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TO: Burlington Transportation Energy and Utilities Committee
FROM: Kirsten Merriman Shapiro, Senior Policy and Project Specialist, CEDO
 Laura K. Wheelock P.E., Public Works Engineer
 Meagan E Tuttle, AICP, Principal Planner, Planning and Zoning
RE: Great Streets Initiative – Downtown Design & Construction Standards
DATE: March 20, 2018

The Great Streets Initiative includes the development of *Design & Construction Standards* (Standards) which will ensure that Burlington’s downtown streets are built to endure decades and reflect Burlington’s values, which have been articulated in many plans created by our community and adopted by the City. These Standards have been developed according to three principles:

- To create a **balance among users and uses of the right-of-way**, to ensure that all modes of travel are accommodated in a safe and adequate way;
- To guide the selection of materials and furnishings that will result in **unified public streetscapes** throughout downtown as projects are constructed over time; and
- To **reframe the center of downtown** by investing in streets that frame City Hall Park and connect downtown to the waterfront.

The principles upon which these draft Standards are based, and the benefits our community can realize through their implementation, have led to the unanimous support of each the Parks, Public Works, and Electric Commissions. We look forward to discussing these standards further with the Council in April.

What are the benefits of Great Streets Standards?

- The first, and one of the more important, benefit is to have a **single, comprehensive resource for downtown street design**. Currently, the City does not have a resource containing information on all aspects of how to design and build public streets. This leads to decision-making at the individual project level about even the most fundamental elements of street design. This resource will provide information not only about elements that are required, but also those preferences that help us implement our community goals. It will serve as a defensible set of standards to assure a consistent, minimum level of quality and performance, particularly when working with private property owners.
- The recommended street dimensions have been developed to make **small changes in how the right-of-way is allocated** among the streets’ users today, **while significantly improving the ability to meet a wider variety of uses**. These changes should not be viewed as trading in one user for another. Small changes are leveraged to result in major improvements to: the safety and accessibility for all users; adequate soil volumes to grow healthy trees; and space within our streetscapes to manage stormwater runoff, which is critical to the health of Lake Champlain and the achievement of the city’s stormwater permitting obligations.

- As a result of the individual project-level decision-making mentioned above, downtown’s streetscapes vary widely in their design and type of elements. The Standards will provide a **more unified visual language, strengthening connections between the waterfront & Church Street**—a concept that is often discussed, but hard to address—and preventing streetscapes from appearing dated.
- Greater cohesion is not only an aesthetic benefit, but also one of function and accessibility. A more unified application of design details, such as minimum sidewalk widths and how to locate benches and trash cans, etc. will greatly **enhance the level of comfort and usability by residents and visitors alike**.
- Standards will assist the City with maintaining streetscapes. While the initial implementation may require adjustments to maintenance schedules or methods, greater cohesion in the dimensions of built environment and materials and elements used should ultimately **lead to more efficient and effective maintenance**. Specifically, as streetscapes begin to use similar enhanced materials, the need to purchase and stock a wide variety of materials and furnishings, and the need to apply a wide variety of maintenance treatments in different ways throughout downtown, will be reduced.
- Provides **more predictability and accuracy**—when estimating project costs and budgets, in where utilities are located underground, and in guiding the selection of elements that are long-lasting and durable, which will help reduce life cycle costs.
- Provides defensible guidelines for the placement of elements within the right-of-way that will **assist DPW and Council in their consideration of requests for encroachments and encumbrances**, particularly in determining whether the City’s standards for a safe and accessible streetscape can be maintained.

The Role of the Standards

It is intended that these standards will be used by anyone involved in the transformation of streets in downtown Burlington, including planners and project managers from the City, outside entities who provide services within the public right-of-way, professional street designers working with or on behalf of the City, and boards and commissions reviewing plans for street designs. To that end, these Standards:

- **DO** incorporate (either directly or by reference) the applicable city and state standards for the design and construction of the right-of-way.
- **DO** include both preferred and alternative materials and fixtures that will allow for flexibility in individual street design, while utilizing a family of elements that help provide cohesion among streets.
- **DO NOT** provide specific designs for each street, or specify the quantity or exact location of all elements within the downtown. While they draw upon recommendations contained within adopted plans, they **DO NOT** replace the project development process that each street design is subject to.
- **DO NOT** mandate the immediate reconstruction of all streets or replacement of elements. Instead, these standards will be applied as streets are redevelopment in a significant way, or as existing elements reach the end of their useful life.
- **WILL** take precedence over existing City guidelines regarding the design of downtown streets, and will guide future amendments to ordinances to be consistent with the standards of practice outlined in the document.
- **WILL** be updated from time-to-time to adjust to new or changing product specifications, or to adapt as lessons are learned from their implementation. Updates to individual sections of these Standards will be approved by boards and commissions of the City per their assigned charter authorities.

We respectfully request the Transportation Energy and Utilities Committee sponsor the attached draft resolution and approve and recommend adoption of the Great Streets Design and Construction Standards by the City Council.

Thank you for your consideration of the Great Streets Design & Construction Standards. The Standards can be viewed at <http://greatstreetsbtv.com/downtown-standards> Please feel free to contact any of the project managers with questions.

