



## PROCESS

This *Comprehensive Master Plan* has been prepared under the leadership of the Burlington Planning Department, with the dedicated assistance of a *Master Plan Steering Committee* specifically formed to provide advice and guidance.

The planning process was organized around an extensive community participation. Over a three-year period, The Planning Department and the Steering Committee undertook a community-based process involved residents, community organizations, institutions, and businesses discussing their ideas about how to maintain and build on Burlington's best features. The stakeholders of Burlington's future participated in numerous public workshops, public forums, expert panel discussions, and community conversations. Information about the master plan was distributed through social media and through announcements and links on the Town's website. On-line surveys were conducted to learn about community perspectives on housing and about the visual characteristics of Burlington.

The *Burlington Comprehensive Master Plan* is the culmination of the synthesis of the intentions, priorities, and actions identified through this process.

A team of professionals assisted in preparing this Plan. The team was led by the planning studio of Harriman, which was formerly the planning practice of The Cecil Group. Specialized assistance was provided by FXM Associates (economic development), TEC (transportation planning), and RKG Associates (housing). Innes Associates assisted the Town with the final layout and edits of the Plan.



From the Public Workshops





## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following land use recommendations provide the basis for actions that the Town should undertake to implement the *Comprehensive Master Plan*. These recommendations are herein provided in a summarized version. Please refer to the full *Comprehensive Master Plan* document and the Implementation section for more details.

**L1. Allow and encourage compact, well-organized development within commercial and retail areas of town.**

The Town should promote development patterns that have more densely clustered buildings, converting excess parking and paving areas into more valuable uses, and re-organizing sites so they provide more landscaping and a pedestrian-friendly environment.

**L2. Promote a broader mix of uses in areas where it will enhance efficient use of the land, increase the quality of life, and keep Burlington in pace with other communities as a great place to live, work, and visit.**

Rather than reinforcing past practice that isolated uses on separate parcels and districts, the Town can promote a more vital mix of uses in many of the commercial, industrial, and institutional areas. By placing opportunities to work, shop, visit and live in these areas in closer proximity to each other, convenience and quality of life can be enhanced.

**L3. Raise the design quality of buildings and site improvements so that they are more attractive and valuable from private and public perspectives.**

The Town should require new development projects to meet high standards of site, architectural and landscape design. It should promote design improvements to existing sites and properties where it will benefit the visible quality of the town and enhance the value of properties. Redevelopment shall enhance the environmental quality of sites through increased stormwater and environmental solutions.

**L4. Enhance the Cambridge Street corridor as Burlington's own "Main Street" providing convenient and community-serving businesses and institutions in a mixed-use setting along an increasingly attractive corridor.**

Cambridge Street should evolve to become an extended community-oriented corridor that provides a rich mix of shopping, service businesses, civic services, institutions, recreational open space, and a variety of housing choices. The entire corridor should be enhanced as a pedestrian, bicycle, and transit corridor that is connected to the neighborhoods of Burlington.



**L5. Promote sustainable land use practices throughout the community.**

Land use management in Burlington should explicitly include methods and requirements to limit negative environmental impacts of development using contemporary practices to protect habitats, enhance water quality and reduce dependence on nonrenewable resources.

**L6. Provide mitigation for negative impacts associated with development and provide positive amenities that will protect and enhance all areas of Burlington.**

Burlington should enhance its set of tools and methods so that new development bears reasonable costs and responsibilities for mitigating negative impacts on the community associated with expansion, new development, or changes in use. Similar tools and methods should be used to add amenities that become civic benefits and contribute to the value of the community as a whole.

**L7. Preserve and enhance the land devoted to open space.**

The Town should continue to recognize the importance of its existing open space assets as a land use requiring stewardship and management in concert with other uses. Smaller open areas add value to the adjacent developed areas and shall be considered as part of area plans within Town. This aspect of land use is amplified and specifically addressed in the related recommendations in the *Open Space Element* of this *Comprehensive Master Plan*.

**L8. Clearly define and strengthen the community core of Burlington including the civic-oriented Common area and the business-oriented Town Center.**

Burlington should promote and invest in the community core districts of Town, leveraging the historic center and land devoted to commercial, retail, open space, and civic uses. These areas of Town are specifically addressed in the related recommendations in the *Town Center Element* of this *Comprehensive Master Plan*.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

**T1. Actively encourage and support multi-modal transportation to reduce traffic congestion and encourage a sustainable, healthy, and livable community.**

The Town should promote modes of transportation that are alternatives to automobiles through proactive marketing and education. For public transit, pedestrian, and bicycle routes, the Town should provide user-friendly information resources and collaborate with advocacy groups to enhance community understanding of the choices available.

**T2. Support and facilitate expanded use of public transit in Burlington.**

Transit ridership can be increased through expanded routes with more stops and more frequent service. Through its operating role for the B Line and its advocacy with the MBTA and LRTA, the Town should seek expanded hours of operation and services that will be more practical and more convenient for bus patrons than other transportation options. Bus stops should have shelters and commuting stops should have convenient parking available.

**T3. Improve the experience and facilities for pedestrians in Burlington.**

To support walking as an alternative to driving, the physical facilities – paths, sidewalks, and crosswalks – need to be available continuously along the routes that people could and would like to use. As Burlington expands and connects segments in the pedestrian network, they should be well-designed to provide for a safe and visibly attractive route accessible by all.

**T4. Improve the experience and facilities for bicyclists in Burlington.**

The future bicycle network in Burlington should have a range of bicycle facilities and improvements corresponding to their intended use and context. This will include both off-street shared paths and on-street lanes and markings. The network should be improved as a series of connected segments passing through developed areas and public open spaces, with bike racks at destinations. The Town network should be linked to nearby regional facilities, including the Minuteman Bikeway and Tri-Community Bikeway.



**T5. Manage traffic demand to reduce congestion and provide alternative modes by promoting private sector solutions and regional coordination.**

The Town should collaborate with the owners of large-scale properties and operations in Burlington to manage traffic and congestion. The Town should establish a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) policy to apply to existing and future developments to manage vehicle flows and parking and provide alternative mode choices. The Town should expand its role and advocacy with existing Transportation Management Associations (TMA's) that support regional traffic management and alternative mode programs.

**T6. Provide for better traffic circulation and a more efficient street network through improvements and traffic management practices that also reduce congestion and improve convenience for the residents of Burlington.**

Congestion in areas of high demand can be improved by accomplishing strategic improvements to the street network and using contemporary technologies to manage traffic flows better. Town-generated street and intersection standards will lead to better design for circulation for all transportation modes. This should include access management planning and improvements to reduce conflicts and concentrations of traffic along major arterials and heavily used corridors. Where capacities should be enhanced to reduce congestion and support desirable development or land use patterns, traffic management practices must also be applied to avoid negative impacts on the residents of Burlington. Traffic circulation and management should also include measures to reduce and redirect cut-through traffic where possible.

**T7. Improve safety for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists.**

Burlington should institute a systematic approach to identify, prioritize, and implement projects that will correct deficiencies to improve safety by reducing the potential for accidents. The Town can employ traffic calming measures to slow traffic and provide a safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclists in residential and other areas. Safety improvements entail expanding accessible routes for the handicapped and focusing initial changes around schools and frequent crash locations. Over time, Burlington should meet contemporary standards for roadway and intersection safety.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- E1. Support the ability of Burlington’s enterprises and institutions to adapt to changing market and service conditions, and maintain Burlington’s status as a regional leader in the commercial, retail, and health sectors.**

The businesses and enterprises in Burlington must adapt to rapidly changing market and economic conditions to remain competitive. This will entail changing the Town’s regulatory framework to broaden the range of uses and the way they are accommodated within buildings and sites. Burlington’s business community must offer their employees and customers high-quality environments that provide more mixed-use environments that offer a range of places to “work, play, and live.” The competitive business environments must provide additional amenities, flexibility, efficiency, and convenience than are typical of aging and outmoded suburban development and use patterns. This recommendation includes active support and promotion of small and entrepreneurial businesses and enterprises that employ the full range of skills and capabilities in Burlington’s population that is part of the workforce.

- E2. Promote town-oriented businesses that provide services, employment, and market opportunities for small enterprises.**

The economy of Burlington includes the direct and indirect benefits and opportunities provided by services and businesses that serve the local market. These will primarily be in areas closely associated with the residential districts of town and in the Town Center, as described in the *Land Use and Town Center Elements* of this *Comprehensive Master Plan*. These enterprises can be supported through regulatory changes, infrastructure, and transportation enhancements, and strengthening the business environment by providing information to owners and promoting local businesses.

- E3. Encourage new investment in targeted areas of Burlington.**

By providing coordinated municipal regulations, programs, and investments, Burlington should attract and support significant reinvestment in existing, developed areas that are identified within the Land Use Element. This should include providing a regulatory environment that promotes a clear and predictable review and approval process for those types of projects and related improvements that it seeks. This process should provide for mitigation of potential impacts in concert with the Town’s overall economic development and land use intent.



- E4. Support a high quality of life for the workforce in Burlington, including highly compensated employment opportunities, so that it is increasingly competitive in attracting and retaining the human resources vital to economic success.**

In today's competitive market, the success of businesses and institutions is directly related to their ability to attract and retain a highly skilled workforce. Employers are choosing locations or making improvements to their own facilities so that they offer amenities, services, recreation, and convenient access to housing. The Town should contribute to these changing needs through modification of its regulatory framework, expansion of transportation choices, and access to open space amenities. The availability of a diverse range of restaurants and food-related businesses is an important dimension of this trend, and should be actively encouraged by the Town.

- E5. Provide conditions to support market entry and incubation of new businesses.**

New small businesses provide an important and highly desirable dimension to Burlington's economic life. Burlington should preserve and promote conditions that support the success of new and small business enterprises. These include regulatory steps to preserve and expand the supply of relatively inexpensive spaces that can be adapted to innovative uses and operations, as long as they are compatible with the neighboring sites and nearby uses.

- E6. Promote locally-available education and training programs that serve businesses, institutions, and the workforce in Burlington.**

Both the workforce and the employers of Burlington need convenient access to ongoing education and training to keep pace with technology and the expanding access to information. Burlington can be an active supporter of business and professional programs and venues that provide education and training within the community. This can include coordination among its own school programs, the Massachusetts community college and higher education network, and other regional associations and institutions.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

### NC 1. Protect the town's clean water through actions and regulations that address both the groundwater and watershed resources.

Burlington is dependent on a clean water supply provided through the combination of the Mill Pond Reservoir and wells. The Town should continue to protect and enhance this municipal resource through measures focused on stormwater and groundwater management that would reduce the potential for contamination and provide for reliable supplies. This could be accomplished through coordination of development regulations and infrastructure projects that apply Low Impact Development (LID) and stormwater Best Management Practices in regards to water quality protection.

### NC 2. Plan for additional resiliency in areas that will likely be affected by flooding resulting from extreme weather and storm events in the future.

Many areas in town are located along wetlands and waterways that are subject to flooding; long-term projections suggest that the severity and frequency of flooding may increase over time. Renovations of existing and construction of new infrastructure and development should be designed to anticipate future flood events to limit potential damage to properties, roads, and utilities.

### NC 3. Protect and enhance the natural habitats and ecological systems within Burlington.

The Town's land management regulations and practices should be coordinated to protect and extend natural corridors. Expanded corridors offer increased habitats and conditions that support a diverse, rich ecosystem of plants and wildlife. The Town should coordinate the acquisition and preservation of open space and wildlife corridors that may be preserved or added within existing and new development. As a primary steward of the town's natural environment, the Town should use the guidance in the *Open Space and Recreation Element* of this plan to distinguish between public open space that is devoted primarily for recreation, and areas that should have limited access and use. Town regulations should guide new development so that it employs landscaping and site design practices that purposefully create new habitats and contribute to a diverse, sustainable natural environment. These measures should be accompanied with information and interpretive programs to support citizen's understanding and appreciation of Burlington's exceptional assets.

### NC 4. Preserve and interpret the Town's historic resources as a link to its heritage and as part of the community's identity.

The town will benefit from the preservation – and celebration – of the historic buildings and places that link the community to the rural and village-centered character that preceded, and stands in contrast with, the more contemporary development of Burlington. In part, this can be accomplished through programs and incentives to retain

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and restore historic buildings. The Town should also work with the advocates and organizations devoted to the town's heritage to provide interpretation, information, and programs to convey the value of the past.

**NC 5. Actively support the creative economy in Burlington and promote the related contributions of individuals, businesses, and organizations.**

The creative economy is composed of those who provide services and products oriented towards the aesthetic and intellectual engagement of their clients. This segment of Burlington's economy would benefit through Town-supported programs that identify and promote creative businesses and individuals. This should include creating or co-sponsoring projects such as a Cultural Inventory with on-line information and links. This recommendation can be accomplished through proactive projects or support that might include special website and media outlets, displays, lectures, open houses, forums, and fairs held in the Town's public buildings and places.

**NC 6. Engage the community in a variety of accessible cultural events and programs through imaginative promotions, sponsorship, and support.**

The Town should be an active organizer and partner in the cultural life of Burlington. The Town should assemble a Public Arts Plan through a collaborative enterprise that engages arts-oriented organizations such as the Burlington Cultural Council and the Burlington Players. The Plan should set the stage for temporary and permanent public arts projects that are integrated into the design and implementation of public open space, streetscape, and municipal facilities. The Plan should provide a framework for events, information, promotion, and engagement. The Plan should establish the stewardship role and responsibilities within the Town as it determines the quantity, quality, and types of projects that the Town should promote, provide, and fund.

**NC 7. Make art a visible dimension of Burlington's townscape.**

The artistic and cultural dimensions of the community should be visibly expressed as part of the townscape of Burlington. Implementing its Public Arts Plan, artistic expressions should punctuate the experience of those moving through Burlington and visiting its civic destinations. The selection and placement should include temporary and seasonal components, as well as permanent installations that are integrated into the Town's historic interpretations, sidewalks and streetscapes, and public buildings.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **OS1. Increase annual spending on stewardship of existing land and acquisition of new lands.**

The Town should adopt the Community Preservation Act, create public/private partnerships, update the 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan, and coordinate with organizations such as The Trust for Public Land for funding that would be used to acquire and maintain lands for conservation and recreation purposes.

### **OS2. Improve access to and connections between open space and recreation resources for all citizens and visitors.**

Establish greenway corridors to connect and guide users to the Town's open space and recreation resources. Construct wayfinding systems to better identify and delineate these routes. Encourage and invest in multi-modal transit infrastructure to provide greater accessibility to destinations near or at open space and recreation resource areas.

### **OS3. Actively manage, maintain, and expand open space and recreation facilities.**

Identify parcels of land, such as the area along Vine Brook that, if acquired, would significantly contribute to the Town's open space inventory. Prioritize, and where possible, acquire such lands. Expand regulatory controls that allow the Town to accept land donations or acquisitions.

### **OS4. Improve awareness and use of open space lands and recreation resources.**

Provide and promote additional programs, activities, and events at Town-owned facilities. Encourage more of such actions on privately owned land.

### **OS5. Increase recreation-oriented uses and facilities.**

Improve access to outdoor recreation facilities, increase awareness of and programming at indoor facilities, and implement renovations at both outdoor and indoor facilities.

### **OS6. Promote the protection of wildlife habitat, woodlands, and water resource areas.**

Review zoning bylaws to determine if open space provisions are sufficient. Wherever possible, acquire lands abutting streams and wetlands.

### **OS7. Connect Burlington's diverse and dynamic public spaces and programs to create, inspire, and uphold inclusive social interaction.**

Coordinate efforts to connect public spaces with other organizations and initiatives, such as the Historic Society and Department of Public Works roadway improvements, to ensure private and public efforts reach the greatest number of citizens.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- TC1. Prepare and implement a comprehensive open space and streetscape plan to articulate and enhance the character of the public realm for three components of the Town's core: the Commons, the Center, and the Hill.**

The Town can strengthen the identity, walkability, and value of its central districts by undertaking a comprehensively-planned and designed program of circulation, streetscape, and open space changes. These should address the existing street system, provide design concepts for enhancing the Town Common and Simonds Park, and set the stage for future changes in the municipal campus and its facilities. Once planned, the improvements can be implemented incrementally.

- TC2. Undertake a specialized economic development evaluation of the Center and create incentives to support desirable redevelopment.**

The existing development pattern on many of the parcels in the Center is not conducive to the type of walkable, compact, mixed-use district envisioned by the community and sought by current zoning. The Town should undertake a focused economic and development study to better understand the real estate conditions, market trends, and development capacity, in collaboration with property owners. With this information, the Town can update its zoning and provide other incentives to attract beneficial private sector redevelopment.

- TC3. Create an identity and promotional program for the Town Center in collaboration with area businesses, institutions, and organizations.**

The Town should convene the stakeholders and advance a coordinated identity and promotional program for the Commons, the Center, and the Hill. This program should inform the public realm designs and be coordinated with the Town's initiatives on arts, culture, economic development and the creative economy, open space, and recreation.



**TC4. Prepare enhanced design standards and guidelines for the Commons and the Center.**

In concert with the economic development studies and identity program, the Town should enhance its existing Design Review Rules & Regulations to better support mixed-use development, pedestrian activity, and placemaking in the Town Center.

**TC5. Promote additional uses that will specifically contribute the to the vitality of the Commons and the municipal campus.**

As the stewards of the Common and the managers of its own municipal campus, the Town should proactively seek and support uses, programs, and activities that will draw more people to the Commons.

**TC6. Expand availability and schedule of bus transit routes serving the Town Center, and improve infrastructure for transit users.**

As some residents have expressed, bus frequency is not enough to provide reliable access to and from the neighborhoods. Expanded levels of service would be desirable to support an active and vibrant Town Center.

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### Unmet and Projected Needs

Even with the Town’s complete utilization of available resources, there are some service areas and facilities that still fall short of meeting the residents’ and Town’s needs. For example, the Town cannot meet summertime water demands, which has necessitated the issuance of water restrictions. A dramatic increase in outdoor water use by single-family homes is the main source of this demand. Despite an increase in the outdoor water price and a push to install secondary water meters with higher rates for outdoor usage, water use has not decreased.

Facilities with the highest need of maintenance or repair are the DPW and Recreation Maintenance facilities at Overlook Park. The current structures were built in the early 1950s and house much of the department’s maintenance equipment. These facilities are not weather-tight which leads to damage of the equipment stored inside. One of these buildings also houses the Burlington Players, an important cultural resource.

The public schools have a relatively steady total enrollment. Schools have seen an approximately three percent decrease in enrollment between 2012 and 2016 (see *Figure SF-1*). During the same time period, the percent of total enrollment of students considered to be from low income or economically disadvantaged households and students with disabilities remained constant. However, total enrollment of English language learners increased from two to five percent (see *Figure SF-2*). The 2016 to 2017 school year saw a higher demand for Early Education, before school-, and after-school care than the Town could accommodate.

**Figure SF-1: Burlington Public Schools Total Enrollment**

