

II. COMMUNITY VISION

In 2000, city residents came together to build a common vision of Burlington's future over the next thirty years. They filled out surveys at community events and through several hundred local organizations; had discussions at their Neighborhood Planning Assemblies, at youth focus groups, at senior centers, at Parent Teacher Organizations, at food shelves and at the University of Vermont; heard and saw visions expressed by children through storytelling and printmaking; and attended Public Hearings and a Summit on the City's Future. Their vision was collected and synthesized in the Legacy Action Plan. Presented here are excerpts from that Plan:

Burlington residents of all ages and backgrounds share a common vision: achieving a thriving economy while preventing the loss of open spaces and farmlands skirting the city. The most desirable means of both achieving a robust economy and countering sprawl is substantial, well-planned growth within the city of Burlington itself. The city has recently experienced a loss of retail business and a significant slowing in its population growth as compared to the rest of Chittenden County. If we reverse this process and Burlington were to absorb a higher percentage of local growth – as a means of countering suburban sprawl – the population could reach as high as 65,000 in 30 years. Burlington must grow carefully but significantly if we are to guarantee everyone the benefits of a healthy economy.

We foresee a Burlington where the downtown is thriving; well-trained workers hold skilled, livable-wage jobs; and businesses are eager to form, locate, and expand here. The downtown core will be a vital regional hub where essential goods and services are readily available to all. Well-trained workers will earn high wages while living and working right here in Burlington, commuting easily to their jobs using an affordable, accessible, and seamless public transportation system and bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly roads and sidewalks.

To achieve a sustainable economy, Burlington must invest in both its people and infrastructure. We should encourage business development, promote livable wages and full employment, and assure long-term commitment to the city by businesses and employees alike. Mixed-use, environmentally and socially conscious development should be supported – development that concentrates growth downtown and in other designated neighborhood centers in the city. Our biggest challenge is to carefully balance the benefits and burdens of growth, providing adequate social supports so that every resident can succeed. Collaboration with other communities in the region and the state will be essential in assuring that this occurs.

Providing economic security and meeting all the basic needs of all the people of Burlington is fundamental to achieving a sustainable city. We must create more livable-wage jobs and offer people the superior training, education, and social supports they need to succeed in them. Earning a livable wage means having enough income to provide a family with the basic needs of decent housing, sufficient food and clothing, and quality health and childcare. This is a pressing issue in our community, where too many people

earn wages that are not sufficient to secure these essential needs. Access to affordable, quality childcare is particularly an ongoing problem. As a community, we need to encourage employer-supported childcare benefits and policies and advocate for adequate federal and state funding for childcare subsidies. Finally, we also need to assure ready access to affordable, high-quality health care for all.

A sustainable economy requires a high degree of self-reliance and a diverse mix of businesses in a dynamic environment. The community has reiterated the need for increased local ownership of and support for local businesses. Burlington has a strong base and tradition of local ownership and self-reliance upon which to build, but policies and practices should be developed to encourage consumers, businesses and institutions to support and patronize locally owned and operated businesses. Residents also called for the city and its people to make maximum use of local resources for basic needs. This will anchor the local economy, which will need to successfully navigate the open waters of the global economy in years to come.

A city is strongest when it is composed of thriving neighborhoods, each unique in its own right but connected in seamless ways to the city as a whole. The community's vision encourages mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhoods and embraces ethnic and cultural diversity. Neighborhoods will retain their historic character and architectural integrity, even as they grow and evolve. Residents will be committed to the betterment of their community and connected to their families, friends, and neighbors in meaningful ways.

A quality environment – free of heavy traffic, noise, and the fear of crime and violence, with plenty of open space for recreation and community gatherings – is critical to maintaining healthy neighborhoods. Freedom from fear also extends to our homes: state and county data shows that violence in the home is a greater threat to the health of our community's residents than violence committed by strangers in public places. In the last five years, thirteen percent more assaults took place in people's homes than in the streets. The consequences of domestic violence significantly affect our residents and the quality of our community life. They must be addressed in any long-term effort to build a sustainable city.

If Burlington is to succeed as a sustainable city, critical attention must be paid to developing a diverse range of excellent, economical housing opportunities in all neighborhoods. This is not an issue to be confronted by the city alone: solutions to the housing crunch will require close cooperation and coordination with other communities in the region, as well as the development of affordable housing in all communities.

One of the hallmarks of a sustainable community is the extent to which it involves a broad section of its citizens in all aspects of decision-making about major issues. This means involvement that occurs not only in the voting booth at election time. It also means providing the opportunity to have a greater impact on all decisions made not only by the government, but also by local businesses, institutions, non-profit organizations, neighborhood associations, and more. In striving toward this kind of wide-ranging public participation in governance, Burlington must address three key issues: the need for

responsiveness and accountability on the part of government, the need for local control over decisions affecting neighborhoods, and the need for informed decision-making.

Education should expand and not limit the choices available to future generations across the city. Learning should take place in safe, attractive, well-equipped schools. It should also occur in a wide range of community-based settings, where youths learn firsthand the value and importance of community service. Learning should instill our young people with respect and appreciation for cultural differences and provide them with a strong commitment to learning throughout life. Finally, learning should be a success for all students, regardless of their backgrounds or learning styles.

Providing our young people with the education to make informed decisions and participate more effectively in our community is just the first step toward greater empowerment for youth. Burlington must also strive to provide “a place at the table” for youth when making decisions that affect their community and their future.

Air quality is one of Burlington’s more pressing environmental concerns. No actions will have a greater impact on the quality of our air and the enjoyment of our environment than diminishing our present reliance on the automobile and fossil fuels. Better transportation planning and reduced reliance on fossil fuels will play the greatest role in countering this problem, but research and public education will be vitally important as well. Harmful emissions will be decreased markedly, noise and congestion in the city’s downtown and neighborhoods will lessen, and sprawl will no longer be fostered and exacerbated by a single-occupant automobile “culture.”

Lake Champlain, the waterfront, and the Winooski River corridor are the centerpieces of our urban natural environment. As the city grows, sufficient resources must be allocated to keep the lake clean and accessible to all, while preserving it for such traditional uses as swimming, fishing, and providing drinking water. Because every city resident also has a personal responsibility to take actions that help improve and preserve the health of our environment, environmental education efforts will be of critical importance in helping people to meet this civic duty.

Blessed with a strong environmental ethic among the Vermont populace, Burlington is well-positioned to embrace energy and resource conservation as priorities as the city moves toward sustainability. Coincident with its growth, Burlington should continuously seek opportunities to incorporate sustainable, renewable resources in its energy mix; promote conservation measures; implement environmentally friendly building standards; and aggressively encourage recycling and resource recovery efforts by city government, businesses, and individual residents alike.

Progress toward the Burlington Legacy Project’s goal of a sustainable city will require broad-based collaboration among a diverse range of government entities, businesses, organizations, educational institutions, health care providers, neighborhood groups, and individual citizens. Each must take responsibility for portions of this plan, providing the direction, commitment, and resources it will take to make this vision a reality.