the need for a car. The best locations include neighborhood activity centers that are intended for concentrating neighborhood-oriented services.

School buildings provide meeting spaces for community groups and other city programs. Recent renovations to both Barnes and Wheeler Schools have included the creation of community rooms to meet the needs of community groups for additional meeting space. In addition, Wheeler also provides space for other community service providers to improve their delivery of service to families with children living in the heart of the Old North End Enterprise Community.



H.O. Wheeler School



Edmunds Middle School

School playgrounds also serve as neighborhood recreation areas. The Burlington Parks & Recreation Department makes significant year-round use of school facilities in providing a wide variety of after-school, evening and summer activities for youths and adults. School property use by Parks & Recreation, as well as other community groups, continues to grow and points to the indispensable role that schools play in the life

of the city. Schools must continue to serve multiple functions in the future. The current demand for use of school facilities by Parks & Recreation cannot always be satisfied however. This situation is expected to continue unless significant indoor recreation space can be provided elsewhere in the community.

Moreover, as demographics and technologies change, our school system will have to meet new needs and patterns. For example, schools that are closed all summer and kindergartens that operate less than half days create schedule conflicts for working and single parents, and may not be the most efficient way of utilizing these facilities. As telecommunications and technology improves, opportunities to take advantage of distance learning programs will become more affordable and available throughout the city.

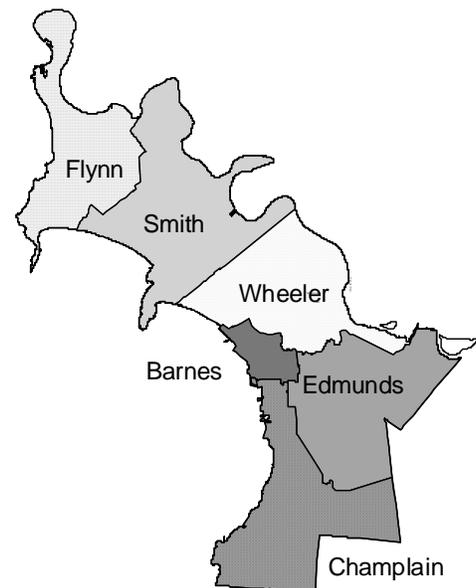
The opportunity for neighborhood interactions in and around schools should be expanded and should include all residents - especially seniors, and all types of schools. To the extent practicable, all schools in Burlington should open their doors to their neighborhoods by offering use of special programs, meeting space and recreational facilities. They also must be active and meaningful partners in community problem-solving and decision-making initiatives.

### Public Educational Facilities

The Burlington School District is the largest public school district in the state with a total enrollment of over 3,600 students in 2005. It is also likely to be the poorest and the most culturally diverse school system in the state as well. Nearly 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced meal programs, and 14% of the students speak English as a second language with over 28 different languages spoken at home. While the challenges are great, the opportunities and rewards are even greater.

The Burlington School District is divided into six neighborhood school districts for the purposes of distributing school enrollment among the City's elementary schools. These neighborhood schools are at the foundation of efforts to create a "learning community." They provide a place to build upon educational and community goals in close proximity to where people live.

These districts are then combined into two middle school districts (Hunt – Flynn, Smith and Wheeler, and Edmunds – Barnes, Edmunds and Champlain), and finally one high school district.



**FACILITIES PLANNING**

Transforming Burlington into a “Learning Community” was the focus of a School Board and Department long-range strategic planning process in 1995. This process involved over eight hundred individuals during the 1994/1995 school year, and resulted in the development of nine strategic planning goals.

One of these goals, “to develop a funding plan for consistent, long range financial stability,” included a review of all current educational facilities to ascertain their needs for capital improvements and required work necessary for complete compliance with the Americans with Disabilities (ADA), as well as outline their potential use. The result of this process provides an important blueprint for furthering the city’s educational goals, identifying opportunities for sharing resources, and improving the efficiency of existing facilities.

We must provide adequate facilities in response to growth and demographic changes, and make the more efficient use of public school buildings and grounds. In 2005, Burlington voters supported maintaining neighborhood schools when faced with the possible closure of Lawrence Barnes School. The City must also be a responsible steward of its public facilities, and its historic buildings in particular. Wheeler and Edmunds schools, and the former Thayer School, are important historic buildings. Each require ongoing maintenance in order to prevent deterioration, and Edmunds in particular is in need of significant rehabilitation including the repair and replacement of many of its windows. Another need identified in the community is for outdoor playfield space for use by the Edmunds Middle School. While the school property is too small to accommodate league-regulated fields, cooperation and collaboration with nearby Parks and Recreation facilities are encouraged. Meeting the needs of city schools should be a priority over making facilities available to non-city groups.

<b>School Property and Outdoor Playing Fields</b>			
<u>School</u>	<u>Total Acreage</u>	<u>Square Feet</u>	<u>#Playgrounds/Fields</u>
Admin & Maint.	17.74	57,191	
<u>Elementary Schools</u>			
Champlain	9.7	61,776	3
Edmunds	6.5	23,770	1
Barnes	3	28,800	3
Wheeler	2	39,080	1
Flynn	10	40,152	3
Smith	14	30,900	8
<u>Middle Schools</u>			
Edmunds M.S.	(inc. w/ elem Sch.)	65,647	(inc. w/ elem Sch.)
Hunt M.S.	20.6	76,282	4

		<u>High School</u>	
Burlington H.S.	44	236,169	7
<u>Total</u>	127.54	659,794	30

*Source: Burlington School Department, Burlington Dept. of Parks & Recreation. 1995*

**PROJECTING NUMBERS**

The School Department utilizes state estimates of the city’s population from the VT Department of Health, and population-forecasting information provided by an area demographer in order to project future enrollments. Population-based projections however, typically do not include housing data - growth in housing stock, changes in family size and household characteristics.

Major demographic changes have occurred over the past several years that may greatly influence future enrollments. These include a 50-year decline in the average family size - which many experts believe has stabilized at 2.2 people per household. This is due in part to more single-parent families and fewer numbers of children per family. Another important factor is the aging of the population and the “graying” of some of the city’s largest neighborhoods. This is particularly true in the New North End. As these neighborhoods gradually transform back into family neighborhoods with children, there will be a continued impact on school enrollments - most likely one that shifts capacity needs between neighborhoods rather than an increase in total system growth.

The School District also needs to play an active role in the City’s planning and development review process by offering information and recommendations regarding proposed development in the city and its possible impact on current and future educational facilities. This will be especially important as the City considers the possibilities, barriers, and impacts of significant population growth over the next three decades.

**LONG-RANGE FINANCIAL STABILITY**

One of the priorities identified in the School Department’s Strategic Planning Process was “to develop a funding plan for consistent, long range financial stability.” Recent events at the local, state and federal levels have drastically transformed the financial landscape for publicly funded schools. No longer are traditional programmatic funding sources available at the same levels - and in some cases at all. In addition, local property taxpayers are overly burdened and increasingly less likely to make-up the difference.

**Education Action Plan**

<b>Action Item</b>	<b>Lead Agency</b>	<b>Secondary Agencies</b>
<b><u>Immediate Term</u></b>		
Identify stable funding mechanisms to support school infrastructure needs.	Schools	
<b><u>Mid Term</u></b>		
Estimate future school enrollments based on a combination of population, land use, and housing projections.	Schools	
Encourage community services and senior housing to locate in close proximity to schools.	Planning & Zoning	CEDO
Provide safe routes and transportation alternatives for children to the public schools especially those for pedestrians and bikes.	Public Works	Parks & Recreation Planning & Zoning
Consider the potential impacts on school enrollments when evaluating new developments through greater School Dept. involvement on the Technical Review Committee.	Schools	Planning & Zoning
<b><u>Long Term</u></b>		
Consider ways to expand the use of school facilities for other community activities, and to design additions that lend themselves to multiple uses.	Schools	

