

Burlington Planning Commission

Tuesday, September 9, 2025, 6:30 PM

Remote & Virtual Meeting via Zoom

In person option available:

Bushor Conference Room (Room 102), 1st Floor of City Hall, 149 Church St.

To Join the Meeting on a Computer

Link:<https://zoom.us/j/97941883790?pwd=bGZBNzNyV1liL3p5NkhIL2dqUFIzd09>

Passcode: 658929

To Join the Meeting on a Phone

Number: +1 646 931 3860 US Meeting ID: 979 4188 3790

1. Agenda

2. Public Forum

3. Chair's Report

4. Director's Report

5. Open Space Plan Draft Review + Comments (30 minutes)

Subject	5.1. Provide comments related to the draft of Burlington's Open Space Plan and ask project team questions.
Meeting	September 9, 2025 - Planning Commission Agenda - Tuesday, September 9, 2025, 6:30 PM, Burlington Planning Commission
Category	5. Open Space Plan Draft Review + Comments (30 minutes)
Department	Planning
Type	
Recommended Action	

6. ZA-26-01: Technical Amendments + Minor Revisions

Subject	6.1. Discussion related to proposed CDO Amendment ZA-26-01: Technical Corrections and Minor Revisions
Meeting	September 9, 2025 - Planning Commission Agenda - Tuesday, September 9, 2025, 6:30 PM, Burlington Planning Commission
Category	6. ZA-26-01: Technical Amendments + Minor Revisions

Department Planning

Type

Recommended Action

7. planBTV: New North End Transportation Scenarios

Subject 7.1. Discussion related to planBTV: New North End Transportation Scenarios. Staff will present these concepts at the meeting, but they are [also available online for review and comment.](#)

Meeting September 9, 2025 - Planning Commission Agenda - Tuesday, September 9, 2025, 6:30 PM, Burlington Planning Commission

Category 7. planBTV: New North End Transportation Scenarios

Department Planning

Type

Recommended Action

8. Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee Representative

9. Commissioner Items

10. Minutes + Communications

Subject 10.1. Accept minutes + communications. Commissioners have opportunity to object to meeting minutes.

Meeting September 9, 2025 - Planning Commission Agenda - Tuesday, September 9, 2025, 6:30 PM, Burlington Planning Commission

Category 10. Minutes + Communications

Department Planning

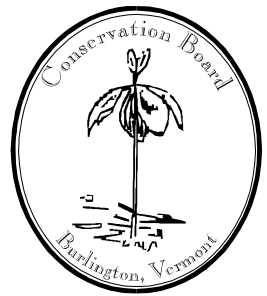
Type

11. Adjournment

Burlington Conservation Board

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Burlington, VT 05401
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*Rebecca Roman, Chair
Ryan Crehan, Vice Chair
Zoe Richards
Don Meals
Ryan Crehan
Leslie Spencer
Ethan Ely
Dale Azaria
Kelly Farrell
Evan Horne*



TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Scott Gustin
DATE: September 9, 2025
RE: Draft Open Space Plan

Following a year of collaborative work including assessments, outreach, visioning, and writing the draft 2025 Open Space Plan is ready for review. The effort to rewrite the city's Open Space Plan kicked off in Summer 2024 in partnership between the core city team, UVM's Spatial Analysis Lab, and Agency Landscape & Planning.

Initial work included needs and values assessments and the start of spatial analysis and mapping work. Stakeholder meetings took place in Fall 2024, and the first round of public outreach and engagement started in January 2025 and spanned into early March. Spatial analysis and mapping work concluded in March 2025 as well. This initial work formed the vision and foundation for the new Open Space Plan.

Information gained from the spatial analysis work and the initial wave of stakeholder and public engagement was compiled and distilled into a framework for the draft plan. Four primary themes emerged:

- Conserve (Stewarding Burlington's network of protected lands to support health ecosystems and a healthy city)
- Connect (A landscape stitched together by stewardship and sustainable development)
- Experience (Diverse outdoor experiences)
- Cultivate (Growing sustainable and accessible local food systems that meet community needs)

A second round of stakeholder and public outreach and engagement spanned the months of May and June 2025. In all, two dozen outreach and engagement events were hosted in a variety of settings such as Winterville, the Library Book Sale, Twilight Block Party, skating at the Sea Caves, and NPA meetings. In addition to these 24 outreach events, the Open Space Plan rewrite was an item of discussion at Planning Commission, Parks Commission, Conservation Board, and Parks, Arts, & Culture Committee meetings over the past year.

Since conclusion of the second wave of outreach and engagement, the initial framework of the new Open Space Plan has been fleshed out. Within each of the four foundational components, strategies and priorities have been articulated, and related implementation matrixes have been formed. The core city team has reviewed the draft and has made recommendations for revision. Now, in September 2025 the draft plan will be reviewed by the Conservation Board, Parks Commission, and Planning Commission.

Following completion of draft review, the plan will be revised and refined to reflect recommendations and will return to the Board and Commissions for approval in October and, ultimately, adoption by the City Council in November 2025.



BURLINGTON OPEN SPACE PLAN





"WHILE IT INITIALLY TAKES
EFFORT TO NOTICE SOMETHING
NEW, OVER TIME A CHANGE
HAPPENS THAT IS IRREVERSIBLE.
REDWOODS, OAKS, AND
BLACKBERRY SHRUBS WILL
NEVER BE "A BUNCH OF GREEN."
A TOWHEE WILL NEVER SIMPLY
BE "A BIRD" TO ME AGAIN, EVEN
IF I WANTED IT TO BE. AND
IT FOLLOWS THAT THIS PLACE
CAN NO LONGER BE ANY PLACE."

- JENNY ODELL,
HOW TO DO NOTHING



* * * * *

Letter from City of Burlington, VT

To be added



* * * * *

Acknowledgments

To be added





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Plan at a Glance

Nestled on the shores of Lake Champlain at the confluence with the winding Winooski River, Burlington sits at a regionally significant location. Open spaces are at the heart of what makes Burlington special -- enabling high quality of life for our community, supporting our city's economy, growing local food, providing home to local and migrating wildlife, and keeping us cool in a changing climate.

VISION

SEE PAGES 56 - 65

Burlington is a Nature-Filled City

with healthy open spaces where wildlife thrive in forests, streams, and the lake; where people enjoy nature's various offerings and eat what their gardens and farms grow; and **where people and ecosystems flourish together.**



GOALS

GOAL ONE



CONSERVE

Stewarding Burlington's network of protected lands to support healthy ecosystems and a healthy city

GOAL TWO



CONNECT

Knitting the landscape together through stewardship and nature-based development

GOAL THREE



EXPERIENCE

Expanding a variety of nature experiences across Burlington

GOAL FOUR



CULTIVATE

Growing sustainable and accessible local food systems that meet community needs



The Open Space Plan provides a roadmap for how to continue to protect the city's open space and urban forest network through a collaborative stewardship approach. Balancing the need to grow with healthy ecosystems is possible with thoughtful planning and collaboration.

STRATEGIES

SEE PAGES 66 - 141

Expand restoration and management city-wide

Support wildlife movement and ecological health

Evolve the conservation fund to be flexible to changing needs

Collaborate to protect open space for future generations

Grow and celebrate nature-based climate solutions

Cultivate an ecosystem of stewardship

Enhance and protect Burlington's urban forest

Encourage new development to incorporate nature-based principles

Increase awareness about Burlington's open spaces

Grow public access to nature-based experiences

Break down barriers to open space access

Cultivate sustainable and resilient agriculture practices

Expand community gardens

Support the cultivation of alternate food sources

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP

The open space plan is a collaborative roadmap to stewarding the future of our city's open spaces.

While the focus is on actions the City of Burlington can take, it also offers strategies we all can take to expand stewardship.

The implementation roadmap identifies:

- Implementation Lead
- Key Partners
- Implementation Timeframe





A large, mature tree with a thick trunk and a wide canopy of green and yellowing leaves stands in a grassy park area. In the background, there are residential houses and a clear blue sky. The tree is the central focus of the left side of the page.

1

Introduction

Burlington wouldn't be Burlington without our open spaces. This plan provides a vision and roadmap for protecting them together now and in the future.



Plan Purpose

The Open Space Plan is a roadmap to guide the City of Burlington and its many partners and collaborators as they work together to grow and steward Burlington's open spaces now and in the future.

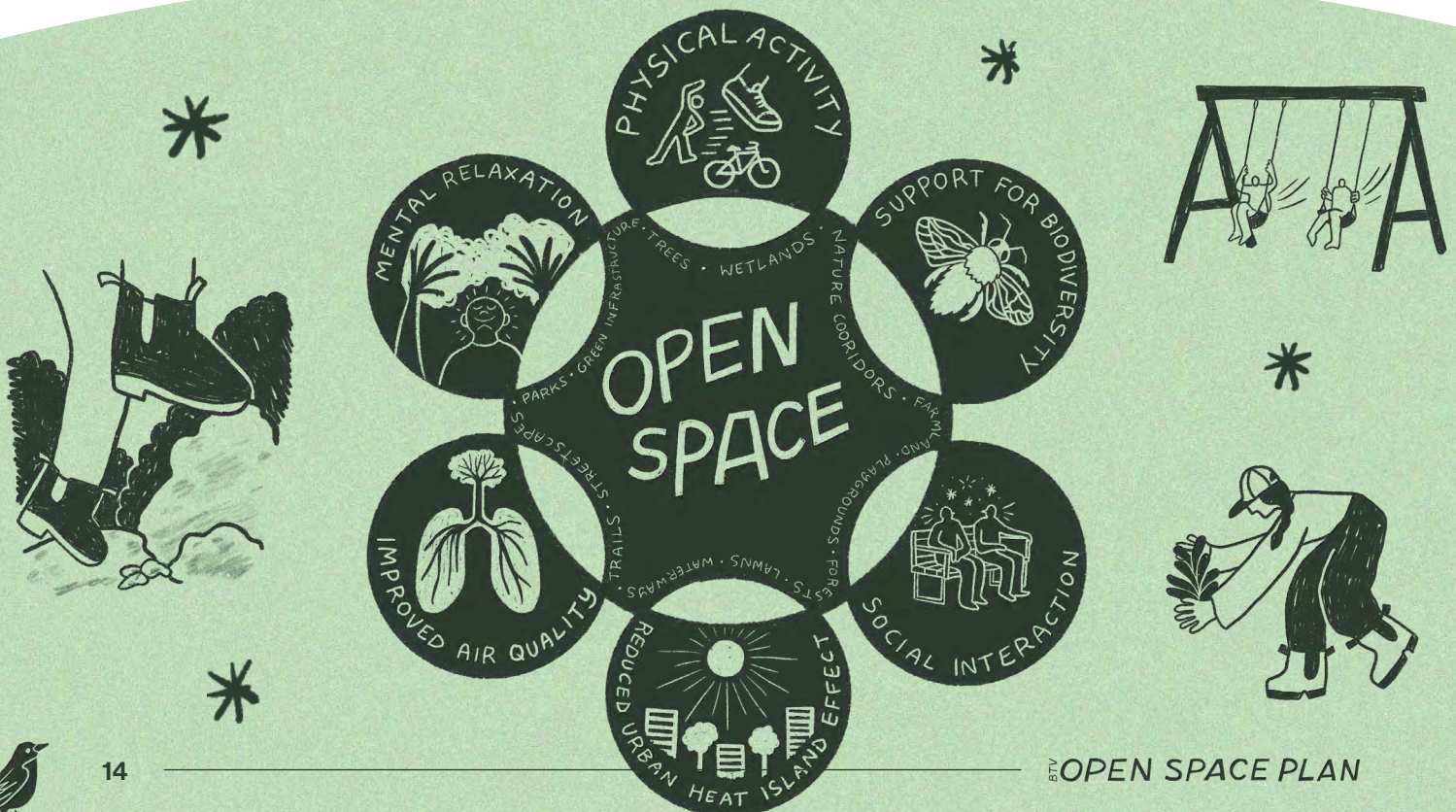
Burlington is a place where open spaces and the built environment are intertwined with one another in a symbiotic relationship that helps to make Burlington the unique place that is it. The conservation of open space enhances the quality of life for residents and allows for the continued functioning and restoration of the natural systems of which we are a part.

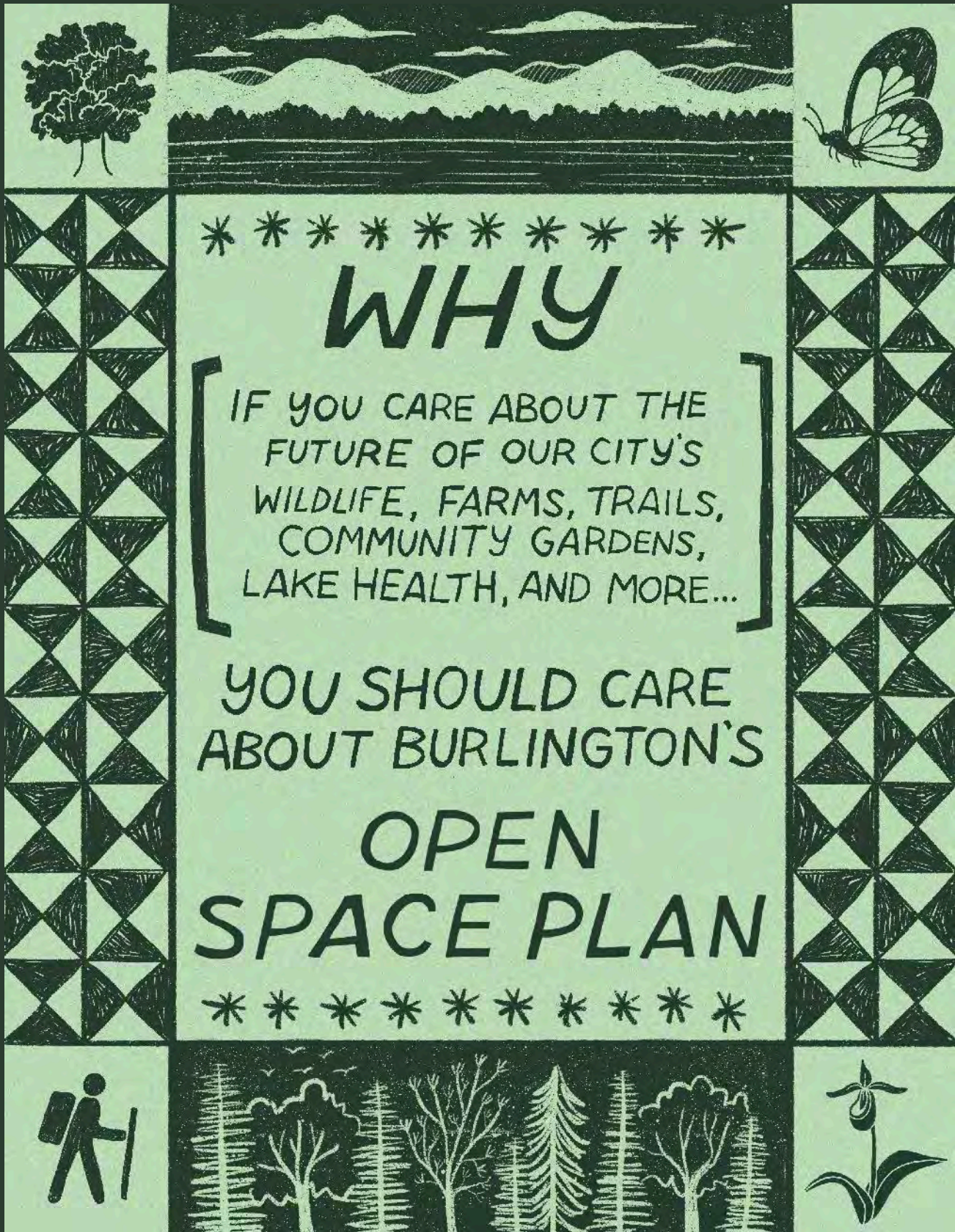
The city benefits from an abundance of open space totaling almost 50% of its geographic area. The city's environmental ethic has pushed for preservation, adaptation, and access to its diverse open spaces.

As Burlington continues to intensify in density to accommodate its increasing population, the City aims to continue its long-standing commitment to providing equitable access to quality open spaces and stewarding the health of the city's ecosystems.

Burlington's Open Space Plan takes an interdisciplinary approach to documenting the City's open spaces, updating open space goals, and identifying specific resource targets and timelines through a robust community-focused engagement process.

Open space matters to Burlington in so many ways!







?

WHAT IS



“Open space” encompasses all the green, outdoor spaces in our city that are important for its ecological health. It includes natural areas, urban agriculture, parklands, greenbelts, rain gardens and pocket parks, trees, and even school grounds, campuses, and yards.

Open spaces are used by people for many reasons, including recreation, play, leisure, and growing food. Environmentally, they’re critical for wildlife and for climate resilience. They also provide residents with a connection to nature. Open spaces include publicly accessible green spaces owned by the City of Burlington, as well as privately owned open spaces. Together, our open spaces create an important network for people, nature, and our city.



WORKING LANDS

50
miles of
shoreline

380
acres of
wetlands



**WATERS +
WETLANDS**

14
community
gardens

Scenic Views





OPEN SPACE?

Everyday Nature
Experiences

50%
of the city's
land area is
open space



PARKS



FORESTS

50+
parks and
urban wild
areas

40%
tree
canopy



GREEN
INFRASTRUCTURE



LAWNS+
AUXILIARY
GREEN SPACES

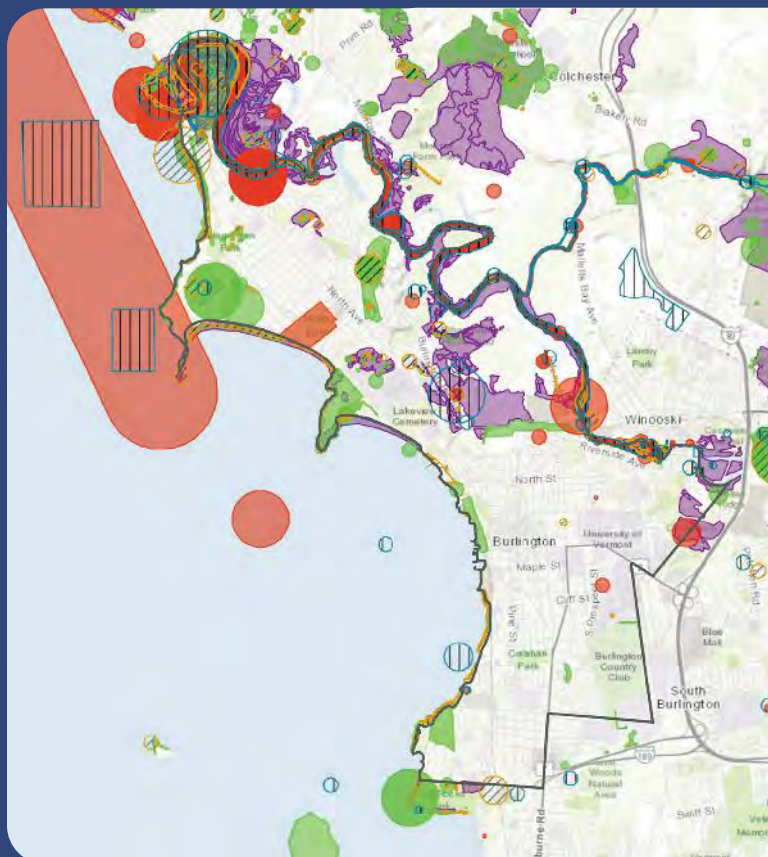
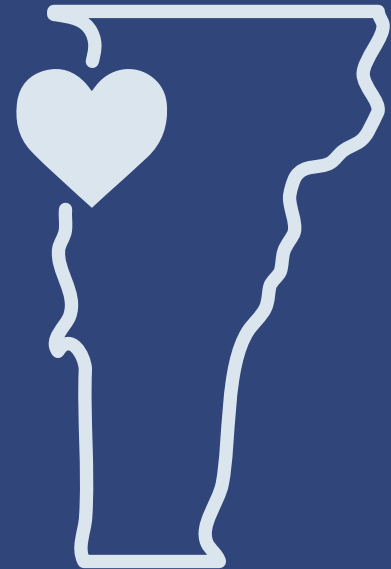




Why does Open Space matter?

Burlington's open spaces play a critical role in regional ecosystems.

At the confluence of the Winooski River and Lake Champlain, Burlington is home to not only 44,000 residents, but also a rich diversity of plants and wildlife species. The City includes plants, animals, and natural communities that are uncommon in Vermont, as well as species classified as rare, threatened, and endangered by the State. Many of these significant natural communities are found along Burlington's waterways, from the shores of Lake Champlain to the Winooski River corridor.



VT Uncommon Species

- Plant
- Animal
- Natural Community

VT Rare, Threatened, and Endangered Species

- RTE Animal
- RTE Plant

VT Significant Natural Communities

- VT Significant Natural Communities

VT Natural Resources Atlas





Lamoille Watershed

Northern Lake Champlain Watershed

WESTFORD

COLCHESTER

ESSEX

WINOOSKI

ESSEX JUNCTION

Lake Champlain

BURLINGTON

Winooski Watershed

SOUTH BURLINGTON

WILLISTON

INTRODUCTION

SHELBURNE

SAINT GEORGE

RICHMOND

19

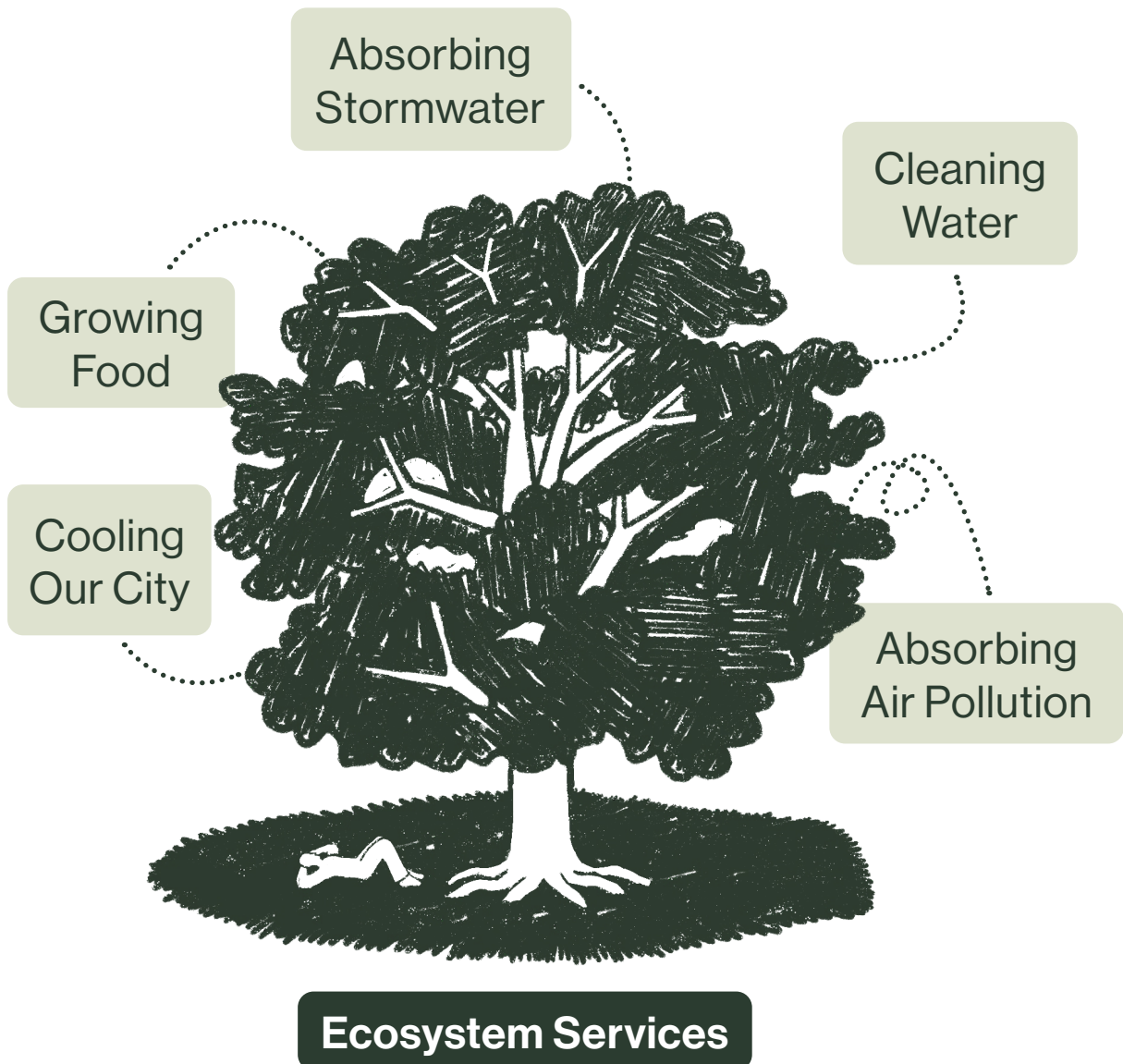




Why does Open Space matter?

Burlington's open spaces act as "natural infrastructure" for our city.

Our city's green spaces are just as important for its function as roads and hard infrastructure, like pipes and powerlines. Like other kinds of infrastructure, they keep our city running. You might not think of a tree as a piece of infrastructure, but it and the other green spaces in our city provide important services like cleaning water, absorbing pollution, and keeping our city cool.





**Our open spaces are
increasingly important
as our climate changes.**

**Burlington is the 4th fastest
warming city in the US.**

Burlington's tree canopy and green spaces act as natural air conditioning, keeping our city cool. Green spaces can cool the area around them and a shaded house can save on air conditioning. The cooling power of open spaces is just one example of how they keep our city livable and healthy for all of us. These superpowers will be even more critical as our climate changes. We need our open spaces now more than ever.





Supporting Human Health and Wellbeing

From providing places for being active to quiet spots to relax and recharge, our open spaces help keep us healthy. They also provide spaces for us to gather, strengthening our community. Public parks offer free spaces to recreate, and research signifies that parks brings savings in healthcare costs.

Being in Burlington's open spaces make you feel...



\$ Supporting Our City's Economy

Open spaces also contribute to our local economy. From direct employment of city staff who care for parks, to saving our city money with the ecosystem services open spaces provide. They also play an important role in our city's economy by driving tourism and supporting outdoor recreation businesses.



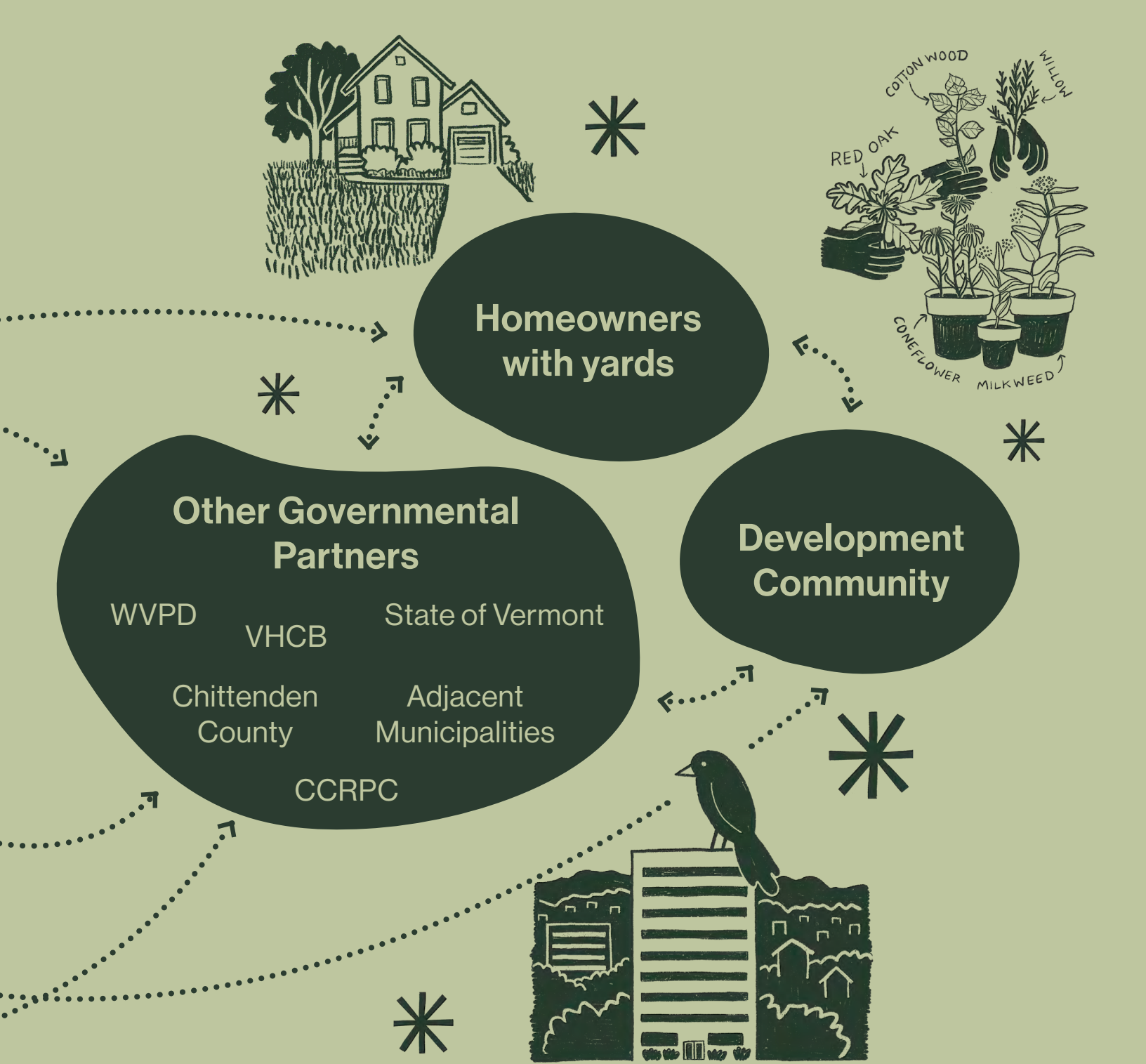


Ecosystem of Stewardship

We're all partners in the future of Burlington's open spaces.

While this document is primarily a roadmap for the City of Burlington, by working together, we can expand our collective impact. Continuing to steward, protect, and enhance our open spaces depends on all of us. Many of these organizations are regularly collaborating on open space initiatives and knowledge sharing—and many more are not listed. These are but a few of the champions who make a difference in open space stewardship.







Plan Process Overview

The Open Space Plan builds on the decades of open space planning and protection in Burlington.

The Open Space Plan reinforces the ongoing commitment to conservation, with a renewed roadmap to guide the next chapter of collaborative stewardship and a policy vision for management and access. As the city grows, Burlington wants to make sure everyone has fair access to high-quality open spaces while maintaining the ecological health of natural areas. The Plan expands on previous plans by:

- Connecting it with other city plans, like the Urban Forestry Plan.
- Working across City departments to make sure the Plan is visionary and feasible.
- Partnering with private owners to expand stewardship to more than City-owned land.
- Finding more ways to not just conserve open space but expand it as well.

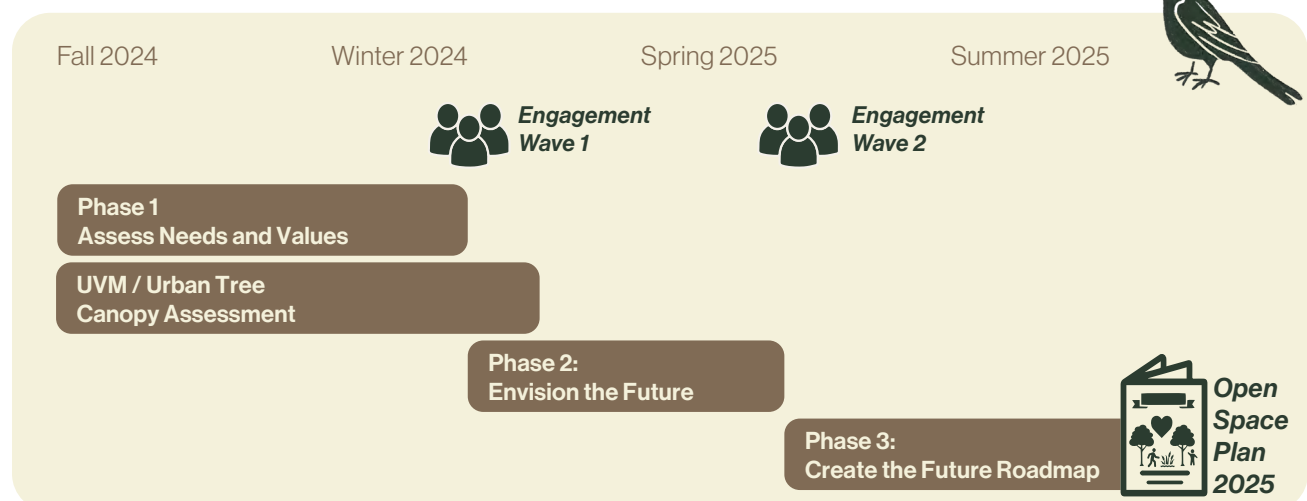
The Plan was created over a year across three planning phases with many collaborators and broad public input:

Phase 1: Assess Needs and Values

The first phase centered on understanding the history and current state of Burlington's open spaces. It assessed open space needs and values of the community.

Stakeholder focus groups were held to understand the most prominent issues faced by those who work with open spaces, and the community shared about their hopes and concerns for the future. In tandem, the University of Vermont's Spatial Analysis Lab conducted a Tree Canopy Assessment. The assessment included analysis on the city's land cover and the patterns and distribution of tree canopy changes over 10 years (from 2014 to 2023). Findings were shared with the public and incorporated into the Open Space Plan.

Project Schedule

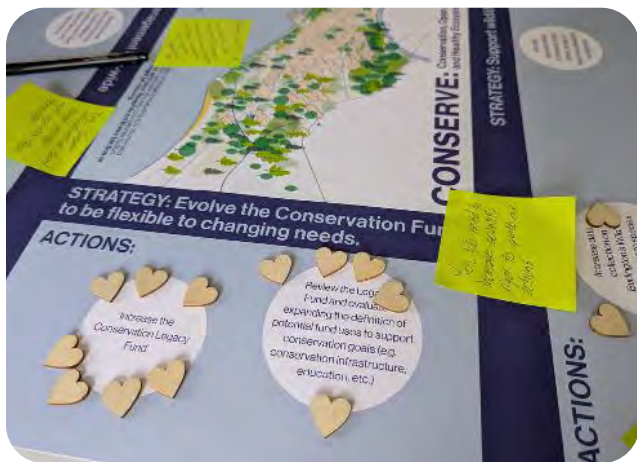


Phase 2: Envision the Future

Building on the community's stories and stakeholder input, the second phase envisioned the future and turned feedback into a draft policy vision with implementation steps. The vision was shared back with the community and stakeholders for input.

Phase 3: Create the Future Roadmap

Finally, the last phase created the future roadmap—this plan—that is guided by a vision statement and four key goals that reflect the core planning goals expressed by the community and stakeholders alike.





Community Input

“Open Space is for the people of Burlington—present and future.”
- 2000 Open Space Protection Plan

The Burlington community has been an integral collaborator throughout crafting this plan update, from the broad vision to the most specific action. The Open Space PI

and attended 18 events across two waves of engagement in 2025: the first in January and February centered around visioning and open space stories, and the second in May and June focused on the plan framework and policy recommendations. Across both waves, the project team shared details about the Plan and process to gain informed feedback from residents. Each wave included in-person events and online engagement to reach a broad audience. Some of these events included Winterville, Sea Caves skating, farmers markets, and Beach Bites.



Open spaces help build community.

Everybody should have access to fresh air and natural spaces!

18
events across
four months



3
school groups
engaged



Education of our youth is key—the entire city is a classroom!



I love this community and our commitment to open spaces.



125
open space
stories
shared

*Open spaces are free,
beautiful, connected places
to gather and learn.*



>230
online survey
respondents

>20
organizations
connected
with



12
stakeholder
focus groups

*Greenspaces are tied
within the fabric of the city.*



*Create a community and
culture of respect and
reciprocity.*



Community Perspectives on Open Space Opportunities

Hope for the future of Open Spaces

Importance of Burlington's open spaces



- A Ecosystem Services
- B Human Health and Wellbeing
- C Flooding in Food Growing Spaces

Balancing needs for people and nature



- A Open Space is Integral to a Thriving City
- B Connections to Nature
- C Balance Growth and Open Space Preservation

Community Concerns

- A Irregular Quality of Park Spaces
- B Pollution in Open Spaces
- C Flooding in Food Growing Spaces



- A Preserve Open Space While Meeting Housing and Other Needs
- B Maintaining momentum for ongoing care and preservation of open spaces



Feelings and Activities



Peace



Calm



Happy



Energized



Relaxed



Connected



Walk



Swim



Bike



Friends



Boat



Lake

Takeaways from common themes



Burlington's parks and open spaces are intertwined and support healthy air, water, people, and wildlife.



There are pressures from development and housing demands that need to be **balanced with future open space investments.**



Providing a variety of experiences



- A Open Spaces Support Social Interaction
- B Bolster the Local Economy and Make Burlington a Destination

Stewardship and climate resilience



- A Connections to Nature
- B Diverse Experiences
- C Mitigating Climate Change

- A Waitlist for Community Gardens
- B Park Rule Breakers
- C Physical Access for Persons with Disabilities



- A Funding for Maintenance
- B Impacts of Pollution and Aggressively Introduced Species



Be Active



Be Restful



Be Communal



Connect with Nature; Wildlife Habitat; Recreation; Clean Water and Air; Food Growth; Climate Resilience; Community Character



Natural spaces should be **accessible for all and support a range of experiences** and activities.



Healthy open spaces **connect us to nature and support a climate ready future**, so it is our job to protect and maintain them.





History of Open Space Use and Protection



Burlington has a long history of open space use and protection, stretching back to pre-colonial times and continuing to today. While there were times when forests were cleared and pollution was common, Burlingtonians over the past decades have realized how important nature is to our city. We've become a leader in open space planning in the nation!

A Pre 1700s



Abenaki couple, 1700s.
Source: City of Montreal

Early Inhabitants

Indigenous Groups: For hundreds of years, the Abenaki people inhabited and stewarded the land in the northeastern US and Canada. In and around modern-day Burlington, they grew beans, corn, and squash in the rich agricultural soil of the Winooski Floodplain.

B 1700s to 1800s



Burlington's Waterfront, 1800s.
Source: University of Vermont

Resource Extraction

In the 1700s, American settlers arrived and farmed the floodplain to support their communities. Some forests were cleared for new farmland.

In the 1800s, Burlington became a trading hub. More forests were cleared for lumber, farmland, and grazing land. The waterfront was lined with lumber yards, train companies, power generating plants, and water pumping facilities.



C Early 1900s

Logging in Vermont, 1900s.

Source: VT Dept. of Forests, Parks and Recreation

Industrialization and Ecological Decline

In the early 1900s, the Industrial Revolution ramped up across the US, and factories and coal gas plants popped up across Burlington, including the Barge Canal. Farming in the Intervale declined, and some of Intervale's land became dumping grounds.

D Mid 1900s



Gardening at the Intervale, 1980s.

Source: Vermont Community Garden Network

Environmental Movement

By the 1970s, the environmental movement was in full swing. Oil tanks on the waterfront were phased out and finally removed as part of a long-term waterfront plan. Conservation efforts began with the Winooski Valley Park District's acquisition of land and lake shoreline. Tommy Thompson's "Gardens for All" began to reclaim some of the farmland that had previously been lost and set up community gardens.

E 1900s and early 2000s



The Urban Reserve, 1990s.

Source: City of Burlington

Codifying Conservation

In the 1990s, residents called for more conservation efforts to protect natural areas in and around the City. The City purchased 40 acres of land now known as the Urban Reserve.

In the early 2000s, Burlington passed the city's first Open Space Protection Plan, becoming a pioneer among US cities to plan for the future of its green spaces. The Plan included the creation of the Conservation Legacy Fund and was closely followed by the Urban Forestry Master Plan.

F 2020s to today!



Burlington City Hall rain garden, 2020.

Source: Burlington Free Press

Planning for Climate and Equity

2020s: The City shifts open space planning to focus on equity and fighting climate change with "Nature Based Climate Solutions". Burlington recognizes that a thriving human community is necessary to protect existing natural areas, restore ecosystems, and steward natural resources for a green future.



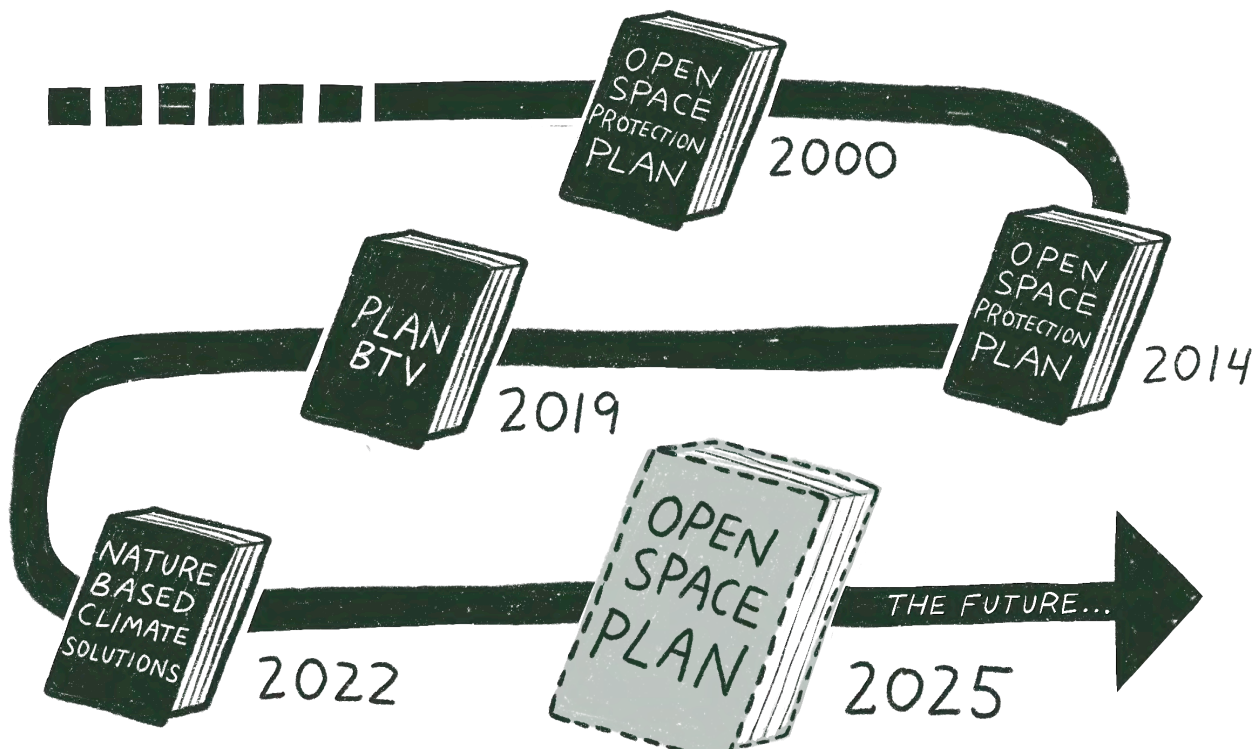


Legacy of Open Space Planning

Burlington's original Open Space Protection Plan was adopted in 2000.

It grew out of a 1997 City Council Resolution calling for the creation of "a plan to protect important natural areas and open spaces" and had a variety of goals related to identifying, protecting, and preserving the City's natural areas and open spaces. The Plan also created the Conservation Legacy Fund, which is still in use today. It was a visionary plan that grew from a long history of open space stewardship in Burlington and laid a foundation for both Burlington and other cities to protect their futures.

The City's 2014 Open Space Protection Plan Update inventories open space lands and characterizes them with respect to natural areas, urban agriculture, parklands, and green infrastructure. The 2014 Plan also assesses the proximity of residents to existing open space



amenities such as community gardens, parks, and the waterfront. The tactical nature and updated goals of the Plan can be used to identify underserved areas of the city and to determine the best places for open space protection and related open space amenities like community gardens and parklands.

Burlington continued to further the goals of the Open Space Protection Plan in 2022 through the adoption of “Nature Based Climate Solutions: An Addendum to the Burlington Open Space Protection Plan”. This addendum was written to further the goals identified in earlier plans, including the Open Space Plan and PlanBTV: Burlington’s Comprehensive Plan, while specifically identifying nature-based solutions that will combat climate change. It focuses on climate change and equity and is built on the inextricable link “that a thriving human community is necessary if we want to ensure thriving ecosystems.”

“Burlington’s citizens, non-profits, and government have a proud tradition of protecting what is important to them and what sets Burlington apart - its sense of place, natural environment, open spaces, and recreational opportunities

As needed growth continues, a comprehensive plan to protect the city’s most vulnerable natural areas and significant open spaces becomes a necessity.”

- 2000 Open Space Protection Plan



Open Space Stories

Conservation Legacy Fund

The Conservation Legacy Fund supports the ongoing protection of our open space network.

Zoe/Scott to share bulletpoints about fund history and use

350+
species of
native bees
in VT





Growing Open Space and Stewardship

In recent years, the City of Burlington and other partners have continued to expand open space and increase stewardship. Here are a few examples...



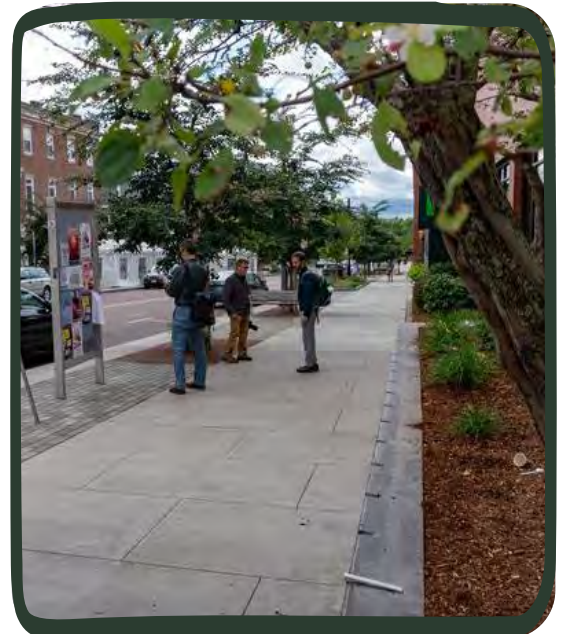
Northbend Orchard on Manhattan Drive

In 2020, residents on Manhattan Drive petitioned the city to plant fruit trees and move boulders to bring more life into a roadside grassy median. It was converted from a space with no ecological or community purpose to a no-mow zone that reestablishes habitat, attracts pollinators, and increases tree canopy.



St. Paul Street Green Infrastructure

St. Paul Street saw a major overhaul in 2018 that combined pedestrian-bicyclist initiatives with green stormwater infrastructure. Corner bumpouts made intersections safer and widened sidewalks became more comfortable while rain gardens, permeable pavers, and soil cells guide runoff to flow into the stormwater system.





Conservation Legacy Grants

The Conservation Legacy Grant is an annual grant program that supports local work on Nature-Based Climate Solutions. Since its inception, grants were awarded to projects that address strategies and actions identified in the Addendum's Implementation Matrix for at least two of the Addendum's six core principles.



Grow Wild Native Plant Giveaway

Grow Wild—a part of Burlington Wildways—has now run its third annual native plant giveaway in collaboration with the University of Vermont. They gave away over 1,300 seedlings in 2025. Planting native plants to enhance native plant diversity is a nature-based solution that can strengthen the local environment and help mitigate effects of climate change.



Burlington City and Lake Semester

Run out of Burlington High School, the Burlington City and Lake Semester program treats the city as its classroom to “explor[e] the people, places, problems and possibilities of our community.” Its curriculum covers a wide breadth of topics. Those pertaining to open space have included native species restoration and climate resilience tree-planting with Burlington Parks, Recreation and Waterfront Department and restoring reptile habitat at Delta Park.







2

Burlington's Open Spaces Today

Our city has many types of open space, from large parks to backyards. Together, these open space create a network that supports people and wildlife.



What is Open Space?

“Open space” describes areas that are green and have natural elements, like plants and animals.

They are used by people for many reasons, including recreation, play, leisure, and growing food. Environmentally, they’re critical for wildlife and for climate resilience. In cities, they provide residents with a connection to nature.

Typically, open space in cities is thought of primarily as parks, trails, water bodies, and natural areas. Burlington has an abundance of these that are frequented by residents and visitors alike, from the smallest Smalley Park to the trail-filled and mostly wild Arms Forest. Much of the city’s publicly-accessible open space lines waterways like Lake Champlain and the Winooski River—evidence of the city historically stewarding open space for public enjoyment and conservation.





There's more to Open Space than we think...

There are lots of other green spaces that should be cared for and planned for. Many other open spaces also contribute to Burlington's open space network, providing home to our city's wildlife and providing ecosystem services that we all benefit from.

Burlington's unique landscape includes working lands (such as the Intervale Center and community gardens), private open space, and other green spaces. Smaller spaces, such as lawns, pocket parks, and green infrastructure, can also be important interstitial pieces of the overall open space network. The ecological and environmental health of our city is not limited to public land. Water flows and wildlife movement seamlessly cross parcel boundaries, and 38% of our urban forest lives on private residential parcels. This Plan aims to guide actions by the City of Burlington, while also offering ways other partners and residents can also support open space stewardship.



E Working Lands

The Intervale Center, Starr Farm Garden



F Private Open Spaces

University of Vermont, Rock Point



G Other Green Spaces

Lawns, pocket parks, green infrastructure





Types of Open Space

Burlington is unique in the rich diversity of its open space. While it has those typically found in urban areas—parks and playgrounds—it also has many natural communities of statewide significance in natural areas like Derway Island and water bodies like Lake Champlain and the Winooski River. Burlington's open space network is not complete without areas that are not typically found in an urban space plan: working lands, private open spaces, and other open spaces. Planning for these types of land is critical to ensuring the health of the overall system and not just those on public lands.



Parks

Parks are areas used primarily by people for recreation and gathering. They vary greatly in size: some are many acres large, like Leddy Park, while others are a small patch of grass on a street corner, like Dewey Park. They also vary greatly in available amenities. They may include benches, water features, playgrounds, ballfields, and even skate parks.



Water Bodies

Water bodies include natural or man-made lakes and streams. They form a network of waterways that serve important ecological functions—including circulating water throughout natural areas and bringing water to wetlands and floodplains. They are also commonly enjoyed recreationally for swimming, kayaking, and other water-based activities.



Natural Areas

Natural areas are lands with outstanding natural resources that function with little interference from people. These include forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. They may have trails and limited amenities and are generally not intensely managed. In addition to serving ecological functions, they also provide people with direct connections to the natural world. In Burlington, natural areas include Derway Island, Arms Forest, Rock Point, and Centennial Woods.





Trails + Greenways

Many natural areas and parks have paths used by people for recreation and mobility. They can be paved or unpaved, single or multi-modal, through forests or along the water's edge. The Burlington Greenway is among the most well-known and well-loved multi-use paths in the city, stretching from its entire north-south extent along Lake Champlain. The 127 Bike Path serves a similar function on the eastern edge along the Intervale, and many trails connect between them through open space—including some that are part of Burlington Wildways.



Private Open Spaces

While local governments tend to concentrate open space efforts on public land, there is much privately owned land with green space that can also contribute to the ecological health and even sometimes the recreational experience of the community. Collaboration with landowners and actions by private property owners are critical to supporting the overall health of our city's ecosystems.

Examples: University of Vermont, Rock Point, Burlington Country Club



Working Lands

Working lands are considered lands used by people to grow food and other flora. They can be for personal or commercial use and span small community gardens to large agricultural plots like the Intervale. Having access to local working lands and their products allows communities to be more self-sustaining, relying less on supply chains for sustenance.



Other Open Spaces

In addition to the previously mentioned types, there are other areas—many small ones—that serve or have the potential to serve greening and cooling purposes throughout the city. They are often overlooked as being interstitial spaces but, all together, can contribute positively to open space network. They can include lawns, pocket parks, green infrastructure, planted medians, school yards, vacant lots, and cemeteries.



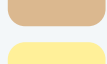
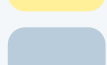


Open Space Inventory

This map shows the current inventory of open space in Burlington.

It includes the seven types of open space with the addition of the tree canopy. Shown together, we can see how green Burlington is. Though not all this land is publicly accessible, we can also get a sense of in what areas we can enjoy natural spaces—much of the green space shown is not in an officially designated park, it could be in your backyard.

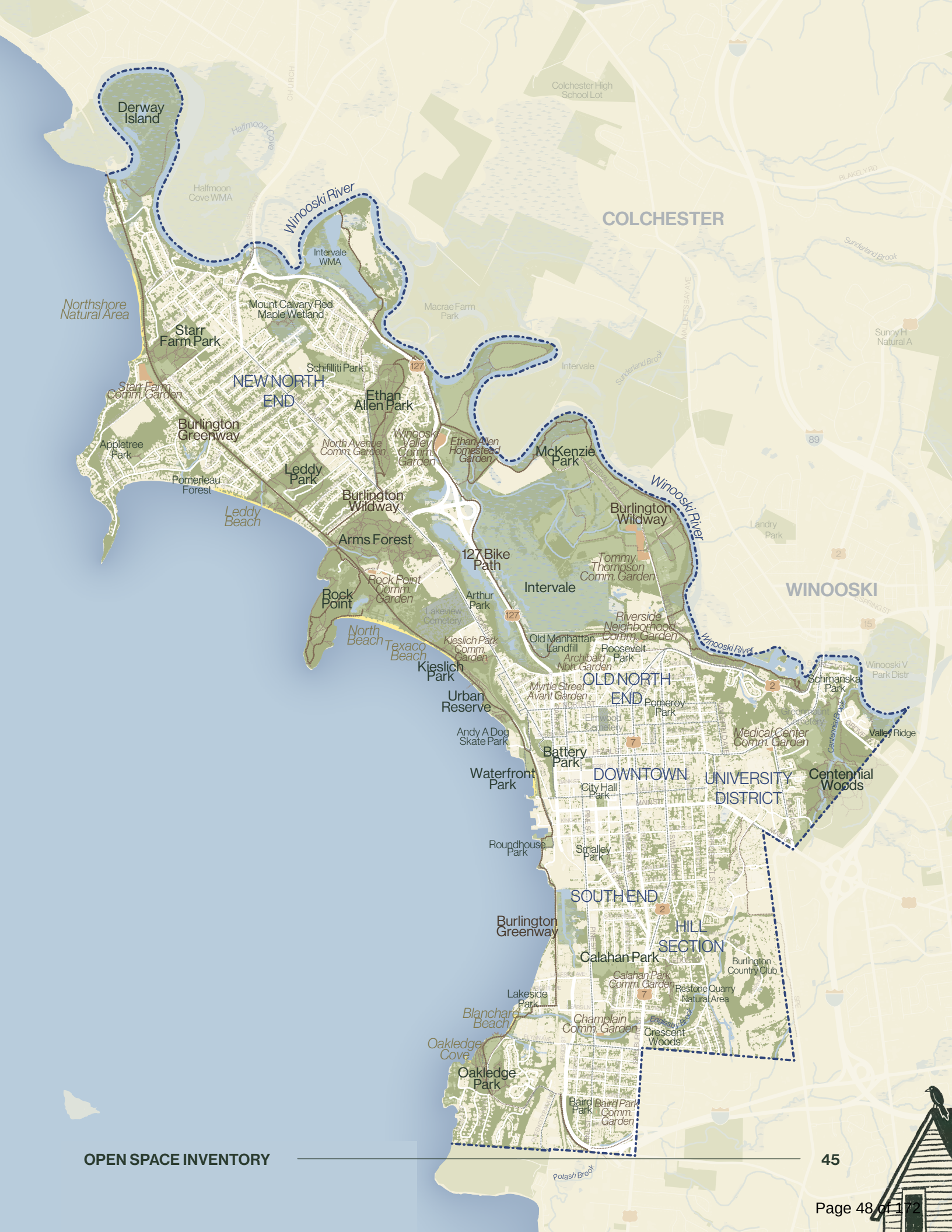
Find your favorite open space and see what else is nearby!

-  Burlington Border
-  Trails & Greenways
-  Bike Infrastructure
-  Tree Canopy
-  Parks & Natural Areas
-  Cemetery*
-  Community Gardens[†]
-  Beach
-  Water
-  Wetland

* Cemeteries are considered other open space, along with lawns, pocket parks, green infrastructure, planted medians, school yards, vacant lots.

† Community gardens are a type of working land. The Intervale, shown on this map as a park or natural area, is the main agricultural working land in Burlington.







Burlington's Natural Communities

The 2014 Open Space Protection Plan identified several natural communities that comprise most of the natural and semi-natural lands (about 67 percent) of the City's 6,775 acres of undeveloped land and water. The communities listed below represent the majority of the naturalized land surface in Burlington's natural areas and parks.



Dry Oak-Pine Forest

Small forests on ridgetops, south to west slopes, with thin soil and rocky outcrops.



Mesic Pine-Oak Sandplain Forest

Small to moderate-sized forests on gentle slopes and level ground in sandy outwash and lakeplain; most extensive upland forest type in City.



Red Maple Swamp

Small to moderate-sized depressions in landscape; high water table; floods in spring.



Silver Maple Floodplain Forest

Moderate-sized to large forests in the floodplain of the Winooski River; most extensive forest type in City.



Alder Swamp

Small depressional areas in level to gently sloping landscapes, including floodplains.



Emergent Marsh

Low, permanently inundated areas in floodplains and at edges of lakes and rivers.



Natural Community Types



* * * * *

Dry Oak-Pine Forest

Main Species

- Red oak
- White pine
- Black oak
- Big-tooth aspen
- Hickory

Soil

Farmington extremely rocky loam; Colton and Stetson sand

Major Issues

- Tree regeneration suppression by common buckthorn, Morrow's honeysuckle
- Managing transition from Norway maple and black locust to diverse canopy

Restoration Priorities

- Ensure native tree canopy replacement by controlling structure-altering unwanted species
- Maintain continuous forest canopy cover
- Manage understory shading to support tree seedlings and native shrubs/herbs
- Reduce edge effects by reversing forest fragmentation



* * * * *

Mesic Pine-Oak Sandplain Forest

Main Species

- White pine, oak (red, white, black)
- American beech
- Ironwood
- Eastern hemlock
- Sugar maple
- Red maple
- Black cherry

Soil

Adams and Windsor loamy sand; Hartland very fine sandy loam

Major Issues

- Tree regeneration suppressed by buckthorn (common, glossy), Morrow's honeysuckle, Norway maple
- Managing transition from single-species pine plantations to diverse forest canopy

Restoration Priorities

- Ensure native tree canopy replacement by controlling structure-altering unwanted species
- Maintain continuous forest canopy cover
- Manage understory shading to support tree seedlings and native shrubs/herbs
- Reduce edge effects by reversing forest fragmentation





Burlington's Natural Communities

Natural Community Types



Red Maple Swamp

Main Species

- Red maple
- Ash (green, black)
- Oak (black, red)
- Paper birch
- White pine

Major Issues

- Small size invites aggressively introduced species and over-use
- Alteration of groundwater due to surrounding impervious cover and surface drainage
- Colonization by deep-shade-casting trees and shrubs (e.g. sugar/Norway maple; glossy buckthorn)

Restoration Priorities

- Reduce edge effects by native shrub plantings at margins
- Monitor and manage tree canopy regeneration
- Monitor and manage shrub layer to support native ground layer

Soil

Au Gres fine sandy loam (seasonally wet)



Silver Maple Floodplain Forest

Main Species

- Silver maple
- Box-elder
- Cottonwood
- Green ash

Major Issues

- Many unwanted community-altering plant species due to frequent flooding
- Edge effects in narrow bands of forest

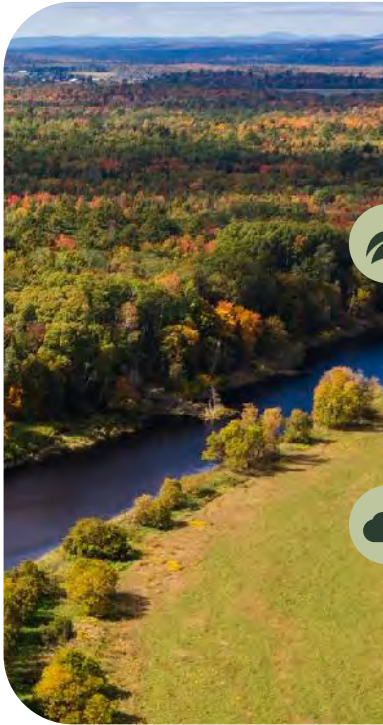
Restoration Priorities

- Identify most abundant structure-altering species for control
- Focus control on early infestations of these species
- Reduce edge effects by reversing forest fragmentation

Soil

Limerick silt loam; Winooski very fine sandy loam; Hadley very fine sandy loam—all types are flooded





* * * * *

Alder Swamp



Main Species

- Speckled alder
- Willow
- Quaking aspen
- Reed canary grass
- Sedges
- Bluejoint reed grass



Soil

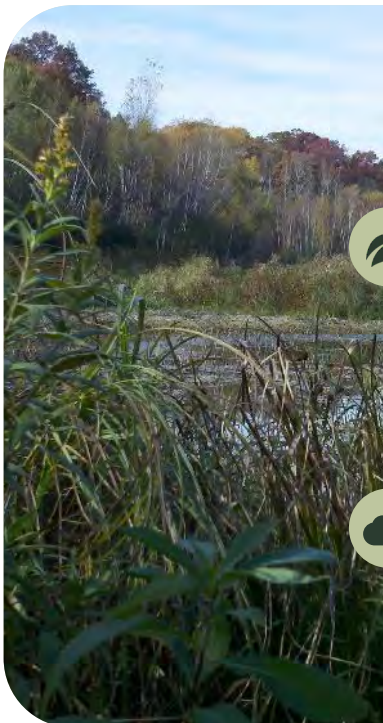
Covington silty clay (wet), others

Major Issues

- Reduced plant and pollinator diversity due to local dominance by reed canary grass

Restoration Priorities

- Identify and evaluate candidates for restoration where other plant communities are being restored and managed for the long term



* * * * *

Emergent Marsh



Main Species

- Narrow-leaved cattail
- Giant reed
- Reed canary grass
- Bulrushes
- Sedges



Soil

(Unknown)

Major Issues

- Dominance by a few plant species
- Low plant and pollinator diversity

Restoration Priorities

- Identify and evaluate candidates for restoration where other plant communities are being restored and managed for the long term





Urban Forest Snapshot

The University of Vermont's Spatial Analysis Lab conducted a Tree Canopy Assessment to detect and analyze changes in the city's tree canopy across a ten-year period, from 2014 to 2023. Using LiDAR data and processes developed by the USDA Forest Service, they found that Burlington has 40% tree canopy coverage—an overall 1.6% decrease in ten years.

The change was not consistent across the city's area: some places lost trees (like parts of the New North End, Downtown, and South End) while others gained (like the University District, Intervale, and Rock Point). Tree canopy change was attributed to a number of factors: some losses were individual tree removals on private yards while others were cleared patches for new construction. Growth of existing tree canopy was the biggest contributor to gains.

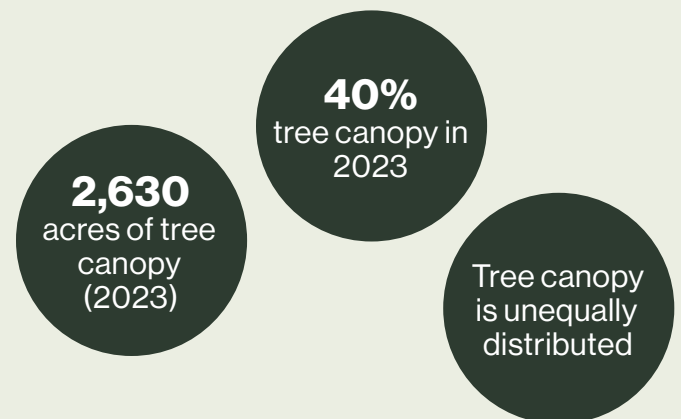
To aid the city in planning how to maintain or grow tree canopy for the next ten years, the assessment also included analyzing landcover to quantify existing tree canopy, possible tree canopy, and land not suitable for trees. Areas with possible tree canopy could be vegetated areas that do not currently have trees, such as grass or shrub area, or paved areas that could be converted to green, such as bare soil or parking lots. 33% of the city's land area falls into this category—though some, like agricultural land in the Intervale, is culturally not suitable for trees. Combined with local knowledge, this assessment can help the city plan for opportunities to increase tree canopy.

Urban Tree Canopy Assessment by UVM

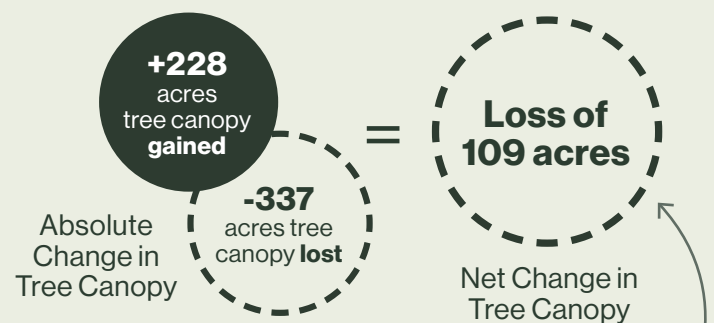


Trees in Burlington

111,912+
Individual trees
estimated in 2023



Change in Tree Canopy (2014-2023)



*That's the equivalent of
18 Battery Parks,
15 Sea Cave skating areas, or
1.5 Ethan Allen Parks!*





Burlington's urban forest includes a mix of larger patches to smaller patches to isolated trees.

Larger forests like at Rock Point, Arms Forest, and Ethan Allen Park support a range of local and migrating wildlife.

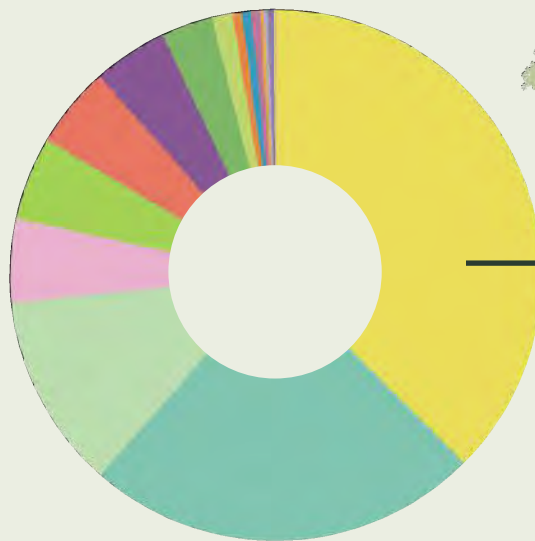


Urban Forest Snapshot

Urban Forest Today

Trees by Land Use

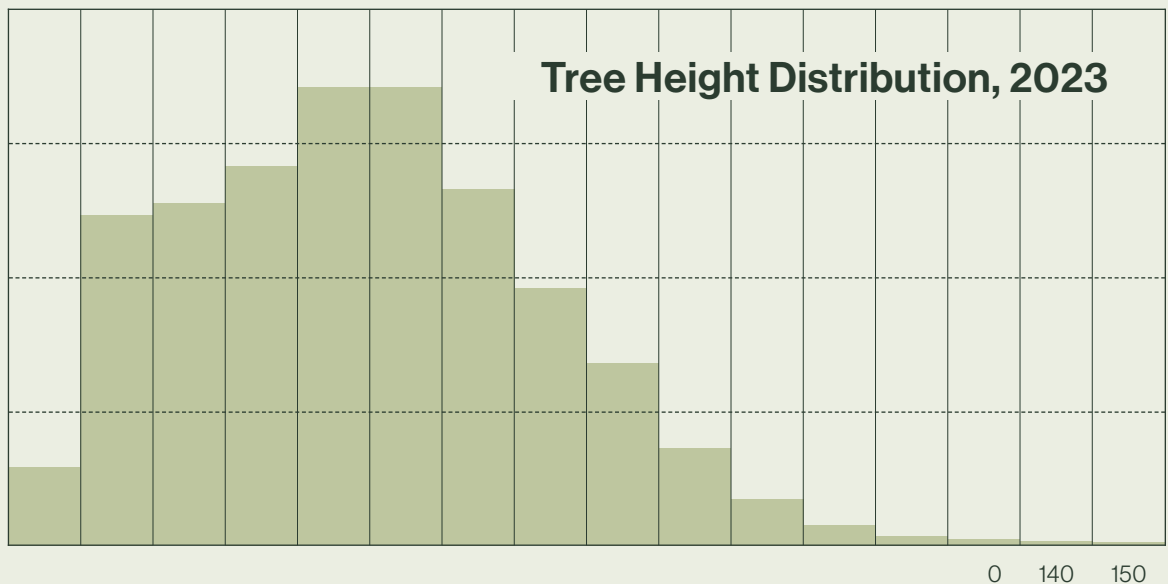
- Parcel Land Use
- City Park
 - City Property
 - Commercial
 - Education - Champlain
 - Education - City Owned
 - Education - Private
 - Education - UVM
 - Farm
 - Farmland
 - Federally Owned
 - Land
 - Mixed Com/Resident
 - ROW - Railroad
 - ROW-Private
 - Religious Institution
 - Residential
 - State Owned
 - Unknown
 - Vacant Land
 - Winooski River



37.5%

of Burlington's tree canopy exists on **residential parcels**.

Engaging with land owners will be key to managing the city's tree canopy.

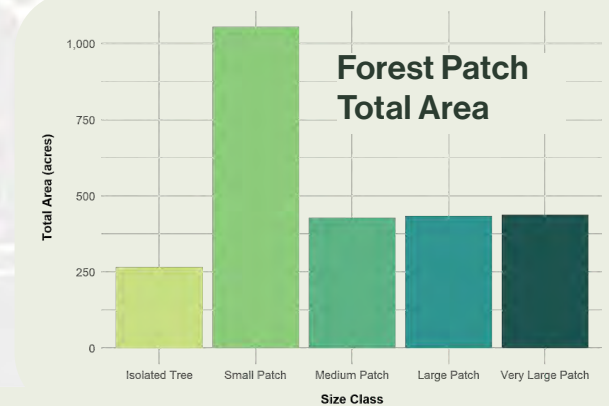


Urban Tree Canopy Assessment by UVM





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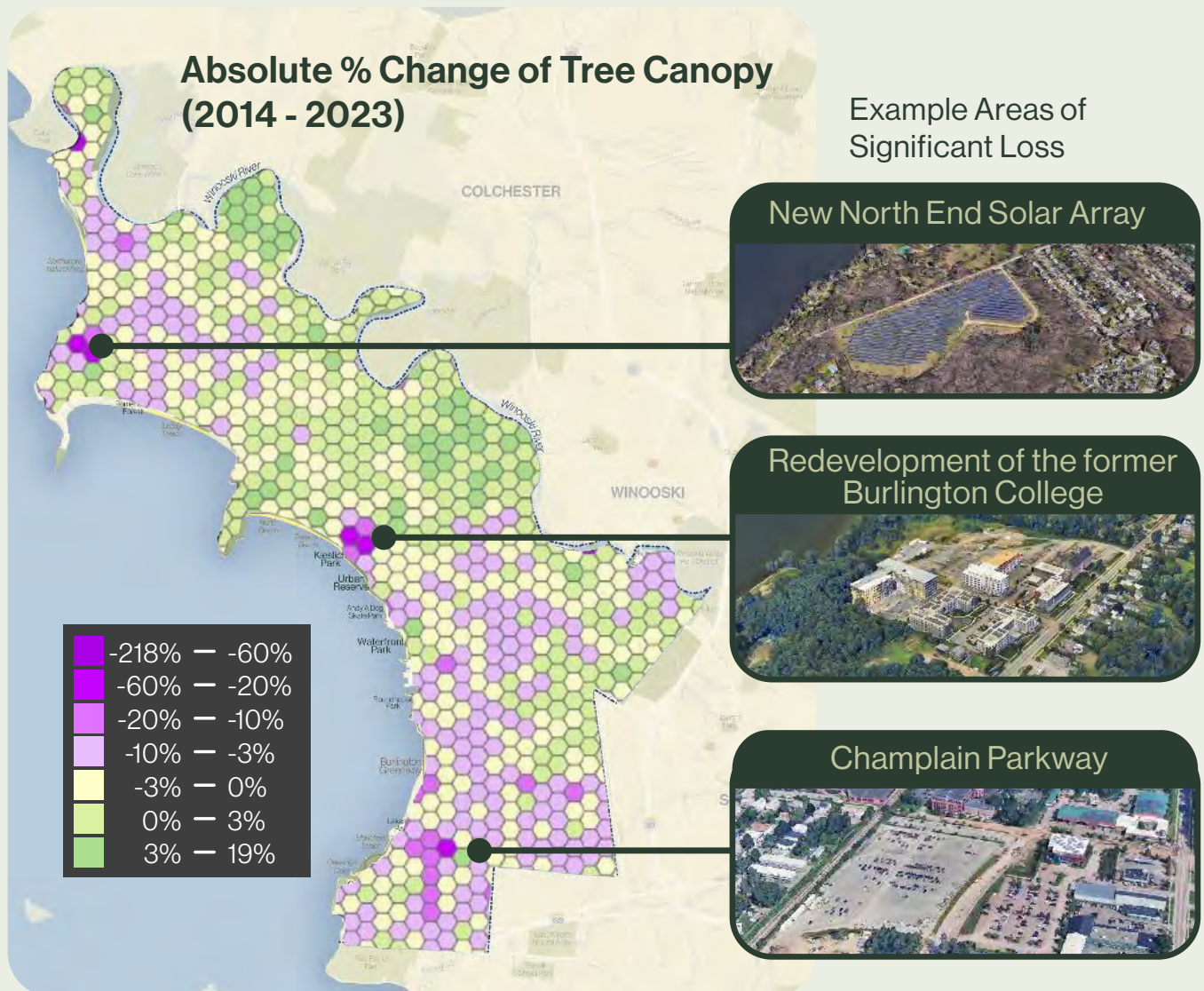


Urban Forest Snapshot

Changes in last 10 years

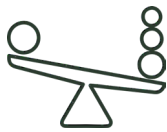
Burlington has experienced a net decrease in tree canopy over the 2014 to 2023 time period, but the story of change is more nuanced, with a mix of loss and gain. All areas of the city experienced both gains and losses of tree canopy, though some

areas saw a net increase and others a net decrease. Removal and die off of mature trees resulted in the loss of large patches of tree canopy. Mature trees with large crowns contribute substantially to tree canopy and take decades to grow, so their loss



Urban Tree Canopy Assessment by UVM





Losses in tree canopy are outpacing gains, resulting in a net decrease in tree canopy. Burlington has experienced 4% relative loss of tree canopy.



Growth of existing tree canopy is the biggest contributor to Burlington's tree canopy gains.

creates large, localized declines in tree canopy. Even though there was evidence of tree loss throughout Burlington, planting efforts, preservation programs, and natural growth helped offset losses and stem decline.



Open Space Stories

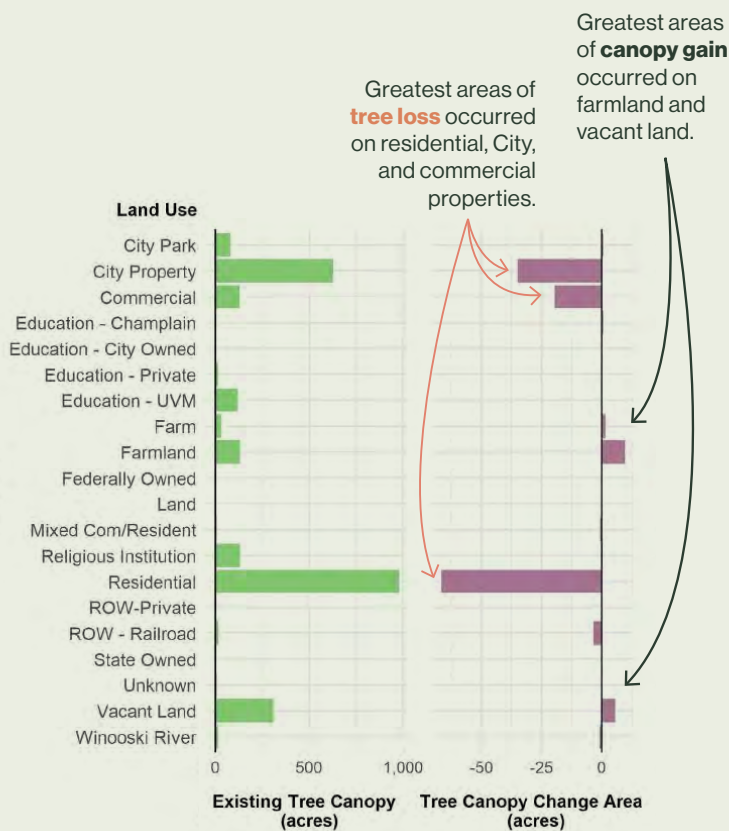
Role of Trees

Tree canopy is important for human health for so many reasons.

Trees help clean the air by removing pollution, which makes it easier to breathe and reduces asthma and other lung problems. They provide shade, keeping neighborhoods cooler during hot weather, which can prevent heat-related illnesses.

Trees also reduce stress and improve mood; just being around nature can make people feel calmer and happier. Between 2014 and 2023, Burlington lost 4% of its tree canopy, which is almost 500 trees.

By planting just one new tree, Burlington can remove enough CO₂ to offset 13 miles of car travel and absorb six bathtubs of stormwater!



What does the lost tree canopy over the last ten years equate to?

-109 acres
of tree canopy change





A photograph of a person riding a bicycle away from the camera on a paved path. The path is surrounded by dense trees with vibrant autumn foliage in shades of green, yellow, and orange. Sunlight filters through the leaves, creating dappled shadows on the path. The person is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, dark shorts, and a blue cap.

3

Vision and Goals

Building on the original vision from the 2000 Open Space protection plan, this chapter reaffirms our city's commitment to stewarding Burlington's open space network.



Vision Statement

Burlington is a Nature-Filled City



Healthy open spaces that connect lake to river create a linked network where wildlife thrives. Around every corner, there are a variety of natural experiences that can be enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Community gardens and urban farms burst with local produce. Burlington's open spaces invite all to explore, play, and grow — **creating a city where people and ecosystems flourish side by side.**



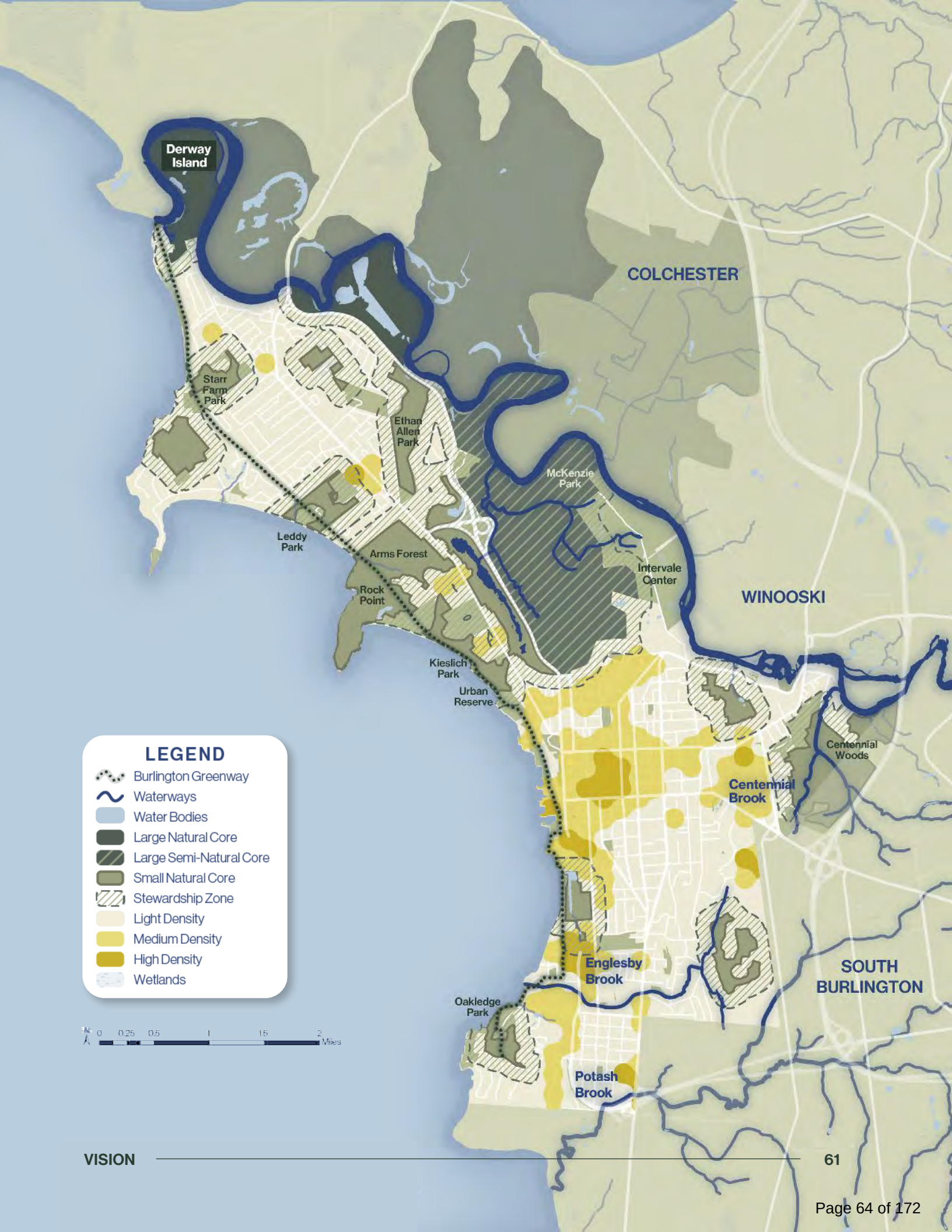


Healthy Connected Ecosystems Framework

Since the first settlers arrived in Burlington and settled along the shores of what is now Lake Champlain, the city's ecosystem has undergone significant changes to meet the needs of a growing population, shifting industry demands, and the impacts of human activity on wildlife patterns. To reinvest in the city's open spaces, wildlife health, and human connections to nature, the plan outlines a comprehensive, scientifically based ecological framework that is widely accessible and actionable by city staff, advocates, and the broader public.

Burlington's healthy ecosystem framework describes the conditions that enable an ecosystem to maintain its structure, function, and ability to recover from change and development. This includes a foundation of protected core natural areas that are large enough and continuous enough to support wildlife that depend upon large natural areas to live. This framework identifies where to prioritize conservation efforts and sustainable resource management to have the greatest impact. It shows where actions in and near open spaces should be considered with a heightened lens for their open space impacts and stewardship opportunities.







Layers of the Healthy Ecosystems Framework

Core Ecological Areas



Water, Wetlands, and Floodplains



Impervious Surface Density



Tree Canopy





Goals and Strategies Overview

CONSERVE

Stewarding Burlington's network of protected lands to support healthy ecosystems and a healthy city

- CS1** Expand restoration and management city-wide
- CS2** Support wildlife movement and ecological health
- CS3** Evolve the conservation fund to be flexible to changing needs
- CS4** Collaborate to acquire land to protect open space for future generations



CONNECT

Knitting the landscape together through stewardship and nature-based development

- CN1** Grow and celebrate nature-based climate solutions across the city
- CN2** Cultivate an ecosystem of stewardship
- CN3** Enhance and protect Burlington's urban forest
- CN4** Encourage new development to incorporate nature-based principles



EXPERIENCE

Expanding a variety of nature experiences across Burlington

- EX1** Increase awareness about Burlington's open spaces
- EX2** Grow public access to nature-based experiences
- EX3** Break down barriers to open space access



CULTIVATE

Growing sustainable and accessible local food systems that meet community needs

- CL1** Cultivate sustainable and resilient agriculture practices
- CL2** Expand community gardens
- CL3** Support the cultivation of alternate food sources

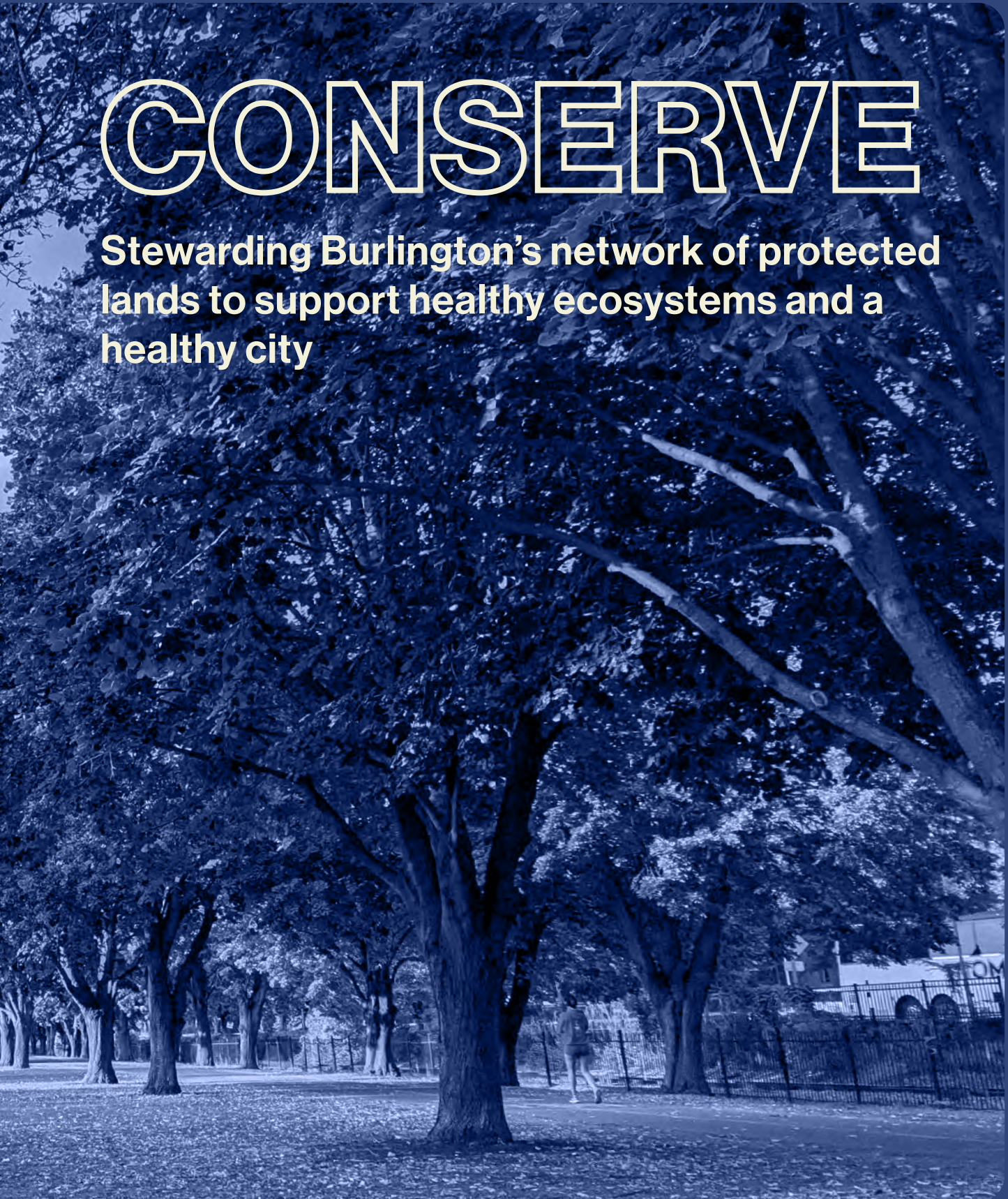




GOAL ONE

CONSERVE

Stewarding Burlington's network of protected lands to support healthy ecosystems and a healthy city





CONSERVE Overview

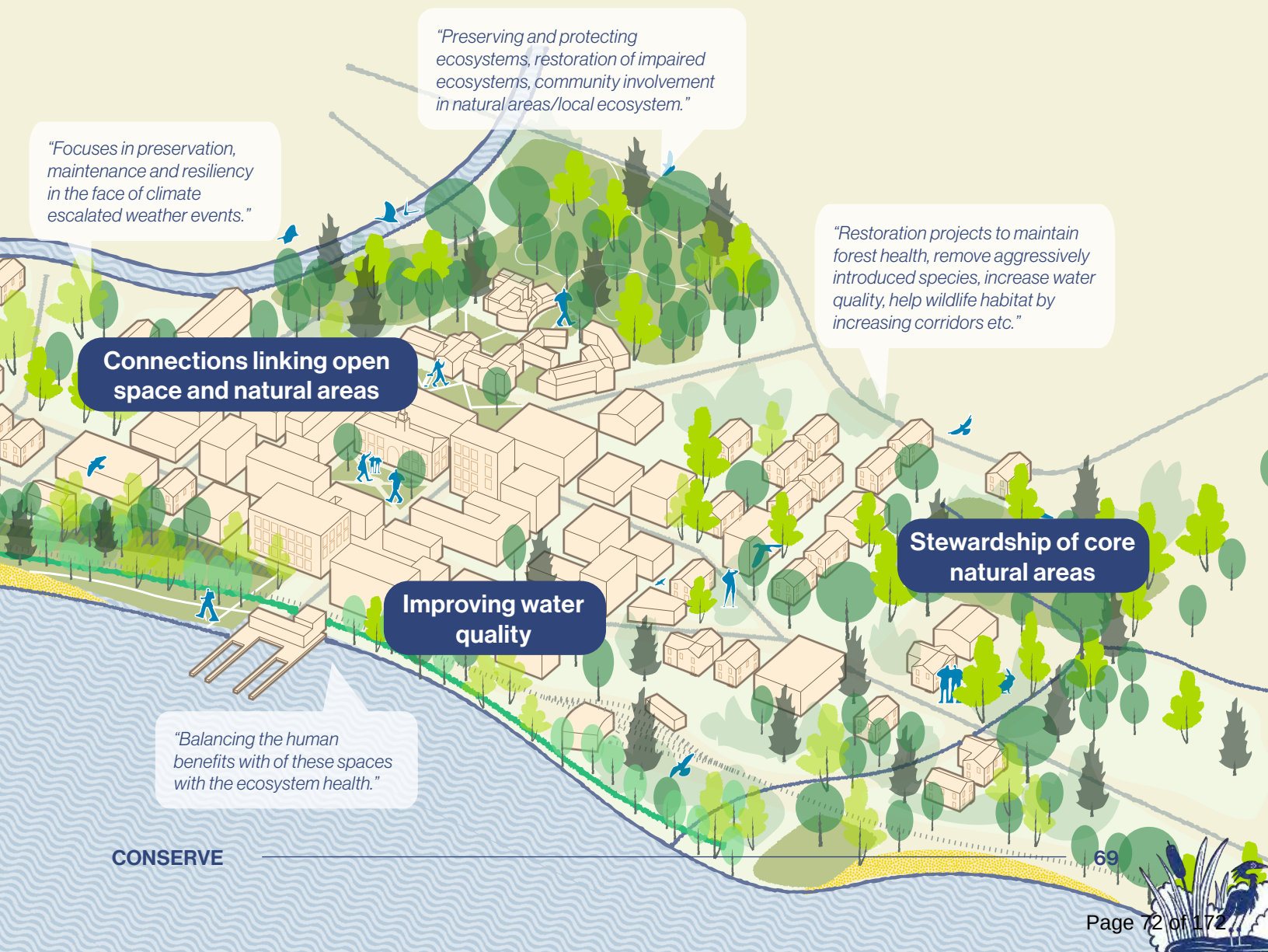
Building on a long legacy of open space protection

Burlington's open space network is special because it includes not just urban parks for people to enjoy, but also large natural spaces that are both locally and regionally significant for wildlife and connected to areas outside the city. Expanding on the 2000 Open Space Protection Plan, this new update provides a roadmap for ongoing protection, restoration, and management efforts undertaken by the city or large land stewards.



CONSERVE Strategies

- CS1** Expand restoration and management city-wide
- CS2** Support wildlife movement and ecological health
- CS3** Evolve the Conservation Fund to be flexible to changing needs
- CS4** Collaborate to acquire land to protect open space for future generations





CONSERVE

Overview

Burlington's ecosystems depend upon healthy waters and a network of preserved lands.

All elements of the natural world are connected. While the relationships that people have with water and land differ vastly, their relationship to each other is inextricable. The flow of water brings nourishment to the land—including through the flooding of floodplains—while runoff from and drainage through land replenishes and enriches the water. Together, they form a network of connected habitats that allow wildlife populations to thrive.

The CONSERVE goal outlines a framework for shared stewardship to support the long-term health of our city's waters and lands.

Water, Wetlands, and Floodplains

From Lake Champlain to the Winooski River to urban brooks, water is integral to healthy ecosystems and community life in Burlington. The ecological health of these waterways is largely influenced by actions and land use across their full watersheds, but Burlington can help by reducing pavement, adding more green spaces, and reducing runoff.



L Champlain

Lake Champlain's 12 miles of shoreline on Burlington's western edge is lined with open spaces. Much of Burlington's land area drains directly into the Lake, including via Englesby Brook. Though the lakeshore was once full of industrial plants, it has in many areas returned to a more natural state that many wildlife species call home.



U Brooks

A number of brooks flow through Burlington, such as Centennial Brook, Englesby Brook, and Potash Brook. In some areas they are surrounded by tree canopy and open space while in others they abut private properties. There are on-going stewardship efforts and opportunities to manage issues like erosion and aggressively introduced species.



- Waterways
- Water
- Floodplains
- Wetlands

COLCHESTER

Winooski River

WINOOSKI

Lake Champlain

Centennial Brook

Englesby Brook

Potash Brook

SOUTH BURLINGTON

Winooski River

With a total length of 90 miles and watershed spanning 1,080 square miles, the Winooski River starts in the Green Mountains and drains into Lake Champlain. It is a critical part of a riparian system that floods its banks—such as the Intervale—and serves as a protected wildlife corridor.

Wetlands

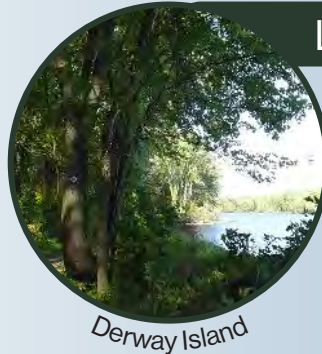
Wetlands are rich ecosystems that support a wide variety of species across all seasons. Development pressures and lack of understanding of their ecological functions resulted in widespread wetland drainage throughout the 1800s and 1900s. Burlington currently has 380 acres of protected wetlands.





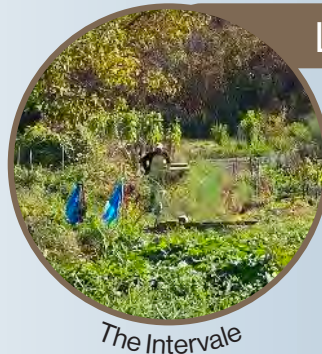
Core Ecological Areas

Burlington's core ecological lands work together to form a network that supports wildlife, cleans air, and absorbs rainfall. These open spaces vary in size and include a range of landscapes, from forests to fields to semi-natural areas, like the Intervale.



Large Natural Core

Preserve large areas for ecosystem integrity at scale and support regionally uncommon species.



Large Semi-Natural Core

Preserve large mixed natural, semi-natural, and agriculture landscapes for food production and ecosystem integrity.



Small Natural Core

Larger isolated blocks of forest (some wetlands, grassland, brushland) embedded in urban landscape.



Stewardship Zone

Support neighbors of open spaces to take stewardship actions that reduce the edge effects on nearby core areas.





LEGEND

- Large Natural Core
- Large Semi-Natural Core
- Small Natural Core
- Stewardship Zone
- Waterways
- Water
- Floodplains
- Wetlands

0 0.25 0.5 1 1.5 2 Miles

Large Core Areas

Large Natural Core



PURPOSE

Preserve large areas for ecosystem integrity at scale and support regionally uncommon species.

EXISTING PROTECTIONS

Majority of land in large cores is protected public open space (Derway Island, Howe Farm); floodplain, wetland and natural resource ordinances protect most of remainder.

OPPORTUNITIES

- All combined, over 2000-acre expanse of largely natural land
- Potential habitat for larger or area-sensitive animals (river otter, mink, bobcat)
- Non-public land is largely in regulatorily-protected floodplain

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Challenge of cross-river collaboration
- Challenge of river flooding introducing unwanted plant species
- Edge effects where residences abut natural area



Semi-Natural Agricultural Core



PURPOSE

Preserve large mixed natural, semi-natural, and agriculture landscapes for food production and ecosystem integrity.

EXISTING PROTECTIONS

Almost half in Intervale; some in McKenzie Park and McCrae Farm Park. Floodplain, wetland and natural resource ordinances protect much of remainder.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Some 1700 acres of continuous floodplain, wetlands and uplands in a mosaic of natural and agricultural land
- The Intervale Center is integral to City identity and part of core

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Challenge of cross-river collaboration
- Challenge of river flooding introducing unwanted plant species
- Edge effects where residences and VT 127 abut natural area
- Reducing fragmentation of floodplain forest requires strategic restoration of agricultural land to forest



Small Core Areas

Small Natural/ Semi-Natural Core



PURPOSE

Larger isolated blocks of forest embedded in urban landscape.

EXISTING PROTECTIONS

Some in parks, or protected by natural resource ordinance, or on institutional land with low prospect for development (e.g., Rock Point).

OPPORTUNITIES

- Continuous forest cover and good tree diversity – less canopy underplanting
- Localized unwanted plant invasions (e.g., knotweed, Norway maple) or light/moderate (e.g., buckthorn, honeysuckle) – forest structure less likely to change if addressed now
- Native groundlayer plants – less need for expensive plantings

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Non-targeted interventions expending resources and patience
- Weak program for ecosystem management
- Long-term stewardship weakly integrated in daily operations



Inventory Process

In November 2024, the project team visited 19 sites representing a range of ecosystems in Burlington. The purpose of the site visit was to identify issues affecting ecological integrity, diversity, and resilience in natural and semi-natural lands.

The sites included:

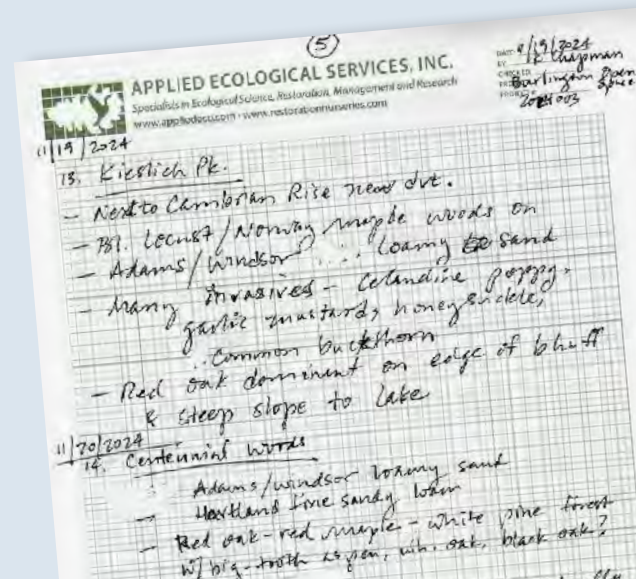
- Large blocks of natural and semi-natural land
- Public parks
- Smaller, interesting natural areas



Sites visited



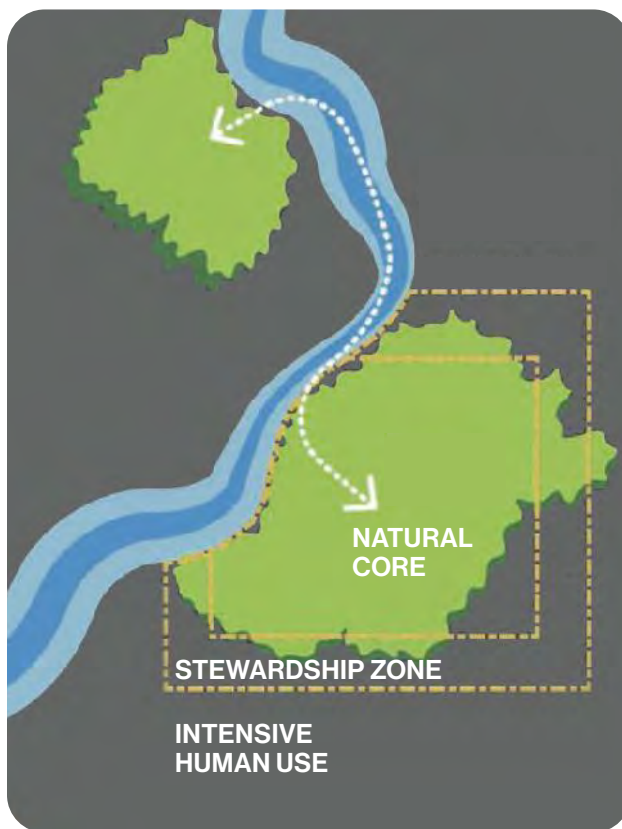
Example of field notes from site visits





Edge Effects and Stewardship Zones

Human development affects nearby natural areas, but we can work together to reduce the negative impacts.



Purpose of Conservation

When thinking of conservation, we take an ecological point of view and envision how to keep the nature we love and avoid damaging it in the future. We think first of the species we'd like our great-grandchildren to see a hundred years from now. These are the common plants, like oaks and pines, and uncommon plants, like orchids and spring wildflowers. Along with these are fungi and soil organisms. Then we turn to generalist wildlife, such as robins, goldfinches, crows, deer, raccoons, foxes, white-footed mice, American toads, garter snakes, bluegills and the fish we usually catch. We also think of habitat specialists and area-sensitive wildlife, like big carnivores and the many warblers and migratory birds that travel thousands of miles to breed here. Lastly, we think of the common and rare insects, many of them pollinators of wildflowers, orchard trees, and crop plants.

The common plants and wildlife can tolerate and even thrive in cities, towns, and rural lands. They are not the focus of conservation because their populations are usually stable or increasing.

Core/Interior Habitats and Edge Habitats
SOURCE: Bentrup, 2008

■ Edge Habitat
■ Interior Habitat

Edge width based on 150 ft



100 acre
27% Edge
73% Interior



10 acre
68% Edge
32% Interior



1 acre
100% Edge
0% Interior

By contrast, uncommon plant and insect species, and wildlife specialists or area-sensitive animals often have declining populations. Many need large and diverse core natural areas to sustain themselves.

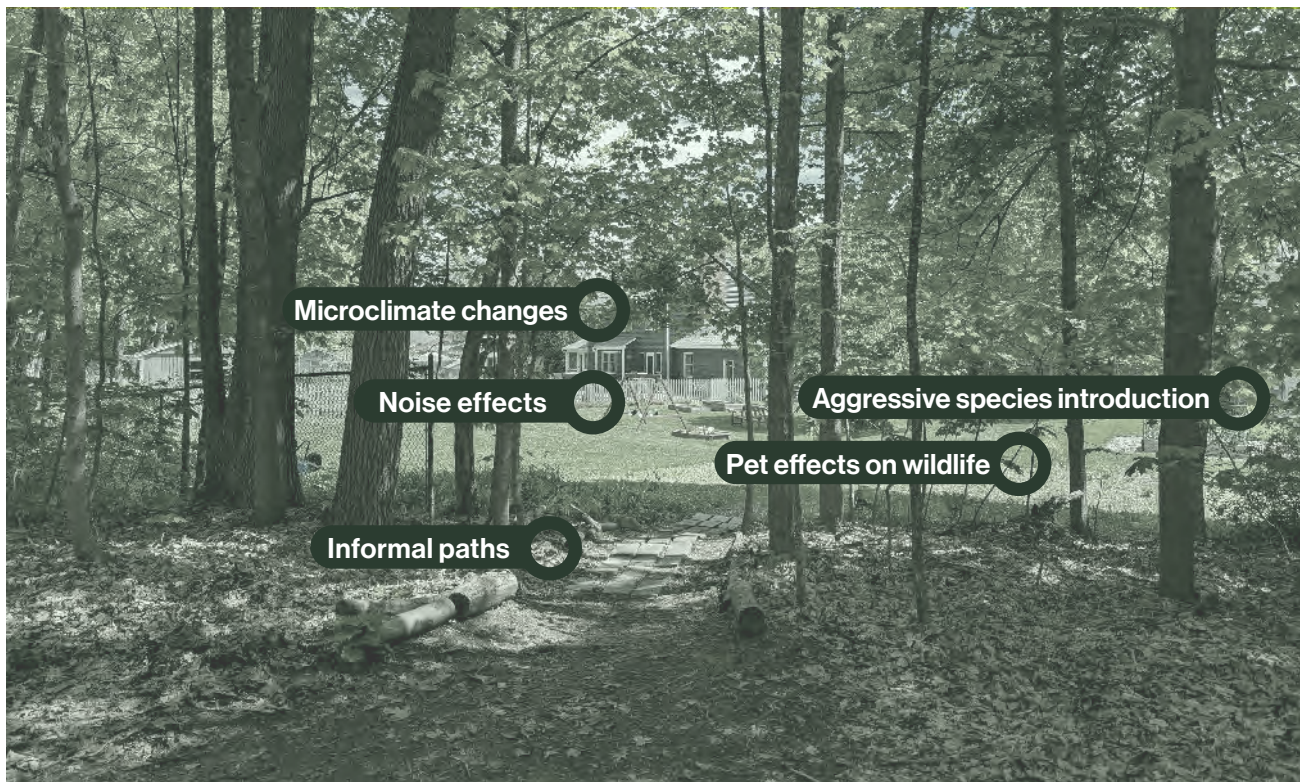
The direct effect on natural areas of conversion to crops and urban or suburban development is well documented. Less obvious are long-term effects from a longer habitat edge compared to the habitat's interior area. Smaller and narrower habitats have more edge than larger, rounder ones.

Edge Effects

Edge effects are damaging influences on core natural areas due to other uses on adjacent lands that penetrate the cores, reducing their suitability for many plant and animal species.

As the length of edge around a natural core grows, interior habitat shrinks. Scientific studies show

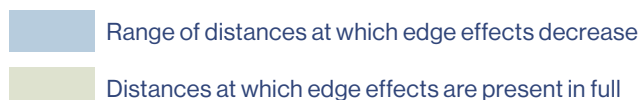
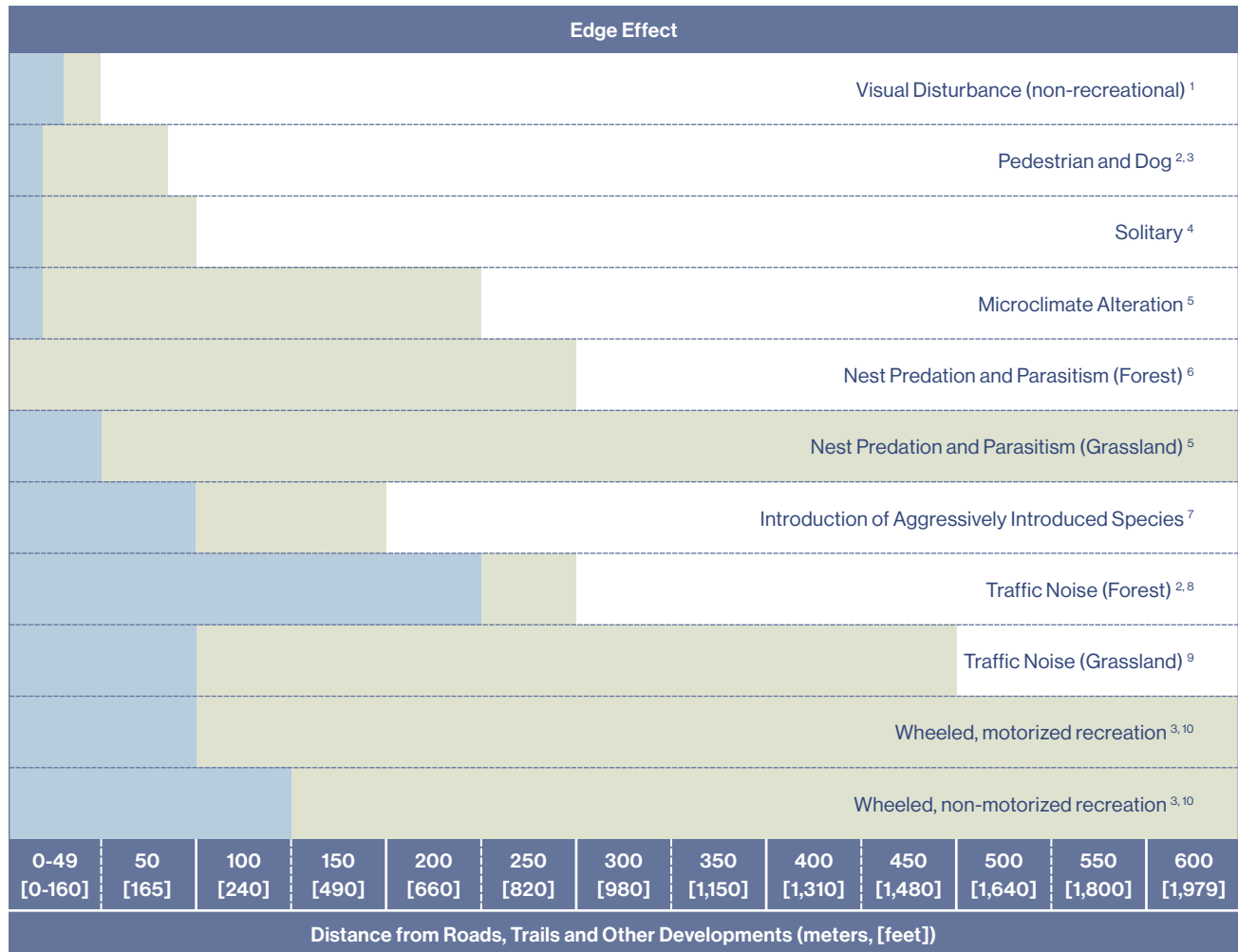
how far edge effects penetrate into adjacent habitat (see table on next page). For instance, birds and other wildlife can be flushed by people walking on trails up to 150 feet away. Predators like raccoon and house cat will travel several hundred feet into forests and grasslands to prey on bird eggs, nestlings, small mammals and other wildlife. Aggressively introduced plants move from edges into natural areas. Traffic noise, warm and dry air, dust from roads, pesticide drift, and other damaging influences affect nearby natural areas. Management can reduce edge effects. In stewardship zones around natural areas, neighbors can act in ways that lessen edge effects. Where room allows, natural areas can be made more round or protected with native vegetation screens.





Edge Effects and Stewardship Zones

Edge Effect Distances



Distance of Edge Effect Penetration into Adjacent Natural Areas

SOURCE: ¹Fish and Wildlife Service (2006), ²Miller et al. (2001), ³Snetsinger and White (2009), ⁴Fernandez-Juricic et al. (2005), ⁵Environmental Law Institute (2003), ⁶Soule (1991), ⁷Askins (1995), ⁸Reijnen et al. (1995), ⁹Reijnen and Foppen (1996), ¹⁰Spahr (1990)

*Unless large natural core near a road with speed limit over 35 mph, then 650 feet or sound barrier recommended

Stewardship Zones: Notify, Educate, Negotiate

Improving Stewardship

The purpose of stewardship zones is to recognize that neighbors of core natural areas play important roles in their health. Stewardship zones are priority areas for providing information and other resources to landowners to increase awareness about how their actions affect the natural function of nearby open spaces and support best practices on their property.

Backyard Stewardship Zone: **165 feet**

Stewardship in this zone reduces most significant negative impacts on natural areas.

- Reduces visual disturbance
- Reduces impacts of pedestrians and pets
- Reduces microclimate alteration
- Reduces introduction of aggressively introduced species
- Reduces traffic noise

Neighborhood Stewardship Zone: **500 feet**

Stewardship in this zone further improves health of core natural area.

- Much greater reduction of microclimate alterations, traffic noise, aggressively introduced species introductions, and nest predation

500 ft
Best Practice
Distance

165 ft
Minimum
Distance

Edge of Core
Natural Area



STEWARDSHIP ZONE

Core Natural Areas



CONSERVE Strategies



STRATEGY 1

Expand Restoration and Management City-wide

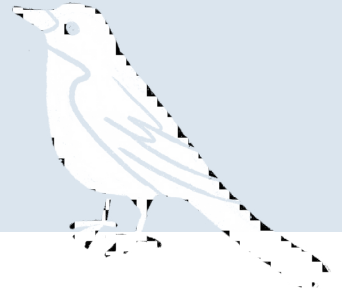
Burlington's natural environment is a chief ingredient in the city's character, making it one of the most attractive and inviting small cities in the country. While Burlington enjoys an abundance of open space, totaling almost 50% of its geographic area, the city has been historically striving to take care of these spaces, from protecting nature to cleaning up polluted areas and maintaining parks. The city realizes that when such spaces are disturbed, natural ecosystems eventually degrade. Now, with climate change creating a noticeable impact, it becomes ever so important to identify, plan, manage, and restore core open spaces, keeping in mind the needs of the ecosystem and the Burlington community.

In order to expand restoration and management throughout the city, Burlington would need to begin with creating inventories of existing natural areas and climate initiatives, followed by the development and continuous evaluation of restoration and management plans with a focus on climate solutions. The city can establish and expand relations with stewards for improving city-wide management, and work towards community values that go beyond basic nature improvements.

ACTIONS

- CS1.1 Develop restoration and management plans for core natural areas. Use existing management plans as templates and work with other organizations to ensure alignment across plans. Prioritize plans for ecological significance.
- CS1.2 Inventory current initiatives and projects that support Nature Based Climate Solutions, identify gaps, and outline future initiatives/projects to close gaps.
- CS1.3 Adjust the City's green infrastructure definition to go beyond stormwater management.
- CS1.4 Establish city- and community-wide values and methods for aggressively introduced species management. Communicate in the communications plan (See EX1.3)
- CS1.5 Update Natural Resource Protection District Map for consistency with Open Space Plan's core natural areas.
- CS1.6 Continue to restore urban waterways like Potash, Centennial, Englesby Brooks (through partnerships, restoration activities, and regulations like buffer zones).
- CS1.7 *See also CN2.3: Support "Friends Of" groups near natural areas (including supporting existing efforts and expanding to new groups) and target outreach within stewardship zones.*





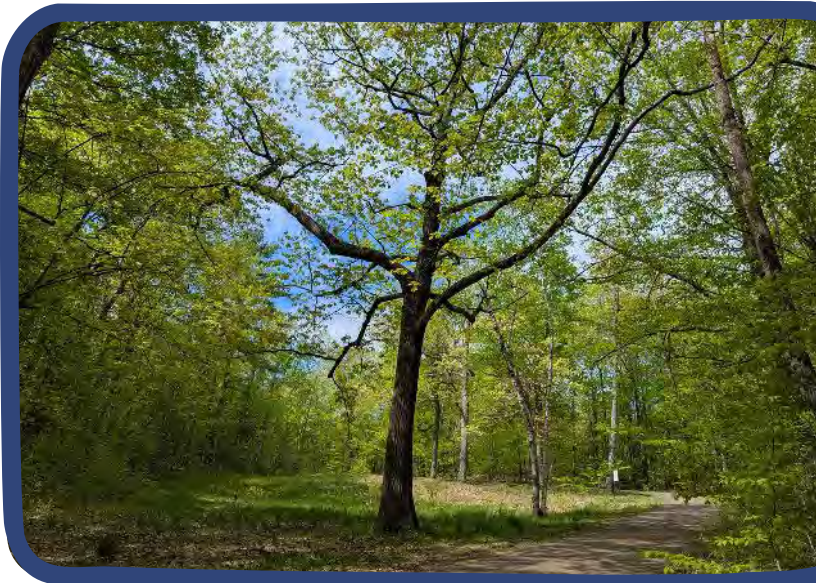
STRATEGY 2

Support Wildlife Movement and Ecological Health

Core natural areas enable wildlife movement and support ecological health. Connecting open spaces and supporting natural systems can be strengthened through stewardship actions, both large and small. This strategy includes actions focused on collecting and sharing data to increase community awareness about ecosystem health. It also includes actions to improve health of ecosystems, especially larger core areas and areas supporting area-sensitive or regionally uncommon plants, animals, and natural communities. The Burlington community showed widespread support for restoration projects to maintain forest health, remove aggressively introduced species, and help sustain the wildlife habitat.

ACTIONS

- CS2.1 Create network of pollinator-friendly and native plant gardens across the city.
- CS2.2 Increase data collection on Burlington's Wildlife Corridors (e.g. species use, frequency of use, key environmental components) to incorporate in other City processes (e.g. zoning, neighborhood codes).
- CS2.3 Continue to identify opportunities to improve large forest areas to improve habitat for songbirds and other indicator species.
- CS2.4 Create an open-access dashboard tracking key indicators related to wildlife, water quality, and restoration with suggested ways to make progress.





CONSERVE Strategies



STRATEGY 3

Evolve the Conservation Fund to be flexible to changing needs

The Conservation Legacy fund has been a critical tool in expanding Burlington's protected open spaces to support community goals. Now, as the pace of new protection slows down, to continue to reflect community values of stewardship, there is a need to broaden the use of the Conservation Fund to include critical maintenance, stewardship, and conservation infrastructure on open space lands.

ACTIONS

- CS3.1 Increase the Conservation Legacy Fund.
- CS3.2 Review the Conservation Legacy Fund and evaluate expanding the definition of potential fund uses to support conservation goals and values expressed in the Fund's inception (e.g. conservation infrastructure, education, GSI, etc.)



STRATEGY 4

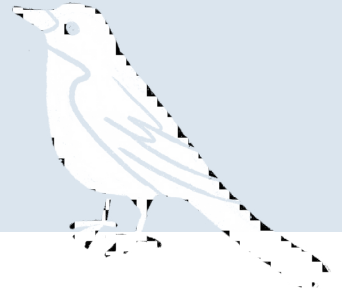
Collaborate to acquire land to protect open space for future generations

Burlington views natural and recreational lands as community assets that support residential quality of life, drinking water quality, food security, and a sense of place and history defined by a unique landscape. With this realization comes the responsibility for nurturing and protecting those assets over the long term. Acquiring land through collaborative strategies for scenic, natural, and recreational purposes is one of the surest ways for any community to secure its most important land assets.

ACTIONS

- CS4.1 Review and update acquisition list and criteria.
- CS4.2 Adapt strategies for land acquisition for conservation for both public and private lands reflecting the priorities of the new open space plan and upcoming comprehensive plan.





Open Space Stories

BEE a Good Steward



Vermont is home to about 350 different species of native bees, making Burlington an important hotspot for bees!

The sandy soils on the lakeshore and elsewhere provide prime nesting grounds for bees and contribute to their high diversity. While the most famous of those bees is the honey bee, bees native to Vermont come in all shapes, colors, and sizes. What they all have in common is that they rely on native plants for nutrients or habitat.

Many of these bees need special native flowers like milkweed to collect pollen from. If those plants disappear, the bees can't survive. That's why Vermont's open spaces and our ability to continue stewarding them, are so important because native plants and habitats are critical for these bees to find the plants they need to grow and thrive.





Implementation Matrix

CS 1 Expand Restoration and Management City-wide			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CS 1.1	Develop restoration and management plans for core natural areas. Use existing management plans as templates and work with other organizations to ensure alignment across plans. Prioritize plans for ecological significance.	Conservation Board, Parks Conservation Team	Qualified ecologists
CS 1.2	Inventory current initiatives and projects that support Nature Based Climate Solutions, identify gaps, and outline future initiatives/projects to close gaps.	Parks Conservation Team	Wildways, NBCS grantees, Water Resources
CS 1.3	Adjust the City's green infrastructure definition to go beyond stormwater management.	Conservation Board	Water Resources, DPI, City Planning, NRCD, "Friends of" groups
CS 1.4	Establish city- and community-wide values and methods for aggressively introduced species management. Communicate in the communications plan (See EX1.3)	Parks Conservation Team and Wildways	State of Vermont, Parks maintenance team, large landowners (e.g. Intervale)
CS 1.5	Update Natural Resource Protection District Map for consistency with Open Space Plan's core natural areas.	City Planning/DPI	Conservation Board, Planning Commission
CS 1.6	Continue to restore urban waterways like Potash, Centennial, Englesby Brooks (through partnerships, restoration activities, and regulations like buffer zones).	Parks Conservation Team	VT DEC, Water Resources, WVPD, BLUE Stormwater
CS 1.7	<i>See also CN2.3: Support "Friends Of" groups near natural areas (including supporting existing efforts and expanding to new groups) and target outreach within stewardship zones.</i>	-	-



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	EX 1.3
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	-	Long-term (6+ years)	-
-	-	-	-



Implementation Matrix

CS 2 Support Wildlife Movement and Ecological Health

No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CS 2.1	Create network of pollinator-friendly and native plant gardens across the city.	Parks Conservation Team	Wildways, VGN, Grow Wild
CS 2.2	Increase data collection on Burlington's Wildlife Corridors (e.g. species use, frequency of use, key environmental components) to incorporate in other City processes (e.g. zoning, neighborhood codes).	Parks Conservation Team	UVM, VT Fish and Wildlife, City Planning, DPI, Conservation Board
CS 2.3	Continue to identify opportunities to improve large forest areas to improve habitat for songbirds and other indicator species.	Conservation Board	Parks Conservation Team
CS 2.4	Create an open-access dashboard tracking key indicators related to wildlife, water quality, and restoration with suggested ways to make progress.	City Planning (provide data), IT Department (set up dashboard) Parks, Communications (maintain dashboard)	City Planning (Data Analysts), Park Conservation Team, Parks Communications

CS 3 Evolve the Conservation Fund to be flexible to changing needs

No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CS 3.1	Increase the Conservation Legacy Fund.	DPI, Parks Conservation Team	Conservation Board, Parks Commission, City Council, Mayors Office, Director of Financial Operations
CS 3.2	Review the Conservation Legacy Fund and evaluate expanding the definition of potential fund uses to support conservation goals and values expressed in the Fund's inception (e.g. conservation infrastructure, education, GSI, etc.)	DPI, Parks Conservation Team	Conservation Board, Parks Commission, City Council, Mayors Office, Director of Financial Operations)

CS 4 Collaborate to acquire land to protect open space for future generations

No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CS 4.1	Review and update acquisition list and criteria.	Parks Conservation Team	City Planning, City Assessor
CS 4.2	Adapt strategies for land acquisition for conservation for both public and private lands reflecting the priorities of the new open space plan and upcoming comprehensive plan.	Parks Conservation Team	City Planning, City Assessor, Conservation Board, Parks Commission, DPI



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	YES (ongoing)	Long-term (6+ years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-

High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
YES	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-

High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
YES	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-



GOAL TWO

CONNECT

**A landscape stitched together by stewardship
and nature-based development**

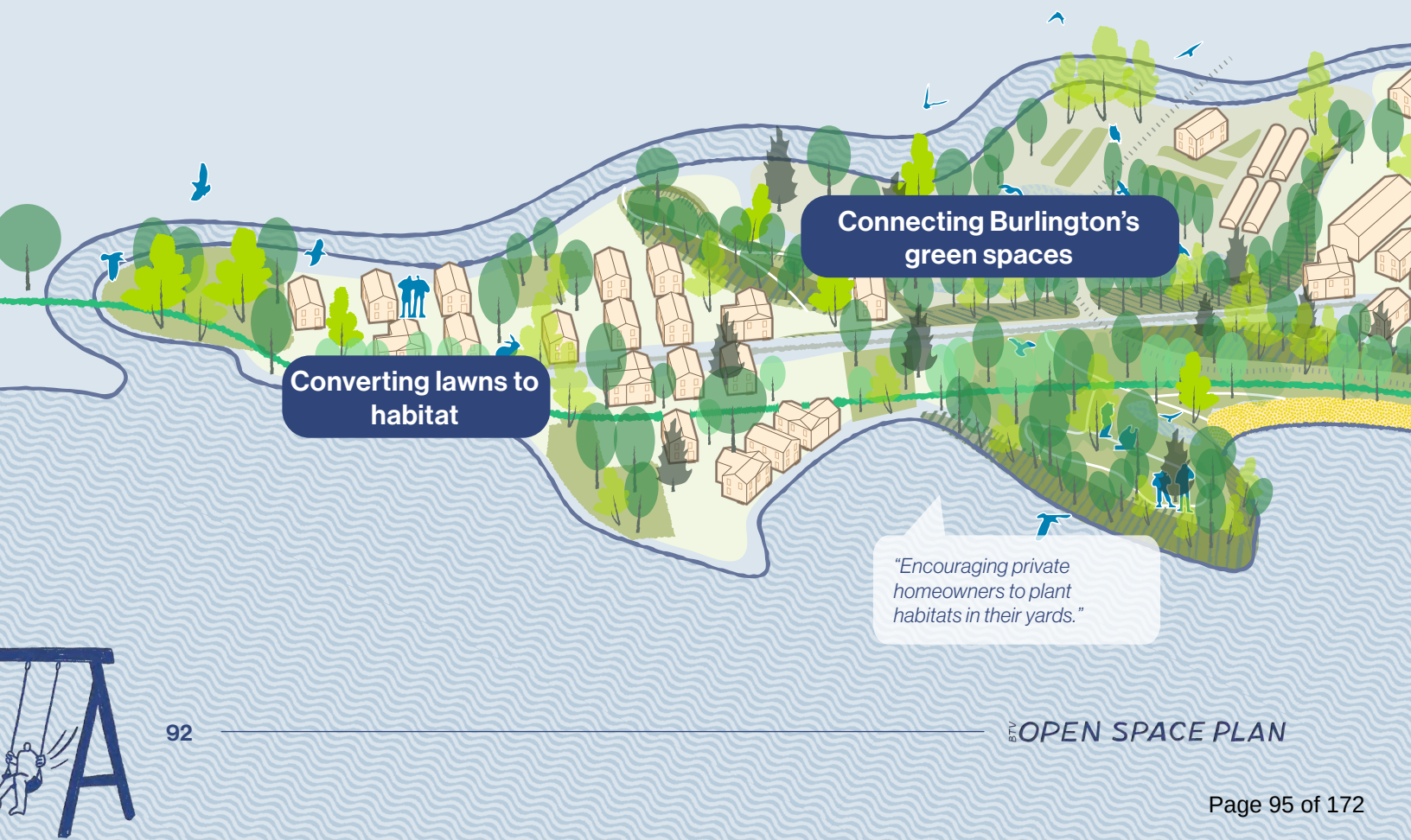




CONNECT Overview

Connections are key to thriving natural spaces.

This goal focuses on increasing connectivity between the city's core natural areas, expanding tree canopy and nature pockets throughout Burlington, and identifying how existing and new development can contribute to healthier ecosystems. The benefits of this approach are a more connected, green network that works better for local wildlife and reduces the urban heat island effect, creating a cooler, more nature-filled city for Burlingtonians to enjoy.



CONNECT Strategies

- CN1** Grow and celebrate nature-based climate solutions across the city
- CN2** Cultivate an ecosystem of stewardship
- CN3** Enhance and protect Burlington's urban forest
- CN4** Encourage new development to incorporate nature-based principles



"More valued and tended open spaces, working gardens, safe walkways to appreciate them, and ecologically-aware based public transportation."

"I'd love to see more pocket-park as well as trees and/or planters along busy streets."

Expanding green stormwater infrastructure

"More tree pits/trenches, better established wildlife corridors, more open green space in available spaces, and more green water infrastructure."

Adding more green to dense areas

Sustainable development that fits with nature

"Green infill, reduction of impervious surface."



CONNECT: Overview

The amount of impervious surface is a key driver of ecological health.

The location and density of impervious surfaces imposes a ceiling on protection, restoration, and stewardship of the natural world, and limits the integration of the natural world into the human-built environment. This constrains open space planning and determines the locations of naturalization and restoration efforts in the built environment, and also limits the actions the City can effectively

take to improve the ecological integrity, resilience, and functioning of the City's open spaces. These actions range from removing invasive plants, to creating pollinator habitat, to restoring wetlands and forests, to managing stormwater runoff, to creating space for animals that cannot tolerate human intrusion on their habitats.

At 10% impervious cover, negative ecological effects are already present.

10% Impervious Cover



10%
impervious

Stream water quality begins to deteriorate. 10% impervious cover can exclude larger mammals, raptors, and area-sensitive species from areas.

20% Impervious Cover

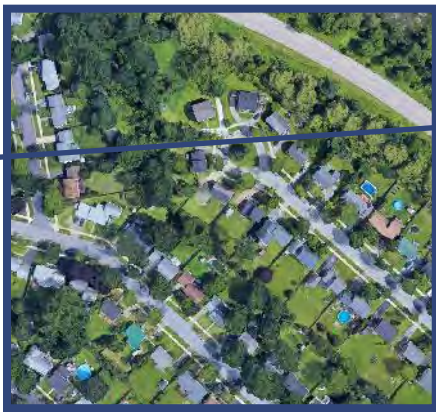


20%
impervious

Streams shift to a highly altered urban state. Visible evidence of erosion, algae blooms, and decreased macroinvertebrate diversity.



25% Impervious Cover



25%
impervious

Remnant natural areas are small and have no interior habitat. Greatly decreases biodiversity in birds, small mammals, herptiles, and invertebrates.



Open Space Stories

BLUE BTV

The city program BLUE helps residents protect their waterways from pollution right in their yard.

Burlington wants to reduce the negative impacts of stormwater runoff: when rainwater flows off impervious surfaces like roofs, driveways, and streets, it can carry dirt, oil, and other pollution into the water. This can cause harmful algae blooms that are often unsafe for people and animals.

Any resident can sign up for a free visit from BLUE. They will do a home inspection, look at how rainwater flows around your yard, and give tips on how to keep that water clean. Tips range from small projects like redirecting your gutter to bigger ones like installing rain gardens or permeable driveways. Once you complete the project, you are "BLUE-certified" -- you are helping make Burlington's waters cleaner!





CONNECT: Overview

How dense an area is impacts what strategies are most effective.

Burlington has a wide variety of neighborhoods, from the dense urban core of Downtown to areas with more open space, like the New North End. The amount of impervious surfaces—such as roads, parking lots, and buildings—greatly influences both the ecological health and future potential of each area. Strategies to enhance green spaces, manage stormwater sustainably, and support biodiversity will differ

depending on the density and development of the neighborhood. Across all neighborhoods, these strategies not only connect ecology, but also connect people to green spaces and to each other.

Stewardship Opportunities

- Potential for an activity to protect, restore and steward ecosystems and habitats
- Rating of activities by zone – Feasibility given space, level of effort/cost, and likelihood of success

Strategies marked as **“High”** represent places where improvements can be made successfully with relatively low cost and effort. **“Low”** indicates strategies that will require greater resources and effort for meaningful change.

Impervious Cover	 Ecological Stormwater Management	 Large Natural Areas	 Small Natural Areas	 Biodiversity Enhancements
High Density > 75%	Low	Low	Low	Medium
Medium Density 50 - 75%	Medium	Low	Low	Medium
Light Density 10 - 50%	High	Low	Medium	High
Open Space < 10%	High	High	High	High

Development Intensity

LEGEND

-  Open Space
-  Light Density
-  Medium Density
-  High Density

Less

Impervious Surface Density

More



Open Space
<10% Impervious



Light Density
10-50% Impervious



Medium Density
50-75% Impervious



High Density
>75% Impervious





Key Connections

Wildlife finds a refuge in large natural area cores, and even in smaller ones if edge effects are controlled. Only large natural areas support species that need large areas and multiple habitats, but many small mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and insects can survive in smaller ones. Many species can move through inhospitable terrain by flying (birds, bats, insects) or by being carried on the wind (winged or plumed plant seeds), but many cannot. For these, connections are needed.

Connections should be as wide as possible and made of vegetation like that of their natural habitat. Connections, however, can be corridors between natural areas for aggressively introduced plants and predators like cats and raccoons. There are many types of connections with different purposes, opportunities, and barriers.







Types of Connections

Habitat Islands

PURPOSE

Plant small habitat islands across urban landscape to increase plant, insect, bird, and small mammal diversity near people's homes and places of work and play.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Many small areas are available on public and private land
- Public interest in seeing flowering plants, butterflies, birds, pollinators, and other signs of nature living nearby

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Too dispersed, small and diverse to facilitate long-term protection and management by any one entity
- Correct siting of habitat islands to avoid conflicts, ensure establishment and persistence, and minimize management costs



Green Stormwater Facility

PURPOSE

Ecologically-inspired and functioning facilities to manage stormwater runoff; e.g., raingarden, tree trench, roadside planter (e.g., St. Paul green streets), downspout redirection to turf, bioswale, bioinfiltration basin, stormwater wetland, green roof, treatment train, etc.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Future road upgrades and major repair jobs are best opportunity to install GSI to manage road and parking lot runoff
- Other opportunities in City's stormwater management plan

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Typically high cost
- Usually limited space to manage large catchments
- Usually small catchments are managed – high per-gallon cost for pollutant removal (lbs. removed/dollar spent)



Other Connections

PURPOSE

Manage movement of wild animals and native plants through urban landscape. Risk that connections will also allow unwanted species to move.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Unknown

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

- Feasibility of using non-public lands
- Limited resources for acquisition of fee title, easement, or lease
- No voluntary recognition program exists





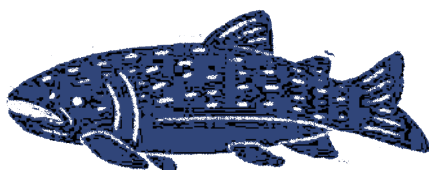
Green Planning Principles

Overall

- A** Develop with native soil, hydrology, and vegetation in mind.
- B** Protect and maintain healthy and resilient natural areas.
- C** Understand past and existing conditions to guide restoration and management.
- D** Create attractive, resilient, and economically feasible plant communities.
- E** Tell an ecological story that inspires people to restore the natural world.
- F** Allow people to visit natural areas while protecting ecosystem resilience.
- G** Document ecological trends by monitoring indicators of health and resilience.

Wildlife

- A** Protect and restore habitat for rare and uncommon animal species.
- B** Create the largest, roundest habitats for area-sensitive wildlife species.
- C** Connect habitat cores to similar nearby habitat.
- D** Design new reserves to minimize edge effects from adjacent properties.
- E** Establish stewardship zones to manage edge effects from adjacent developed land.
- F** Install special habitat features like nest boxes and basking logs.
- G** Manage nuisance wildlife, such as deer and geese, using appropriate methods.



Soil & Hydrology

- A** Preserve stable soils and existing natural hydrology.
- B** Fix eroding lands and deranged hydrology with catchment and watershed management.
- C** Prevent flooding by preserving natural lands and installing green infrastructure.
- D** Use ecological stormwater management tools before highly engineered solutions.
- E** Reduce runoff at its source; use a sequence of natural features to manage runoff.
- F** Solve soil and hydrological problems in the most cost-effective way.

Vegetation

- A** Protect and restore rare and common native ecological land cover types.
- B** Encourage diverse native flowering plants across the growing season.
- C** Control non-native and native plants that disrupt ecosystems and depress biodiversity.
- D** Establish vegetation that can be managed with the least effort.

Human Use

- A** Identify natural areas with sensitive wildlife that tolerate little human interaction.
- B** Define management units and access points.
- C** Detect problems early by monitoring on-trail and off-trail use.
- D** Recruit organizations, experts and volunteers to help maintain and monitor natural areas.
- E** Protect cultural resources, such as Native American artifacts and historical structures.

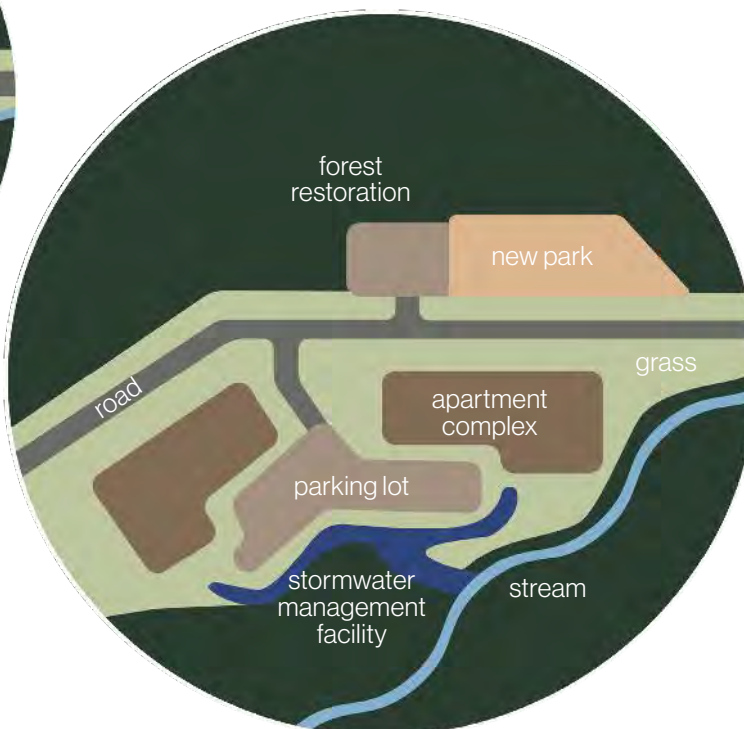
Nature-Supporting Redevelopment Areas

Development and open space can work in tandem to provide mutual benefits to both natural and people. In this scenario, a commercial building at the edge of a with homestead across the street can be converted to an apartment complex with a new park, ecological stormwater infrastructure, and forest restoration. Opportunities for redevelopment around brownfields and old commercial areas can follow this type of example.



2025

Commercial by a stream with homestead across the street



2035

Apartments with new park, stormwater management, and forest restoration





CONNECT Strategies



STRATEGY 1

Grow and Celebrate Nature-Based Climate Solutions Across the City

The 2022 Addendum to the Open Space Plan highlighted the connection between a thriving environment and a thriving community. Built on a foundational theme of equity, inclusion, and relationships, NBCS are holistic strategies that protect, restore, and steward the world around us through multidisciplinary collaboration.

While NBCS are deeply integrated throughout this Open Space Plan, this strategy focuses on education and awareness—strengthening existing relationships and building new partnerships to educate on, grow, and track NBCS throughout the city and across many initiatives. This involves not just the city government, but also schools, the public, and private property owners.

ACTIONS

- CN1.1** Educate the public on Nature-Based Climate Solutions and their value. (See also EX1.3)
- CN1.2** Create and support existing education, recognition, and incentive programs to encourage private property owners to integrate Nature Based Climate Solutions and implement sound ecological practices (e.g. reducing lawn space), especially within Natural Area Stewardship Zones. Potential programs include adaptation of Green Design Standards, expansion of the BLUE program, and encouragement of “Wild Yards” to convert mowed areas to naturalized open space.
- CN1.3** Continue to partner with schools to grow nature-based climate solutions on school grounds.
- CN1.4** Create a municipal management plan to track and reduce mowed lawns
- CN1.5** Continue to grow nature-based climate solutions on City property, including but not limited to green stormwater infrastructure.
- CN1.6** *See also in CS2.1 CONSERVE: Create network of pollinator-friendly and native plant gardens across the city.*





STRATEGY 2

Cultivate an Ecosystem of Stewardship

From school children to community-based organizations to city leadership, Burlington has a deep sense of care and commitment to stewarding the natural world around them—not just for personal use but for its intrinsic value and environmental health. Burlingtonians across the city are doing meaningful work in many different capacities to educate people to open space, plant pollinator gardens, advocate for resilient waterways, and encourage responsible growing and foraging.

This strategy celebrates the existing communities of care and seeks to support and build on them to facilitate knowledge and resource sharing. Across the community, schools, organizations, and City departments, this strategy streamlines processes and seeks to make valuing open space integral to how everyone operates, particularly through co-education and shared resources.

ACTIONS

- CN2.1 Create a database and listserv of open space organizations to support collaboration, resource sharing, etc.
- CN2.2 Co-host an recurring open space summit for land stewards, community organizations, and others.
- CN2.3 Continue to support “Friends Of” groups near natural areas (including supporting existing efforts and expanding to new groups) and target outreach within stewardship zones.
- CN2.4 Update Urban Wilds definition, including considering expanding beyond city-owned land.
- CN2.5 Distribute educational resources about how personal actions can support water quality health in lake, river, and tributaries. (See also EX1.3 Communications Plan)





CONNECT Strategies



STRATEGY 3

Enhance and Protect Burlington's Urban Forest

The urban forest provides enumerable benefits to the city, from creating shade to providing homes for wildlife to reducing stormwater runoff. Burlington's tree canopy—though still at 40% coverage across the city—has dwindled in the last ten years and needs action to not only protect existing trees but to add new ones.

In order to do so, data on the trees needs to be kept up-to-date and tracked over time. This includes updating the Tree Ordinance and conducting regular tree canopy assessments and setting goals. These can be used to identify areas that need enhanced protection and areas that can be considered for establishing new copses of trees. As 37.5% of Burlington's trees are on private property, bringing the community along and educating about management will also contribute to a well-rounded strategy.

ACTIONS

- CN3.1 Update the Tree Ordinance.
- CN3.2 Update the urban tree canopy goal and mapping/data analysis every 10 years. Consider developing specific goals for different types of canopy based on their ecological value.
- CN3.3 Conduct Pocket Forest Feasibility Study that develops plant lists, identifies potential existing sites, and envisions incentives for establishing pocket forests in new developments, dense neighborhoods, and greenbelts.
- CN3.4 Identify large valuable trees in the city that are on public and private land and consider protection with ideas framed the policy toolkit from Biophilic Cities network.
- CN3.5 Educate the public on benefits of the urban forest and how to manage it on private property. (See also CN1.1, CN1.2, EX1.3)





STRATEGY 4

Encourage New Development to Incorporate Nature-Based Principles

Though conservation and development have historically been pitted against each other, the two can work together in mutually beneficial ways. Cities like Burlington that both deeply value open space and sorely need to expand their housing stock can build dense development that also increases ecologically healthy green areas with practices like Low Impact Design and Conservation Development.

This strategy capitalized on widespread desires throughout the community to incorporate nature-based principles in development. On the new development side, creating green design standards and development review resources will help foster environmentally-beneficial building. On the existing development side, providing educational resources to owners and occupants within Stewardship Zones will help those closest to natural areas support their ecological health.

ACTIONS

- CN4.1 Develop Green Design Standards for new developments and redevelopments.
- CN4.2 Provide educational resources for owners and occupants in Stewardship Zones to support ecological health of nearby natural areas.
- CN4.3 Create development review resources to support review bodies in evaluating sustainable/ecological nature-based approaches to development and open space impacts of new development.





Implementation Matrix

CN 1 Grow and Celebrate Nature-Based Climate Solutions Across the City			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CN 1.1	Educate the public on Nature-Based Climate Solutions and their value. (See also EX1.3)	Parks Conservation Team	Conservation Board, Parks Commission, Wildways, Parks Communications
CN 1.2	Create and support existing education, recognition, and incentive programs to encourage private property owners to integrate Nature Based Climate Solutions and implement sound ecological practices (e.g. reducing lawn space), especially within Natural Area Stewardship Zones. Potential programs include adaptation of Green Design Standards, expansion of the BLUE program, and encouragement of “Wild Yards” to convert mowed areas to naturalized open space.	Parks Conservation Team	Conservation Board, Wildways, GROW wild, BLUE program, Parks Communications
CN 1.3	Continue to partner with schools to grow nature-based climate solutions on school grounds.	Burlington School District	Burlington Wildways, Parks Conservation Team, Shelburne Farms.
CN 1.4	Create a municipal management plan to track and reduce mowed lawns.	Parks	Parks Ground Maintenance, Parks Conservation Team, Water Resources
CN 1.5	Continue to grow nature-based climate solutions on City property, including but not limited to green stormwater infrastructure.	Parks	Water Resources
CN 1.6	<i>See also in CS2.1 CONSERVE: Create network of pollinator-friendly and native plant gardens across the city.</i>	-	-



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
YES	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	YES (ongoing)	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	YES (ongoing)	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	-	-





Implementation Matrix

CN 2 Cultivate an Ecosystem of Stewardship			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CN 2.1	Create a database and listserv of open space organizations to support collaboration, resource sharing, etc.	Parks Conservation Team	Wildways, Conservation Board
CN 2.2	Co-host an recurring open space summit for land stewards, community organizations, and others.	Wildways, Mayor	VCGN, Audubon, UVM, Wildways partners (e.g. Intervale, WVPD, Rock Point, Parks)
CN 2.3	Continue to support “Friends Of” groups near natural areas (including supporting existing efforts and expanding to new groups) and target outreach within stewardship zones.	Parks Conservation Team	Parks Communications, WNRCD, Friends of the Winooski, Watersheds United Vermont, etc.
CN 2.4	Update Urban Wilds definition, including considering expanding beyond city-owned land.	Conservation Board	Wildways, Large landowners, Parks Conservation Team, DPI
CN 2.5	Distribute educational resources about how personal actions can support water quality health in lake, river, and tributaries. (See also EX1.3 Communications Plan)	Lake Champlain Sea Grant (BLUE program)	Water Resources, Parks Communications



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
YES	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	EX 1.3





Implementation Matrix

CN 3 Enhance and Protect Burlington's Urban Forest			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CN 3.1	Update the Tree Ordinance.	Parks, City Arborist	Conservation Board, Parks Commission, City Arborist, Parks Conservation Team, DPI, Planning, Planning Commission
CN 3.2	Update the urban tree canopy goal and mapping/ data analysis every 10 years. Consider developing specific goals for different types of canopy based on their ecological value.	Parks, City Planning, Conservation Board	UVM Spatial Analysis, or similar provider
CN 3.3	Conduct Pocket Forest Feasibility Study that develops plant lists, identifies potential existing sites, and envisions incentives for establishing pocket forests in new developments, dense neighborhoods, and greenbelts.	Parks Conservation Team	Parks Planning, City Planning
CN 3.4	Identify large valuable trees in the city that are on public and private land and consider protection with ideas framed the policy toolkit from Biophilic Cities network.	Conservation board	UVM Spatial Analysis Lab, City Arborist, Branch Out Burlington
CN 3.5	Educate the public on benefits of the urban forest and how to manage it on private property. (See also CN1.1, CN1.2, EX1.3)	Parks Conservation Team	Conservation Board, Parks Commission, Wildways, Parks Communications
CN 4 Encourage New Development to Incorporate Nature-Based Principles			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CN 4.1	Develop Green Design Standards for new developments and redevelopments.	DPI, City Planning	Conservation Board, Planning Commission, Water Resources, land owners, landscape architects (?)
CN 4.2	Provide educational resources for owners and occupants in Stewardship Zones to support ecological health of nearby natural areas.	Parks Conservation Team and Parks Communications	Grow Wild, Parks Planning, Lake Champlain Sea Grant
CN 4.3	Create development review resources to support review bodies in evaluating sustainable/ecological nature-based approaches to development and open space impacts of new development.	DPI	Conservation Board, Parks Conservation Team



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
YES	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
YES	-	Long-term (6+ years)	-
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	CN1.1, CN1.2, EX1.3

High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-





GOAL THREE

EXPERIENCE

**Expanding a variety of nature experiences
across Burlington**

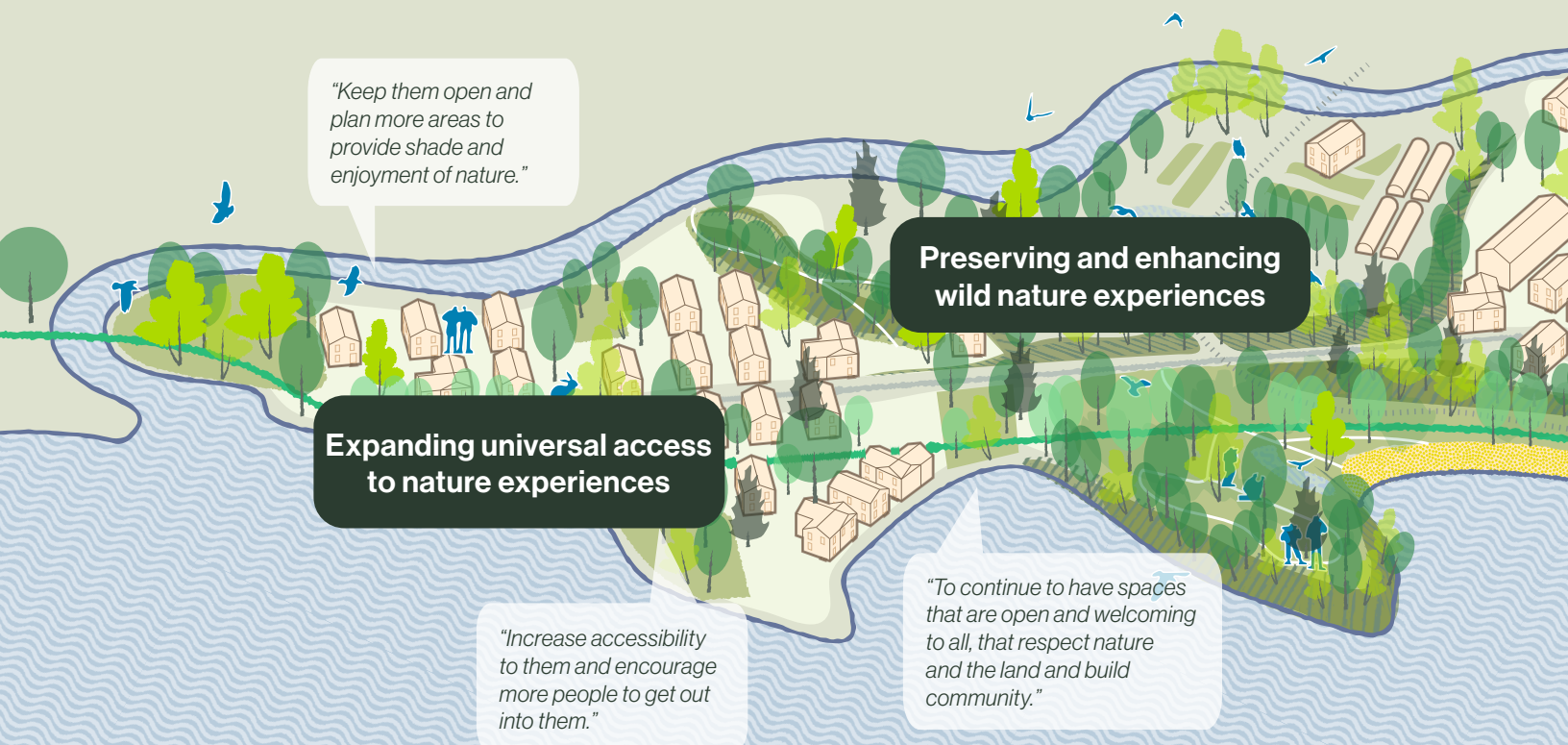




EXPERIENCE Overview

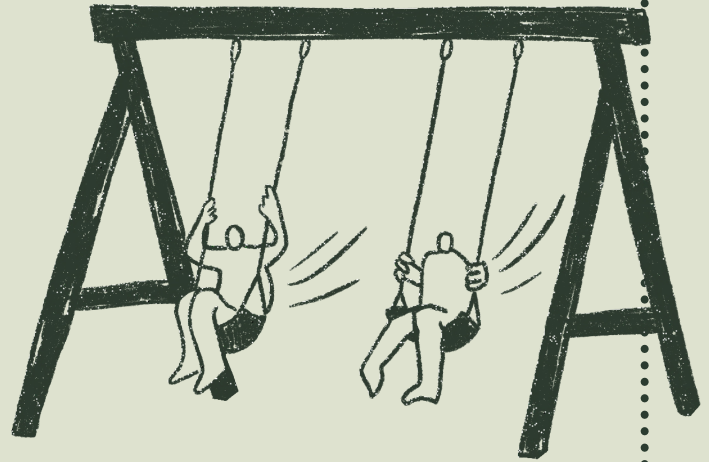
Fostering diverse outdoor experiences for everyone

Burlington's Open Space Plan is not just about land—it's about how people use and enjoy them. As reflected in the first wave of engagement, Burlingtonians' outdoor experiences are as diverse as the open spaces themselves. This goal focuses on preserving and enhancing nature experiences while breaking down barriers to access. It also considers the different types of nature experiences people have—everyday experiences and wild ones—and how to educate people about them while growing opportunities.



EXPERIENCE Strategies

- EX1** Increase awareness about Burlington's open spaces
- EX2** Grow public access to nature-based experiences
- EX3** Break down barriers to open space access



"To preserve and maintain the ones we have, and to add smaller open spaces even in the most urban parts of the city if possible"

Increasing visitor stewardship of open spaces

"Connectivity for animals, climate solutions, youth engagement, educational purposes, community gathering spaces."

Growing everyday nature experiences

Expanding the open space network

"More community spaces to connect with each other and the natural world."



EXPERIENCE: Overview

Connecting with nature can take many forms, from everyday nature moments to big woods experiences.

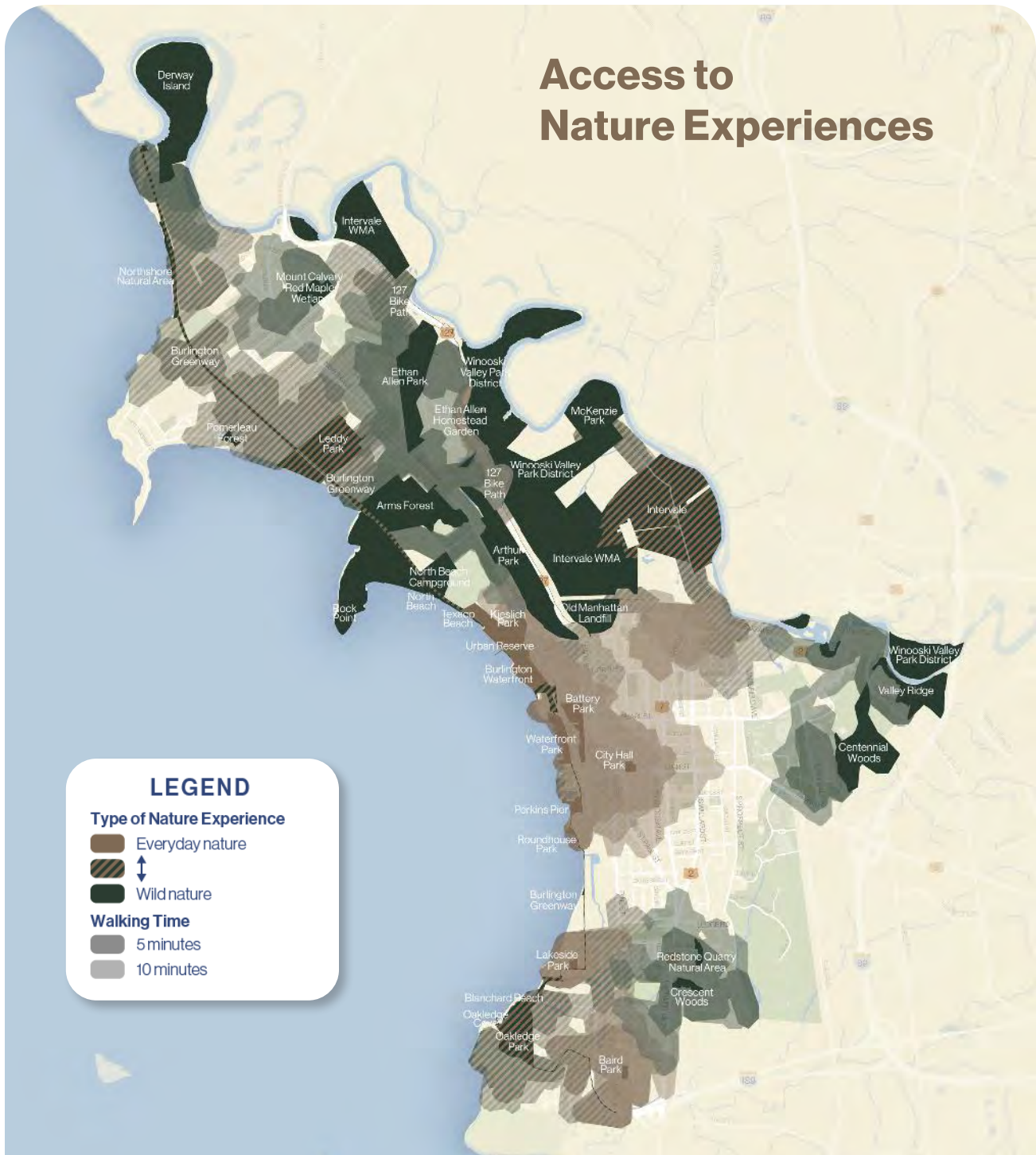


Standing at the edge of Rock Point and gazing out at Lake Champlain, without a building in site. Pausing along a neighborhood walk to admire a neighbor's pollinator garden and breathe in the evening air. Burlington offers such a range of outdoor experiences, both in everyday life and in close-to-home adventures.

managed heavily by people while others are left more wild. Some spaces lend themselves to passive recreation while others are more active. Some spaces can only be used in certain ways while others have many potential uses. Burlington is lucky to have all these types of open spaces.

These experiences reflect the variety of open space types and their diverse ownership and management practices. Some open spaces are





LEGEND

Type of Nature Experience

- Everyday nature
- Wild nature

Walking Time

- 5 minutes
- 10 minutes

Nature Experiences	% area within....	
	5 walk	10 walk
Everyday Nature	11%	21%
↕	23%	39%
Big Woods / Wild Nature	13%	25%

This map categorizes open spaces by whether they foster everyday nature or wild nature experiences. It shows the surrounding area that is within a 5-minute or 10-minute walk.



EXPERIENCE Strategies



STRATEGY 1

Increase Awareness About Burlington's Open Spaces

Half of Burlington's land area is covered by open spaces, but not everyone knows about the diversity of spaces and types of experiences afforded by this large network. While many people—residents and visitors alike—frequent Burlington's parks and recreate freely—from hiking to swimming to picnicking to relaxing—there is a wealth of knowledge and events that can be readily shared. Some center on history and learning while others foster connections and shared experiences.

This strategy aims to connect more people to more experiences through education and communication. By increasing awareness of the natural world and ways to engage in it, more people will become part of an ever-growing community of open space champions.

ACTIONS

- EX1.1 Collaborate to create educational tools on Burlington's natural history and stewardship story with associated places to visit.
- EX1.2 Create a central calendar that crowdsources events and volunteer efforts around the City. (See also EX1.3)
- EX1.3 Create a comprehensive open space communications and education plan to share recommendations of the open space plan. (See also EX1.2)





STRATEGY 2

Grow Public Access to Nature-Based Experiences

Burlington offers a wide variety of nature experiences, from a morning walk in the park to a weekend rafting escapade. From an afternoon watching bees and birds in a pollinator garden to a thrilling mountain biking adventure through the woods. It's not everyday that those big experiences happen—and they're not necessarily possible for everyone. Everyone should be able to experience nature everyday—and it's much easier in Burlington, where nearly the entire city is within a 10-minute walk from an open space.

This strategy focuses on making those everyday nature experiences more commonplace and integrated into daily routines. It includes increasing opportunities throughout the city, partially in partnership with private and institutional landowners. Public access to private land is already happening in places like Rock Point and can be expanded to even more areas.

ACTIONS

- EX2.1 Expand “everyday” nature experiences across the city that give community members opportunities to experience green/natural spaces as part of daily routines and without driving.
- EX2.2 Continue to partner with private and institutional landowners to expand public access to nature experiences.

**The upcoming
Comprehensive Plan will
continue to address
these issues.**



EXPERIENCE Strategies



STRATEGY 3 Break Down Barriers to Open Space Access

Everyone in Burlington is within a 10-minute walk from an open space, but not all open spaces are created equal. Not only do they differ in size, nature, and types of experiences offered, they also differ in accessibility. Accessibility can refer to physical accessibility (“How easy is it for me to get to an open space by foot, bike, or car?”) or cultural accessibility (“Once I get to this open space, how welcoming and comfortable of an environment is it for me? For my family?”).

This strategy seeks to tackle both while considering the health of important natural areas. Acknowledging that there are cultural differences in enjoying open spaces, inclusive and accessible strategies need to be employed to engage marginalized communities and accommodate cultural preferences. Physical access is a priority as well, particularly by different modes, and needs to be balanced with ecological sensitivities.

ACTIONS

- EX3.1 Evaluate opportunities for universal access in natural areas where appropriate and considering ecological sensitivity. (See also EX3.3)
- EX3.2 Improve equitable transportation access to natural areas and seek out alternative funding mechanisms.
- EX3.3 Regularly engage marginalized communities who face barriers to accessing or enjoying open space to identify additional actions to increase use and where to prioritize improvements. (See also EX3.1)
- EX3.4 Plan for and accommodate different cultural preferences in the use of public outdoor spaces.
- EX3.5 Incorporate language access in educational campaigns.

The upcoming Comprehensive Plan will include specific strategies for improvements in multi-modal access to the Intervale.

Stakeholder and public feedback included some challenges that are being accomplished outside of the Open Space Plan, including cat and dog regulations, food safety, and border management. This plan acknowledges these challenges and supports related actions in other plans.





Open Space Stories

Wildways

* * * * *

Burlington Wildways is a local organization

that focuses on connecting and stewarding the city's natural areas to promote ecological health and engage the community in understanding and participating in the protection of urban natural spaces. Their mission is to *promote ecological health and improve nature access through stewardship, education, and collaboration.*

The Wildways program includes several parks, forests, wetlands, and trails, working to create a network of wild places that Burlingtonians and visitors can enjoy while also supporting wildlife and ecological restoration. It also has some programs nested within it, like Grow Wild which promotes native plant gardening for local climate resilience.





Implementation Matrix

EX 1 Increase Awareness About Burlington's Open Spaces

No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
EX 1.1	Collaborate to create educational tools on Burlington's natural history and stewardship story with associated places to visit.	Parks Conservation Team	Crows Path, Master Naturalist, UVM, Shelburne Farms, ECHO, WVPD, Vermont Folklife, UVM Spatial Analysis, Generator
EX 1.2	Create a central calendar that crowdsources events and volunteer efforts around the City. (See also EX1.3)	Parks Communications (with LoveBurlington)	Wildways, Parks Conservation Team
EX 1.3	Create a comprehensive open space communications and education plan to share recommendations of the open space plan. (See also EX1.2)	Parks Communications	City Planning, Park Planning, Wildways

EX 2 Grow Public Access to Nature-Based Experiences

No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
EX 2.1	Expand "everyday" nature experiences across the city that give community members opportunities to experience green/natural spaces as part of daily routines and without driving.	Parks Conservation Team, Parks Planning	Parks Communications, Neighborhoods/ individual landowners
EX 2.2	Continue to partner with private and institutional landowners to expand public access to nature experiences.	Parks	UVM, Rock Point, Intervale Center other large landowners



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	EX 1.3
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	EX 1.2

High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
YES	-	Long-term (6+ years)	-
-	-	Long-term (6+ years)	-





Implementation Matrix

EX 3 Break Down Barriers to Open Space Access

No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
EX 3.1	Evaluate opportunities for universal access in natural areas where appropriate and considering ecological sensitivity. (See also EX3.3)	Parks Planning	BACA
EX 3.2	Improve equitable transportation access to natural areas and seek out alternative funding mechanisms.	Parks Planning	DPW, CCRPC
EX 3.3	Regularly engage marginalized communities who face barriers to accessing or enjoying open space to identify additional actions to increase use and where to prioritize improvements. (See also EX3.1)	Parks Planning, City Planning, REIB, BACA	Liberation Ecosystem, BPRW Conservation Team, Wildways
EX 3.4	Plan for and accommodate different cultural preferences in the use of public outdoor spaces.	Parks Planning, City Planning, REIB	Liberation Ecosystem, BPRW Conservation Team, Wildways
EX 3.5	Incorporate language access in educational campaigns.	Parks Communications, REIB	-



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Long-term (6+ years)	EX 3.3
-	-	Long-term (6+ years)	
YES	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	EX 3.1
YES	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-





GOAL FOUR

CULTIVATE

Growing sustainable and accessible local food systems that meet community needs

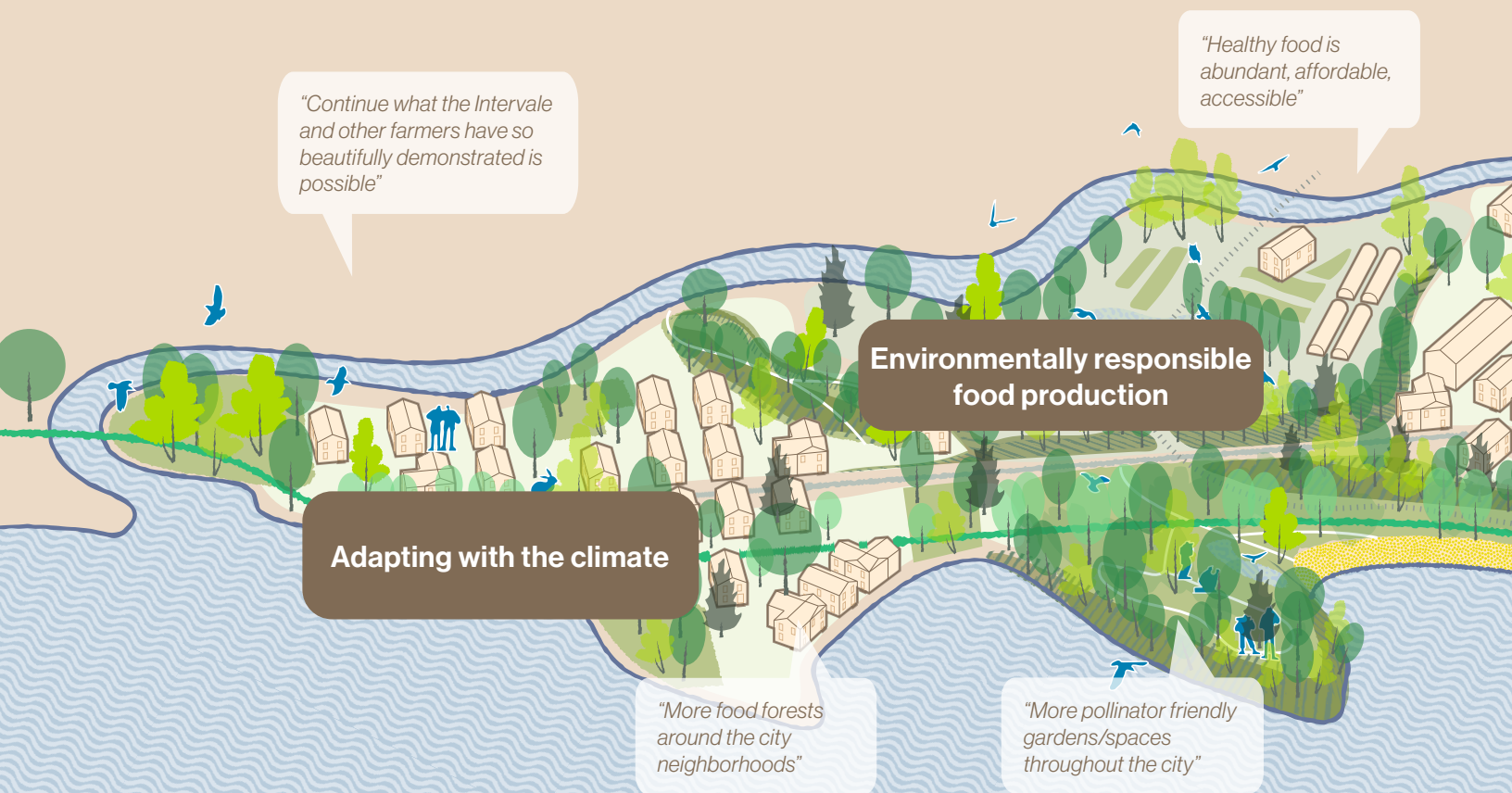




CULTIVATE Overview

Growing local connects us to our food and can create more sustainable food systems

Local food systems are integral to the fabric of open space and life in Burlington, from the home garden to the community garden to the Intervale Center. More growing space is needed to meet the community's demand, and the system is susceptible to challenges like climate change.



CULTIVATE Strategies

- CL1 Cultivate sustainable and resilient agriculture practices
- CL2 Expand community gardens
- CL3 Support the cultivation of alternate food sources



Pollinator habitat near growing spaces

"Increased awareness and furthering education"

Growing community within the growing community

Access to community gardens and growing spaces

"Floodplains with more resiliency"

"Availability of places to garden in every neighborhood."



CULTIVATE: Overview

Exposure to varied food experiences can strengthen local food resilience



In Burlington, food growing spaces also hold deep cultural significance as symbols of community resilience, heritage, and connection to the land. For many of Burlington's immigrant communities, these spaces exemplify traditional agricultural practice, provide space for intergenerational knowledge sharing, and encourage food sovereignty. Similarly, community gardens often reclaim space for marginalized communities, nurturing identity, pride, and care. These spaces connect people closer to nature and collective health, making them vital to cultural continuity and social cohesion.

Exposure Burlingtonians' food growing practices like regenerative agriculture, community gardening, and foraging are just a few of the many ways to increase food experiences and strengthen local food resilience. This includes expanding community gardens, promoting sustainable urban agriculture, and encouraging alternative food sources like food forests and foraging. Together, these efforts diversify how food is grown and accessed locally, reducing reliance on commercial growing methods and improving food security. Take a look at the map to see the many food experiences available to Burlington residents today.



Access to Intervale and Community Gardens

LEGEND

Type of Food Experience

Community (e.g. gardens)

↕

Agriculture (e.g. Intervale)

Walking Time

5 minutes

10 minutes

Food Experiences

	% area within....	
	5 walk	10 walk
Community	14%	30%
↕	1%	2%
Agriculture	2%	3%

Community gardens are distributed across Burlington, although there are gaps in Downtown and in the New North End. The Intervale Center is located near the mid-point of Burlington, but access largely requires a car.



CULTIVATE: Overview

Steward Ecological Health to Sustain Long-Term Food Production

While providing access to more food experiences is important to increase awareness and encourage future stewardship of food growing spaces, the quality of those food growing and cultivating spaces is also critical. This plan identifies several strategies to ensure that Burlington also considers soil health, climate resilience, and sustainable land stewardship as part of its cultivation goals. This focus will ensure that both traditional and alternative food systems can thrive in the face of environmental challenges, such as flooding and temperature fluctuations, aggressive introduced species, and habitat pressure.







CULTIVATE Strategies



STRATEGY 1

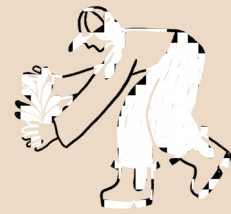
Cultivate Sustainable and Resilient Agriculture Practices

Community-based urban agriculture and stewardship is an integral part of Burlington's open spaces. Since the creation of the first community garden, there has been a thoughtful balance between open space and food production needs throughout the city. This system is under threat, however, from climate change, aggressive introduced species, and deer overpopulation. Flooding especially has been and will continue to be a major issue as weather patterns become more unpredictable.

This strategy endeavors to address these major issues in order to ensure that urban agriculture can continue to thrive for many generations to come. Underlying it is also a focus on soils: as soils are the core resource to farming, understanding them and how to maintain their health is critical to ensuring they remain fertile and retain growing potential.

ACTIONS

- CL1.1 Continue to plan for resilient agriculture strategies in the Intervale as climate and flood risks increase.
- CL1.2 Develop and implement deer management strategies, and track progress.
- CL1.3 Work with other agencies to educate and share resources on soil health information and remediation.



STRATEGY 2

Expand Community Gardens

There are currently 14 community gardens managed by the Burlington Area Community Gardens (BACG) program with plots ranging from 100 square-feet to 750 square-feet. The program not only connects people with plots of land but also encourages community partnerships through community days and knowledge sharing. They foster a close relationship with food and provide food security.

While these gardens are well-loved, demand historically has been and continues to be much higher than supply. There is a great need for more community gardening space, especially as the city continues to grow. This strategy seeks to identify partnerships that can identify where community gardens can be expanded and to set and track goals for expansion.

ACTIONS

- CL1.1 Partner with community and other groups to explore new spaces for community gardens and community agriculture (especially in areas with less vehicle access, higher percentage of low-income residents, and less access to grocery stores).
- CL1.2 Track garden plots per capita to establish baseline conditions and evaluate unmet demand. Set and track mid-term and long-term goals for community garden spaces.





CULTIVATE Strategies



STRATEGY 3

Support the Cultivation of Alternate Food Sources

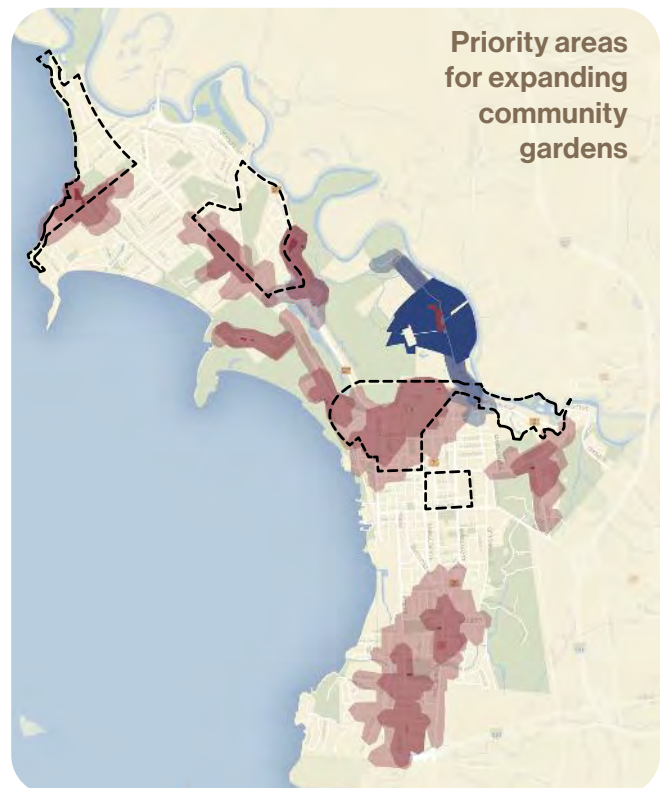
Gardening is not the only method for sourcing food outside of a commercial environment: the natural world is full of native edible plants. Alternative food sources like food forests and the practice of foraging for wild food sources have gradually spread in recent years, partially as a sustainable activity and partially as a safeguard against food insecurity. There sometimes is, however, a conflict between the desire or need for foraging and conservation goals.

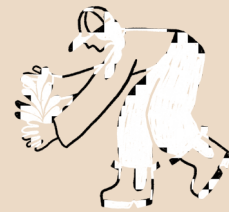
This strategy not only acknowledges foraging as a viable method but also encourages sustainable foraging practices. Food forests can be planned for and educational resources can be shared to ensure responsible cultivation of foraging practices.

ACTIONS

- CL3.1 Plan for food forests, including consideration of tree choices to allow for more community food production. (See also CL3.2)
- CL3.2 Work with the public to facilitate responsible, safe, and sustainable foraging communities. (See also CL3.1)
- CL3.3 See also in CS2.1 CONSERVE: Create network of pollinator-friendly and native plant gardens across the city.

 >15% families below \$25k income.
Potential focus areas for expanding community gardens





Open Space Stories

New Farms for New Americans



What began in 2008 as a workforce development program

under the Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV) has evolved into a community-based gardening and agriculture program for refugees and immigrants.

Each year, NFNA connects around 100 participants with plots of land in the Intervale and Ethan Allen Homestead for subsistence farming—for consumption or for sale—and offers education and training on adapting farming practices to Vermont's climate.

This program not only helps farmers grow culturally significant crops like snake gourd, African eggplants, and daikon but also increases food security and fosters cross-cultural communities. climate resilience.





Implementation Matrix

CL 1 Cultivate Sustainable and Resilient Agriculture Practices			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CL 1.1	Continue to plan for resilient agriculture strategies in the Intervale as climate and flood risks increase.	Intervale Center	Farmers, UVM AgroEcology, Parks Conservation Team, VT Garden Network, CEDO (with NRCS)
CL 1.2	Develop and implement deer management strategies, and track progress.	Conservation Board	Parks Conservation Team, Intervale Center
CL 1.3	Work with other agencies to educate and share resources on soil health information and remediation.	NRCS, CEDO	NRCS, Conservation Districts, UVM Extension Service
CL 2 Expand Community Gardens			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CL 2.1	Partner with community and other groups to explore new spaces for community gardens and community agriculture (especially in areas with less vehicle access, higher percentage of low-income residents, and less access to grocery stores).	City Planning, Parks Conservation Team	Vermont Garden Network
CL 2.2	Track garden plots per capita to establish baseline conditions and evaluate unmet demand. Set and track mid-term and long-term goals for community garden spaces.	Parks Conservation Team	Community gardeners, Vermont Garden Network
CL 3 Support the Cultivation of Alternate Food Sources			
No.	Action	Lead	Key Partners
CL 3.1	Plan for food forests, including consideration of tree choices to allow for more community food production. (See also CL3.2)	Park Planning or Conservation Team	Parks Conservation Team
CL 3.2	Work with the public to facilitate responsible, safe, and sustainable foraging communities. (See also CL3.1)	Intervale Center	WVPD, Parks Communications and Conservation Teams, Rock Point, UVM
CL 3.3	<i>See also in CS2.1 CONSERVE: Create network of pollinator-friendly and native plant gardens across the city.</i>	-	-



High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
YES	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	-
-	-	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
-	-	Long-term (6+ years)	-
High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
-	-	Long-term (6+ years)	-
YES	YES	Near-term (0-2 years)	-
High Priority	Quick Win	Implementation Timeframe	Related Actions
YES	-	Long-term (6+ years)	CL3.2
-	-	Mid-term (2-6 years)	CL3.1
-	-	-	-







4

Way Ahead

Implementing the Open Space Plan will be a team effort. This chapter looks at opportunities to work together—and dream big!—for the future of our open spaces.

How can I contribute?

The Open Space Plan is a roadmap to guide the City of Burlington and its many partners and collaborators as they work together to invest in a thriving open space system for future generations.

While the City is the primary author of this document, and many of the actions will be led by the City, the City cannot implement this plan alone. It will require the investment of everyone in Burlington to make this plan a success. Below are Burlington's open space stewards and key actions that each group will need to champion.

Large Land Stewards

- Contribute to **monitoring of important restoration and wildlife indicators** including aggressive, introduced species, and water quality - See *Strategies CS 1.3, CS 1.4, CS 2.2, and CU 1.2*
- Help **expand public access to nature experiences** - See *Strategy EX 2.2*
- **Alleviate the impacts of climate change** by managing stormwater on-site, expanding tree canopy, and reducing impervious surfaces - See *Strategies CN 1.5 and CN 3.2*



Community Organizations

- **Expand access to food cultivation and pollinator-friendly and native gardens** throughout the city through advocacy and City partnerships - See *Strategies CU 3.1 and CS 2.1*
- **Join a consortium of like-minded organizations** and share resources and best practices - See *Strategy CN 2.1*



Development Community

- Lean into **sustainable/ ecological nature-based approaches to development** - See *Strategy CN 4.3*
- CN 4.1 Contribute to the development of Green Design Standards for new developments and redevelopments to ensure standards balance fiscal realities with aspirations for sustainable building - See *Strategy CN 4.1*



Governmental Partners

- Collaborate across agencies to **identify opportunities for nature-based solutions** in all city, county, and state projects - See *Strategy CN 1.2*
- **Engage seniors and youth** in expanding awareness of nature-based climate solutions - See *Strategy CN 1.3*



Homeowners with Yards

- Consult with the BLUE program about **adding a rain garden or other green infrastructure** to absorb rainfall - See *Strategy CU 3.3*
- Consider converting part of your yard to a **low mow or no mow zone** with native plants - See *Strategies CN 1.2 and CN 1.4*



Everybody!

- **Get out into your open spaces, trails, and forests** - See *Strategy CU 3.3*
- Learn how to **responsibly forage for food** in forests and other open spaces - See *Strategy CU 3.2*



Wild Ideas

Throughout the Open Space Plan process, Burlington residents, land stewards, and other stakeholders shared some out-of-the-box ideas to help guide future investment in and enjoyment of Burlington's open space network and urban wildlife.

Below are a few of Burlington's big ideas! Many of these are tactics or projects that align with the goals and strategies of the plan, and if the funding opportunities and community visions align - these ideas will go a long way in transforming Burlington into a nature-filled city.

Create Continuous Habitats

Tunnel under North Avenue
to the Intervale

Create a wildlife bridge
over Colchester Avenue

Bridge over (or under)
Interstate 89

Become a Foodie City

Encourage food production
everywhere

Street trees should be fruit
producing trees

Go big with "Go Wild"

Need add'l
item

Rewild the Champlain
Connector

Celebrate "no-mow"
May

Create community
toolsheds



Comprehensive Plan Corner

As the City prepares to embark on a new comprehensive plan, there are a few recommendations within the Open Space Plan that will be important to carry forward into the future comprehensive planning.

EX 2.1 Adapt strategies for land acquisition for conservation for both public and private lands reflecting the priorities of the new open space plan and upcoming comprehensive plan.

EX 2.1 Expand “everyday” nature experiences across the city that give community members opportunities to experience green/natural spaces as part of daily routines and without driving.

Additional Considerations Improve multi-modal access to the Intervale in conjunction with existing plans; include adequate funding to ensure creation of critical access







City of Burlington, VT
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Burlington, VT 05401
Phone: (802) 865-7194
www.burlingtonvt.gov/plan

TO: Burlington Planning Commission
FROM: Sarah Morgan, AICP, Principal Planner
Charles Dillard, AICP, Director of City Planning
DATE: September 5, 2025
RE: Proposed ZA-26-01 Technical Amendments and Minor Revisions

This memo is intended to provide an overview about the set of proposed changes included in ZA-26-01.

1. Overview & Background

The revisions included proposed by staff in ZA-26-01 include technical corrections to the ordinance as well as minor revisions to existing standards, described in below in Section 2 of this memo. The proposed set of minor zoning revisions aim to address challenges in the implementation of existing standards, and also seek to align Burlington's CDO with 24 V.S.A. § 4412 following changes enacted under Act 181.

2. Minor Revisions to the CDO

The proposed minor revisions described below will support greater flexibility within current zoning regulations to accommodate development needs. Together, these minor revisions provide greater flexibility for ground-level design in the South End Innovation District, remove residential occupancy limits per Act 181, address challenges related to fence height in Downtown districts, and expand the use of Alternative Compliance to support context-sensitive development.

South End Innovation District

The proposed amendment to the SEID Ground Floor Entries standards addresses a primary challenge that has arisen in reviewing ongoing development plans in the overlay. These entry standards were based on a desire for highly-activated ground floors, particularly those occupied by retail uses. However, local and national trends continue to demonstrate reduced viability of retail and non-residential uses, particularly those in ground floor podiums that are costly to build. As such, the ground floor standards should be amended, both to facilitate greater amounts of private entries into ground floor residential uses on Primary Frontages, and to acknowledge the aforementioned concerns regarding retail viability. Furthermore, the amendment proposes to eliminate the requirement for ground floor entries on Secondary Frontages to extend flexibility to site development and to facilitate marketable residential ground floor uses on these less prominent streets.

Finally, City staff has encountered several site-specific challenges related to topographical and infrastructural conditions that make meeting the current standards challenging. For example, Lakeside Avenue, long proposed as a Secondary Frontage in the first phase of the SEID project, is approximately eight feet below the developable portion of the parcel. As the ROW width, particularly as it crosses under the railroad, does not accommodate a sidewalk, the requirement to locate ground floor entries along this Frontage is not reasonable. Similar challenges have been seen at other locations in the SEID.

Ultimately, this proposed amendment will increase flexibility in the SEID and allow for much-needed housing within a larger South End that continues to see successful business activity in existing buildings.

Residential Occupancy Limits

Adopted in June 2024, Act 181 made statewide changes to land use, commercial development, and housing laws. Among them, Act 181 amended 24 V.S.A. § 4412 to prohibit local zoning or subdivision bylaws from restricting

unrelated occupants from living in the same dwelling unit, stating that “No zoning or subdivision bylaw shall have the effect of prohibiting unrelated occupants from residing in the same dwelling unit.”

Burlington’s CDO currently limits the number of unrelated adults who may live together in a dwelling unit within residential zoning districts and also setting minimum space and parking requirements. This amendment removes those occupancy limits to bring the ordinance into compliance with Act 181.

PlanBTV Downtown Code Fences

Downtown business owners, their employees, and service providers are facing ongoing challenges related to substance use, hygiene, and safety, particularly in alleys, entryways, and service areas. Due to the rigidity of the planBTV Downtown Code, the Development Review Board has requested a zoning amendment to provide them with increased flexibility and authority to potentially allow for taller fences.

The proposed amendment to Article 14 would grant the DRB the authority to approve fence heights of up to 6 to 8 feet, provided that the applicant can demonstrate that such a waiver is justified for public or property safety and aligns with the intent of the Form-Based Code, as well as creating an administrative approval pathway allowing for fences to be up to 6 feet in height, as long as they are transparent.

Alternative Compliance

Alternative Compliance is a zoning review and approval process that offers flexibility for unique site or building conditions in circumstances where relief from standards is minimal, does not negatively impact neighboring properties, and results in development that complies with the ordinance or is better than strict compliance. Currently, the only zoning districts that permit Alternative Compliance are those covered under the planBTV Downtown Code (Article 14), which enables the Development Review Board the authority to grant limited relief from certain zoning standards upon review.

As a regulatory tool, Alternative Compliance provides context-sensitive solutions for circumstances such as irregular lot shapes, topographical challenges, or spatial constraints. This amendment proposes expanding the Development Review Board’s authority to grant up to 20% relief from numerical zoning requirements when unique site or building conditions justify it. Any relief must be the minimum necessary, avoid adverse impacts on neighboring properties, and produce an outcome consistent with or better than full compliance.

3. Technical Corrections

In collaboration with the Department of Permitting and Inspections, this amendment includes a number of technical amendments, are outlined in Section 4c of this memo.

4. Proposed Amendment: ZA-26-01

a) Amendment Type

Text Amendment	Map Amendment	Text & Map Amendment
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b) Purpose Statement

The proposed changes in ZA-26-01 all aim to support greater flexibility within current zoning regulations to accommodate development needs. The purposed changes ensure compliance with recent statewide legislation by eliminating existing Residential Occupancy Limits and also expand the authority of the Development Review Board to grant limited relief from numeric standards. Additionally, the proposal seeks to correct several errors in the CDO, enhancing clarity and consistency in administration for both staff and applicants.

c) Proposed Amendment

1. Amendments to Article 3: Applications, Permits, and Project Reviews

- Revises Sec. 3.1.2 (c) 11. to apply to “Buildings, as defined in Article 13” instead of “structures”.
- Amends Table 3.5.2-1 Zoning Districts (Major Impact) to reflect changes made under the Neighborhood Code, including the creation of the Residential Corridor district.
- Deletes and reserves Sec. 3.5.3 (c) Major Impact Exemptions to reflect the elimination of minimum parking standards in ZA-22-07

2. Amendments to Article 4: Zoning Maps and Districts

- Corrects footnote reference in Table 4.4.2-1
- Amends Sec. 4.4.2 (d) 3. B. to reflect the changes made under ZA-25-04, including referring to Senior Housing as Housing for Older Persons and Individuals with Disabilities.
- Modifies Table 4.4.5-1 Lot Size, Frontage, Setback, & Lot Coverage Standards in Residential Districts:
 - Corrects a footnote reference in the column related to Lot Coverage.
 - Deletes and reserves Footnote 8, which is now irrelevant given the standard related maximum required front yard setback.
- Corrects reference made in Sec. 4.4.5 (d) 2. B. Encroachment to the Waterfront Setback
- Deletes and reserves 4.4.5 (d) 4. C. Residential Occupancy Limits to comply with 24 V.S.A. § 4412.
- Corrects reference made in Sec. 4.4.5 (d) 4. D. Additional Unit on lot or within Owner-Occupied Single Detached Dwelling
- Amends Tables 4.4.5-6 Housing for Older Persons and Individuals with Disabilities Bonus and Table 4.4.5-7 Maximum Intensity, Lot Coverage and Building Heights with Bonuses to include the Residential Corridor District.
- Amends Table 4.5.6-2 Frontage & Activation Standards to reflect changes proposed in Sec.4.5.6(c)2.D.
- Amends Sec. 4.5.6 (c) 2. D. SEID Ground Floor Entries to facilitate greater amounts of private entries into ground floor residential uses on Primary Frontages, and to acknowledge the aforementioned concerns regarding retail viability.

3. Amendments to Article 5: Citywide General Regulations

- Establishes provision for Alternative Compliance under Sec. 5.2.1, which was formerly Reserved.
- Amends Sec. 5.3.5 (a) to remove reference to Sec. 5.2.3 (b) 10, which was eliminated under ZA-25-04.

4. Amendments to Article 6: Development Review Standards

- Corrects reference made in Sec. 6.2.2. (m) Landscaping, Fences, and Retaining Walls

5. Amendments to Article 7: Signs

- Amends Sec. 7.1.1 Authority and Intent to clarify that signs of advertising features not expressly permitted in this ordinance are prohibited.
- Amends Sec. 7.1.4 Historic Marker Exemptions to incorporate Freestanding Yard signs.

6. Amendments to Article 8: Parking Regulations

- Amends Sec. 8.1.8 Minimum Off-Street Parking Requirements to remove conditions related to Residential Occupancy Limits to comply with 24 V.S.A. § 4412.

7. Amendments to Article 9: Inclusionary and Replacement Housing

- Amends Sec. 9.1.5 Applicability to remove reference to Adaptive Reuse.
- Amends table under Sec. 9.1.12 Additional Density and Other Development Allowances to align with changes made via the Neighborhood Code.
- Amends Sec. 9.2.10 (b) to remove reference to conditional use and incorporate the loss of non-residential uses.

8. Amendments to Article 13: Definitions

- Moves the definition for “Building” in Article 14 to Article 13 to consolidate definitions.
- Deletes definitions for “Elderly Housing”, “Housing, Senior”, and “Senior Housing” to reflect changes made in ZA-25-04, where Housing for Older Persons uses the definition established under the Fair Housing Act.
- Simplifies the definition of “Planned Unit Development” and references Article 11 for specific provisions.

9. Amendments to Article 14: PlanBTV Downtown Code

- Amends Sec. 14.6.8 (b) v. A. Fences and Free-Standing Walls to grant the DRB the authority to approve fence heights of up to 6 to 8 feet and create an administrative approval pathway allowing for fences to be up to 6 feet in height, as long as they are transparent.

d) Relationship to planBTV

This following discussion of conformance with the goals and policies of planBTV is prepared in accordance with the provisions of 24 V.S.A. §4441(c).

Theme:	Dynamic	Distinctive	Inclusive	Connected
Land Use:	Conserve	Sustain		Grow

Compatibility with Proposed Future Land Use & Density

The proposed amendment is consistent with the Land Use and Density related policies of planBTV. As frequently discussed with the Planning Commission, the rise in housing costs and slow pace of construction are some of the biggest challenges related to housing in Burlington. The “Dynamic” theme prioritizes innovative solutions that are environmentally, economically, and socially sound, echoing this amendment’s need to support greater flexibility within current zoning regulations to accommodate development needs.

Additionally, many of these amendments are primarily and are intended to clarify for the public and staff the standards and processes regulating development and growth across the city.

Impact on Safe & Affordable Housing

This amendment has no direct impact on safe and affordable housing, except in that it corrects errors and provides greater clarity for applicants.

Planned Community Facilities

This amendment has no direct impact on planned community facilities, except in that it corrects errors and provides greater clarity.

h) Process Overview

The following chart summarizes the current stage in the zoning amendment process, and identifies any recommended actions:

Planning Commission Process					
Draft Amendment prepared by Staff 9/4/25	Presentation to & discussion by Commission: 9/9/25	Approve for Public Hearing	Public Hearing	Approved & forwarded to Council	
City Council Process					
First Read & Referral to Ordinance Committee	Ordinance Committee discussion	Ordinance Committee recommend	Second Read	Public Hearing	Council Approval & Adoption

CITY OF BURLINGTON

ORDINANCE _____

Sponsor: Office of City Planning,
Planning Commission

Public Hearing Dates: _____

First reading: _____

Referred to: _____

Rules suspended and placed in all
stages of passage: _____

Second reading: _____

Action: _____

Date: _____

Signed by Mayor: _____

Published: _____

Effective: _____

In the Year Two Thousand Twenty-Five

An Ordinance in Relation to

ZA-26-01 Technical Amendments and Minor Revisions

It is hereby Ordained by the City Council of the City of Burlington as follows:

1 That Appendix A-Burlington Comprehensive Development Ordinance of the Code of Ordinances of the City
2 of Burlington be and hereby amends Sec. 3.1.2 (c) Exemptions, Table 3.5.2-1 Zoning Districts, and Removes
3 Sec. 3.5.3 (c); Corrects a footnote referenced in Table 4.4.2-1 Dimensional Standards and Density; Amends
4 Sec. 4.4.2 (d) 3. B. Senior Housing; Deletes and reserves footnote 8 in Table 4.4.5-1; Corrects reference to
5 Table 4.4.5-1 made under Sec. 4.4.5. (d) 2. B.; Deletes and reserves Sec. 4.4.5. (d) 4. C. Residential
6 Occupancy Limits; Corrects reference made to Article 3 under Sec. 4.4.5. (d) 4. D.; Amends Table 4.4.5-6
7 Housing for Older Persons and Individuals with Disabilities Bonus and Table 4.4.5-7 Maximum Intensity,
8 Lot Coverage and Building Heights with Bonuses; Amends Table 4.5.6-2 Frontage and Activation Standards
9 and Sec. 4.5.5 (c) 2. C. Ground Floor Entries; Adds Alternative Compliance provisions under the formerly
10 reserved Sec. 5.2.1; Amends Sec. 3.5.3. A. 1. Changes and Modifications; Amends Sec. 5.3.5 (a) to remove
11 reference to Sec. 5.2.3 (b) 10; Corrects reference made to Sec. 5.2.6 (d) under Sec. 6.2.2 (m); Amends Sec.
12 7.1.1 Authority and Intent and Sec. 7.1.3 (h) Historic Marker; Removes reference to Adaptive Reuse under
13 Sec. 9.1.5 (b); Amends Sec. 8.1.8 Minimum Off-Street Parking Requirements; Aligns table in Sec. 9.1.12
14 Additional Density and Other Development Allowances to reflect base allowances amended under ZA-25-
15 02; Amends Sec. 9.2.10 (c); and modifies Article 13 by deleting definitions for "Elderly Housing", "Housing,
16 Senior", and "Senior Housing", moves the definition for "Building" from Article 13, and amends the
17 definition for Planned Unit Development.

Article 3: APPLICATIONS, PERMITS, AND PROJECT REVIEWS**PART 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS AND ZONING PERMITS****3.1.2 Zoning Permit Required**

Except for that development which is exempt from a permit requirement under Sec. 3.1.2(c) below, no development may be commenced within the city without a zoning permit issued by the administrative officer including but not limited to the following types of exterior and interior work:

(a - b) *As Written*

(c) Exemptions

The following shall be exempt from the requirements of this Ordinance and shall not be required to obtain a zoning permit:

1. – 10. *As Written*

11. All ~~structures~~ buildings, as defined in Article 13, of 24 square feet or less and no taller than 15 feet, as long as they are located in compliance with applicable setbacks. This exemption is limited to 1 such structure, or multiple structures in aggregate up to 24 square feet, per property. This exemption does not apply to properties located within the Special Flood Hazard Area.

12. – 21. *As Written*

Article 3: APPLICATIONS, PERMITS, AND PROJECT REVIEWS**PART 5: CONDITIONAL USE AND MAJOR IMPACT REVIEW****Sec. 3.5.2 Applicability**

(a) **Conditional Use Review – *As Written***

(b) **Major Impact Review**

Major Impact Review shall be required for the approval of all development involving any one or more of the following:

Table 3.5.2-1 Zoning Districts					
	Downtown Mixed Use and Form Districts	Neighborhood Mixed Use, Institutional, Enterprise, <u>Residential Corridor</u>	Residential- Medium Density<u>Intensity</u>, Residential – High Density<u>Intensity</u>	Residential- Low Density<u>Intensity</u>	RCO-A, RCO-C, RCO-RG, UR
Dwelling Units	Creation of fifty (50) or more dwelling units	Creation of twenty-five (25) or more dwelling units	Creation of ten (10) or more dwelling units	Creation of five (5) or more dwelling units	NA
Land Subdivision	NA	NA	Creation of ten (10) or more lots;	Creation of five (5) or more lots	NA
Non-residential or Mixed Use Development	A development footprint ¹ of fifty thousand (50,000) s.f. or more, or the creation of one hundred thousand (100,000) s.f. or more of gross floor area.	A development footprint ¹ of twenty thousand (20,000) s.f. or more, or the creation of forty thousand (40,000) s.f. or more of gross floor area.	A development footprint ¹ of eight thousand (8,000) s.f. or more, or the creation of fifteen thousand (15,000) s.f. or more of gross floor area.	A development footprint ¹ of five thousand (5,000) s.f. or more, or the creation of ten thousand (10,000) s.f. or more of gross floor area.	Creation of five thousand (5,000) s.f. or more of gross floor area ²

¹ Development Footprint: total area of impervious coverage – buildings and parking.

² Farm structures are exempt per 10 VSA 6001.

In addition, Major Impact Review shall also be required for multiple projects undertaken by the same applicant or responsible party within any consecutive twelve (12) month period on the same or adjacent property that in the aggregate equal or exceed the above criteria.

Sec. 3.5.3 Exemptions

Major Impact Review shall not be required for applications involving one or more of the following:

- (a) Temporary structures that do not otherwise involve a conditional use;
- (b) Rehabilitation that does not expand the floor area of an existing building or the structural capacity of existing development;
- (c) ~~Reserved Projects that do not result in a change of use or increased parking demand;~~
- (d) Subsurface site improvements including but not limited to underground utility lines and subsurface drainage ways; and,
- (e) Projects where the scope and authority of municipal regulation is limited by statute pursuant to 24 VSA 4413.

Article 4: ZONING MAPS AND DISTRICTS

PART 4: BASE ZONING DISTRICT REGULATIONS

Sec. 4.4.2 Neighborhood Mixed Use Districts

(a) Purpose – As Written

(b) Dimensional Standards and Density:

The density and intensity of development, dimensions of building lots, the heights of buildings and their setbacks from property boundary lines, and the limits on lot coverage shall be governed by the following standards:

Table 4.4.2 -1 Dimensional Standards and Density

Districts	Max. Intensity (floor area ratio ¹)	Max. Lot Coverage	Minimum Building Setbacks (feet)			Building Height (feet)
			Front ³	Side	Rear	
NAC	2.0 FAR	80% ⁴	0	0 ²	0 ²	Min: 22', 2 stories Max: 35
NMU	2.0 FAR	80%	0 ⁵	0 ²	0 ²	Min: 22', 2 stories Max: 35
NAC-Riverside	2.0 FAR	80%	0	0 ²	0 ²	Min: 22', 2 stories Max: 35
NAC-CR	2.0 FAR	60%	Min. 0 ⁷ Max. 20 ⁷	10 ⁶	20 ⁶	Min: 22', 2 stories Max: 65'
1 – 4. As Written 5. Notwithstanding footnote 4 3, the NMU district at the intersection of Pine St. and Flynn Avenue shall have a minimum front yard setback of 10 feet. 6 – 7. As Written						

(c) Permitted and Conditional Uses – As Written

(d) District Specific Regulations

1. – 2. As Written

3. Development Bonuses/Additional Allowances

A. Inclusionary Housing – As Written

B. ~~Senior Housing~~ Housing for Older Persons and Individuals with Disabilities

A maximum of an additional 10-feet of building height, and corresponding FAR, may be permitted at the discretion of the DRB in the NAC and NAC-Riverside districts where no less than twenty-five per cent (25%) of the total number of onsite units are reserved for projects including exclusively housing for Older Persons (as defined by the federal Fair Housing Act), housing for Individuals with Disabilities (as defined by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act), or a mixture exclusively thereof ~~low-moderate income senior households as defined by state or federal guidelines~~, including no less than ten percent (10%) reserved for low income households. The total gross floor area dedicated to the senior housing housing for older persons and individuals with disabilities shall be equivalent to the gross floor area resulting from the additional allowance. Increased lot coverage allowance for ~~senior housings~~ such projects in these districts shall be the same as for inclusionary housing (see Sec. 9.1.12)

Sec. 4.4.5 Residential Districts

(a) Purpose – As Written

(b) Dimensional Standards

The intensity of development, dimensions of building lots, the heights of buildings and their setbacks from property boundary lines, and the limits on lot coverage shall be governed by the following standards:

Table 4.4.5-1 Lot Size, Frontage, Setback, and Lot Coverage Standards in Residential Districts

District	Min. Lot Frontage ^{2,3,4,5} (linear feet)	Setbacks ^{1,6,7,8,9}			Lot Coverage ^{1,9} 10
		Front	Side	Rear	
Residential Low (RL)	30'	Min: Avg. of front setback 2 adjacent lots on both sides +/- 5 feet Max required: 25 ft	Min: 10% of lot width or avg. of side setback of 2 adjacent lots on both sides Max required: 20 ft	20 ft.	45%
Residential Medium (RM)				15 ft.	55%
Residential High (RH)	N/A				80%
Residential Corridor (RC)	N/A	Min required: 5 ft Max permitted: 20 ft			80%

1 – 7: As Written

8. ~~Reserved For properties in the RL and RM zones with frontage along Lake Champlain or the Winooski River, the front yard setback shall not be required to exceed 50 feet.~~

9. As Written - An additional ten per cent (10%) lot coverage may be permitted for accessory residential features per (d) 2C below.

(c) Permitted and Conditional Uses – As Written

(d) District Specific Regulations

The following regulations are district-specific exceptions, bonuses, and standards unique to the residential districts. They are in addition to, or may modify, city-wide standards as provided in Article 5 of this ordinance and district standards as provided above.

1. Additional Residential Development Permitted – As Written

2. Exceptions to Dimensional Standards

A. Encroachment into Side Setback for Residential Driveways – As Written

B. Encroachment into the Waterfront Setback

The following exceptions to the required waterfront setback for Lake Champlain and the Winooski River established under ~~Sec. 4.5.4:~~ Article 4, Table 4.4.5-1, footnotes 7 and 8.

3. Exception for Neighborhood Commercial Uses – As Written

4. Miscellaneous Standards

A – B – As Written

~~C. Reserved C. Residential Occupancy Limits.~~

~~In all residential districts, the occupancy of any dwelling unit is limited to members of a family as defined in Article 13. Notwithstanding the following, the minimum square footage requirements shall be reduced by ten (10%) percent in situations where the residential premises are owner occupied.~~

~~Subject to Conditional Use approval by the DRB, a dwelling unit may be occupied by more than four (4) unrelated adults if it contains at least twenty five hundred (2,500) square feet excluding its attic and basement pursuant to the following:~~

- ~~(i) If in a RL district, the dwelling unit also contains at least an additional two hundred fifty (250) square feet and two (2) onsite parking spaces, plus one (1) additional parking space per adult occupant in excess of four (4); or,~~
- ~~(ii) If in a RM district, the dwelling unit also contains at least an additional two hundred (200) square feet and two (2) onsite parking spaces, plus one (1) additional parking space per adult occupant in excess of four (4).~~
- ~~(iii) If in a RH district, the dwelling unit also contains at least an additional 150 square feet and two (2) onsite parking spaces, plus 1 additional parking space per adult occupant in excess of four (4).~~

~~In considering a request relating to permitting a greater number of unrelated individuals residing in a dwelling unit within a residential zoning district, no conditional use permit may be granted unless all facilities within the dwelling unit, including bathroom and kitchen facilities are accessible to the occupants without passing through any bedroom. Each room proposed to be occupied as a bedroom must contain at least one hundred twenty (120) square feet.~~

D. Additional Unit on lot or within Owner-Occupied Single Detached Dwelling

Where an existing Principal Structure in any Residential Zoning District contains only an owner-occupied Single Detached Dwelling, and an applicant proposes to add a single additional dwelling unit within the Principal Structure or within a detached Secondary Structure on the same lot as the owner-occupied home, the application shall be subject to administrative review and approval according to Sec.3.2.7 (a) 13, and exempt from paying impact fees, according to Sec. 3.3.~~13.~~, except where otherwise required.

5. Residential Development Bonuses

The following exceptions to maximum allowable residential standards in Tables 4.4.5-1 and 4.4.5-2 may be approved in any combination subject to the maximum limits set forth in Table 4.4.5-6 at the discretion of the

DRB. Any bonuses that are given pursuant to this ordinance now or in the future shall be regarded as an exception to the limits otherwise applicable.

A. Housing for Older Persons and Individuals with Disabilities Bonus

Residential development in excess of the limits set forth in Tables 4.4.5-1 and 4.4.5-2 may be permitted by the DRB for projects including exclusively housing for Older Persons (as defined by the federal Fair Housing Act), housing for Individuals with Disabilities (as defined by the federal Americans with Disabilities Act), or a mixture exclusively thereof provided the following conditions are met:

- (i) No less than twenty-five (25) per cent of the total number of units shall be reserved for low-moderate income households as defined by state or federal guidelines, including no less than ten (10) percent reserved for low-income households. (Projects taking advantage of this bonus are exempt from the Inclusionary Zoning requirements of Article 9, Part 1.);
- (ii) The proposal shall be subject to the design review provisions of Art. 6;
- (iii) Lot coverage, height, and development intensity shall not exceed the following. The maximum dwelling units per building in Table 4.4.5-2 may be waived subject to the DRB approval under Article 11.

Table 4.4.5-6: Housing for Older Persons and Individuals with Disabilities Bonus

District	Maximum Lot Coverage	Maximum Development Intensity	Maximum Height
RL	55%	1.5 FAR	4 stories, 50 ft
RM	65%	1.75 FAR	
RH, <u>RC</u>	90%	2.0 FAR	5 stories, 62 ft.

B. Residential Conversion Bonus – As Written

C. Limitations on Residential Development Bonuses:

For projects where the conditions of more than one applicable bonus listed above and under Sec. 5.4.8 (e) are met, and where any applicable development allowances per Article 9 are utilized, the applicant may use the most permissive exemption to the underlying lot coverage or residential intensities applicable.

In no case shall any development bonuses and allowances granted, either individually or in combination, enable a building to exceed the maximum development intensity, lot coverage, and building height permitted in any district as defined below:

Table 4.4.5-7: Maximum Intensity, Lot Coverage and Building Heights with Bonuses

District	Maximum FAR*	Maximum Height	Maximum Lot Coverage*
RL	1.5 FAR	50-feet	55%
RM	1.75 FAR	50-feet	65%
RH, RC	2.0 FAR	62-feet	90%

*- or 125% of the pre-application gross floor area or coverage of the qualifying principal building as may be applicable per Table 5.4.8-1 Historic Building Rehabilitation Bonus

(c) Effective Date – As Written

Article 4: ZONING MAPS AND DISTRICTS

PART 5: OVERLAY ZONING DISTRICT REGULATIONS

Sec. 4.5.6 South End Innovation District Overlay

(a - b) – As Written

(c) District Specific Regulations

1. Dimensional Standards & Density – As Written

Table 4.5.6-2: Frontage and Activation Standards

Frontage Type	Min lot frontage occupied by buildings ^{1,2}	Percent of ground floor building frontage containing non-residential uses ¹	Ground floor level entries required
Primary	80% min	80% min	Every 60' min
Secondary	70% min	20% min or 500 sq. ft. whichever is greater	N/A
1. Measured linearly. 2. A courtyard on a building façade adjacent to a street or Public Path, with minimum dimensions 12 feet minimum and 35 feet maximum, shall be counted in the calculation of frontage to satisfy this requirement.			

2. Frontage and Ground Floor Activation Standards

A – B. – As Written

- D. Ground ~~Floor Level~~ Entries: At least one ground ~~level floor public~~ entry into a building or interior courtyard or open space, not including service doors, is required each 60' linear feet along a Primary frontage of each building façade fronting on a Street, Public Path or open space on the same lot.

Article 5: CITYWIDE GENERAL REGULATIONS

PART 1: DIMENSIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Sec. 5.2.1 Reserved Alternative Compliance

Unless otherwise provided for in this ordinance, relief from any numerical standard by no more than 20% of such requirement may be granted by the Development Review Board after review. Decisions by the DRB regarding any Alternative Compliance granted shall be made in writing and upon affirmative findings that:

- a. The relief is necessary to accommodate unique site and/or building circumstances or opportunities, and the unnecessary hardship has not been created by the applicant;
- b. the relief granted is the minimum necessary to achieve the desired result;
- c. the relief will not impose an undue adverse burden on existing or future development of adjacent properties; and,
- a.d. the relief will result in an outcome equal to or better than strict compliance with the standard being relieved.

Article 5: CITYWIDE GENERAL REGULATIONS

PART 3: NON-CONFORMITIES

Sec. 5.3.5 Nonconforming Structures

(a) Changes and Modifications

Nothing in this Part shall be deemed to prevent normal maintenance and repair or structural repair, or moving of a non-complying structure pursuant to any applicable provisions of this Ordinance.

Any change or modification to a nonconforming structure, other than to full conformity under this Ordinance, shall only be allowed subject to the following:

1. Such a change or modification may reduce the degree of nonconformity and shall not increase the nonconformity except as provided below.

Within the residential districts, and subject to Development Review Board approval, existing nonconforming single family homes and community centers (existing enclosed spaces only) that project into side and/or rear yard setbacks may be vertically expanded so long as the expansion does not encroach further into the setback than the existing structure. Such expansion shall be of the existing nonconformity (i.e. setback) and shall:

- i) Be subject to conformance with all other dimensional requirements (i.e. height, lot coverage, density and intensity of development);
- ii) Not have an undue adverse impact on adjoining properties or any public interest that would be protected by maintaining the existing setbacks; and,
- iii) Be compatible with the character and scale of surrounding structures.

Existing accessory buildings of 15 feet in height or less shall not exceed 15 feet tall as expanded.

~~Within all districts, and subject to the Development Review Board approval, structures for the purpose of creating an ADU may be constructed on lots with legally non-conforming lot coverage per Sec.5.2.3 (b) 10.~~

Article 6: DEVELOPMENT REVIEW STANDARDS

PART 2: SITE PLAN DESIGN STANDARDS

Sec. 6.2.2 Review Standards

(a – l) As Written

(m) Landscaping, Fences, and Retaining Walls

Fences may be placed within the required setback along a property line, but shall be setback sufficiently to provide for the maintenance of both sides of the fence without entering onto the adjacent property and shall present a finished side to the adjoining property and public street. Fences placed within a clear sight triangle shall adhere to the standards of Sec. 5.2.6 (ed). Styles, materials, and dimensions of the proposed fence shall be compatible with the context of the neighborhood and the use of the property.

Article 7: SIGNS**PART 1: GENERAL PROVISIONS****Sec. 7.1.1 Authority and Intent**

These regulations are enacted under the provisions of 24 V.S.A. Section 4411 with the intent to ensure that all Signs and advertising features:

(a – e). *As Written*

Any sign or advertising feature not expressly permitted by this ordinance shall be prohibited.

Sec. 7.1.3 Exemptions

Repainting, refacing, repair, or change of lettering, logo, or colors using the same materials within an existing permitted Sign frame shall be exempt from the requirements of this Article and allowed without the requirement to obtain a new zoning permit.

The following types of Signs are permitted in all parts of the city, and shall also be exempt from the requirements of this Article and the necessity to obtain a permit:

(a – g) *As Written*

(h) Historic Marker: A non-illuminated sign, either a Wall Sign sixteen square feet or less in size or a Freestanding Yard sign of 14 square feet or less and 12 feet tall or less, commemorating the historic significance of a building or site.

(i – j) *As Written*

Article 8: PARKING REGULATIONS**PART 1: GENERAL REQUIREMENTS****Sec. 8.1.8 Minimum Off-Street Parking Requirements**

Requirements for a minimum number of off-street parking spaces have been recognized as an impediment to building housing and other desired uses, inhibit the expansion of alternative transportation and transportation demand management, and act as an instrument to overbuild parking and incentivize single occupancy automobile use. Therefore, minimum off-street spaces are eliminated in all parking districts for all uses. ~~except for applications seeking to exceed occupancy of a dwelling unit by more than four (4) unrelated adults. Such applications are subject to the parking requirements of Sec. 4.4.5 (d), 4, C, Residential Occupancy Limits.~~

Article 9: INCLUSIONARY AND REPLACEMENT HOUSING**PART 1: INCLUSIONARY ZONING****Sec. 9.1.5 Applicability**

This ordinance provision shall apply to any development of five or more residential units in a single structure. Multiple developments or projects by the same applicant or responsible party within any consecutive twelve (12) month period that in the aggregate equal or exceed the above criteria shall be subject to these regulations.

Except as otherwise provided in this ordinance, these regulations shall apply in the instances specified below.

- (a) The creation of five (5) or more residential units through new construction and/or substantial rehabilitation of existing structures, including the development of housing units utilizing development provisions other than those specified in Sec 9.1.5 (b).
- (b) Where units are created using the ~~Adaptive Reuse or~~ Residential Conversion criteria pursuant to the provisions of Art 4, Sec 4.4.5, this article shall be applicable when at least ten (10) or more dwelling units are created.
- (c – d) *As Written*

Sec. 9.1.12 Additional Density and Other Development Allowances

All covered projects shall be entitled to increases in the development allowances of the underlying zoning district in accordance with the provisions of this section.

- (a) Any covered project shall be entitled by right to an increase in the maximum lot coverage density/intensity, and, where applicable, height allowed for the lot(s) on which the project is located when all required Inclusionary Units are constructed on the same lot, or lots subject to Article 11 Planned Development. Calculations for these entitlements shall be based on the following tables:

Zoning District	Maximum Units/Acre	Maximum FAR	FAR/ Height	Maximum Lot Coverage
RH, RC	46	<u>2.0 FAR</u>	<u>5 Stories, 62 ft.</u> 12' height set back 10' along street facade ¹	92 90%
RM	25	<u>1.75 FAR</u>	n/a 4 Stories, 50 ft.	48 65%
RM-W	25		12' height set back 10' along street facade¹	72 %
RL, RL-W	8.75	<u>1.5 FAR</u>	<u>4 Stories, 50 ft.</u> n/a	44 55%
FD6, FD5	n/a	<u>0.5 FAR</u>	0.5 FAR	100%
NMU, NAC, NAC-R	n/a	<u>0.5 FAR</u>	0.5 FAR +12' height set back 10' along street facade	92%
NAC-CR	n/a	<u>0.5 FAR</u>	0.5 FAR +12' height set back 10' along street facade	72%
E-LM-SEID	n/a	<u>0.25 FAR</u>	0.25 FAR	n/a

¹ In the ~~RH and RM-W Neighborhood Mixed Use-residential~~ zones an additional 12 feet of building height shall be allowed by right only for an additional 5% of inclusionary housing units provided in excess of the minimum requirements of Sec. 9.1.8.

- (b – d) *As Written*

Article 9: INCLUSIONARY AND REPLACEMENT HOUSING

PART 2: HOUSING PRESERVATION AND REPLACEMENT/DEMOLITION AND CONVERSION

Sec. 9.2.10 Exemptions

This article shall not be applicable to:

- (a – b) *As Written*

- (c) The demolition, loss, or conversion to a nonresidential use of a single attached or detached housing unit or duplex that is occupied by the owner as his or her primary residence for the twelve-(12) month period preceding the date of application for ~~conditional-use~~ approval. Nor shall this section be applicable in its replacement requirement to that portion of a multi-unit building of three (3) units or more that is occupied by the owner as his or her primary residence for the thirty-six-(36) month period preceding the date of application for ~~conditional-use~~ approval. Any exemption allowed under this provision shall be void if the owner sells any of the applicable units within twenty-four (24) months of the date of ~~conditional-use~~ approval; and,

- (d) *As Written*

Article 13: DEFINITIONS

Building: Not synonymous with Structure; man-made construction completely enclosed by a roof, window, doors and solid exterior walls, and designed, built, or occupied as a shelter of enclosure for persons, animals, or property.

Elderly Housing: See Housing, Senior.

Housing, Senior: Housing that is designed for, and is occupied primarily by, those persons fifty-five (55) years of age or older.

Planned Unit Development: A development plan for one or more lots, tracts, or parcels to be developed as a single, integrated entity. See Article 11 for specific provisions. One or more lots, tracts, or parcels of land to be developed as a single entity, the plan for which may propose any authorized combination of density or intensity transfers or increases, as well as the mixing of land uses. This plan, as authorized, may deviate from bylaw requirements that are otherwise applicable to the area in which it is located with respect to lot size, bulk, or type of dwelling or building, use, density, intensity, lot coverage, parking, required common open space, or other standards, pursuant to the authority and limitations set forth in the comprehensive master plan and 24 V.S.A. §4417 as amended.

Senior Housing: See Housing, Senior

Article 14 PlanBTV Downtown Code

Section 6: Applicable in All Form Districts

Section 14.6.8 – Site and Landscape Standards

a) Purpose and Applicability – *As Written*

b) Site Standards

i – iv. *As Written*

v. Fences and Free-standing Walls:

A. Fences and Free-standing Walls placed within the First Lot Layer shall not exceed 4-feet in height, except for see-through fences which shall not exceed 6 feet in height. Fences and Free-standing Walls placed within the Second or Third Lot Layer shall not exceed 8-feet in height unless a different height limit is specified under the applicable Form District or Frontage Type. The Development Review Board has the authority to allow the fences up to 8-feet in height in all lot layers where it is demonstrated by the applicant, at the judgment of the Board, that such a waiver is justified for public or property safety standards and otherwise meets the intent of the Form Based Code.

Article 14 PlanBTV Downtown Code

Section 8: Glossary

Building: ~~not synonymous with Structure; man-made construction completely enclosed by a roof, window, doors and solid exterior walls, and designed, built, or occupied as a shelter of enclosure for persons, animals, or property. See definition for “Building” in Article 13.~~

* Material stricken out deleted.

** Material underlined added.

Ordinances 2026/ZA-26-01 Technical Corrections and Minor Revisions

DRAFT v1.0 09/04/26

Burlington Planning Commission

149 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401

www.burlingtonvt.gov/cityplanning

Andy Montroll, Chair
Alexander Friend, Vice Chair
Michael Gaughan
Erhard Mahnke
Ryan Nick
Erin Malone
Julia Randall

Burlington Planning Commission

Tuesday August 12, 2025, 6:30 P.M.

Hybrid Meeting via Zoom and in City Hall's Bushor Conference Room

Draft Minutes

Commissioners Present:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☒ Andy Montroll | ☒ Michael Gaughan |
| ☐ Erhard Mahnke | ☒ Erin Malone |
| ☒ Ryan Nick | ☒ Julia Randall |
| ☒ Alexander Friend | |

City Staff Present:

- | |
|---|
| ☐ Charles Dillard, Director |
| ☐ Sarah Morgan, Principal Planner, OCP |
| ☐ Mary O'Neil, Principal Planner, DPI |

Development Review Board Attendees: Caitlin Halpert

Design Advisory Board Attendees: Richard Martin, Jay White, Ron Wanamaker, Joel Baird, Gabe Stadecke

Public Attendance: Sharon Bushor, Elizabeth Watson

1. **Agenda**

Call to Order: 6:30pm

Changes to Agenda: N/A

2. **Welcome + Introductions**

3. **Public Forum**

No attendees spoke during Public Forum

4. **Joint Meeting of the Planning Commission, Development Review Board, and Design Advisory Board**

Elizabeth Watson (Heritage Strategies), Sarah Morgan, and Mary O'Neil presented on preserveBTV and facilitated a discussion related to Historic Preservation in Burlington.

Summary of discussion: The Burlington Planning Commission held a special meeting to discuss the preservation plan, with Elizabeth and her team presenting an overview of the project. They highlighted the partnership with Heritage Strategies, the establishment of a Historic Preservation Advisory Committee, and the completion of focus groups with residents. The presentation covered the project's goals, including preserving Burlington's distinctive identity, encouraging adaptive reuse, and reviewing historic regulations. Elizabeth and her team are currently in the analysis phase and plan to draft recommendations in the coming months, with a public workshop and UVM graduate student involvement planned for September.

5. **Planning Commission Meeting:**

a. **Chair's Report** : N/A

b. **Director's Report**

ACT 181: The Planning Commission discussed the upcoming August 25th Council meeting regarding the Act 181 maintenance map, with C. Dillard offering to help coordinate a memo expressing the

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Commission's opinions on the map. M. Gaughan raised questions about the delegation of Legacy Act 250 permits, which Charles clarified could not be addressed until the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission adopts their regional plan in June or July next year. Discussed the need to schedule a meeting of the Long Range Planning Committee to address the memo for the Council meeting.

c. Presentation from staff related to *planBTV* New North End design concepts

Between 50-60 attendees at Design Workshop on 7/23. Design concepts now entering refining stage. The meeting focused on the New North End's development plan, highlighting its suburban nature and the community's vision for a more connected, inclusive, and vibrant neighborhood. Key discussion points included:

- Expanding housing choice and affordability, improving transportation networks, balancing growth with green space, and identifying areas for intense development. The plan emphasizes creating safer, more accessible routes, enhancing parks and open spaces, and prioritizing sustainability in infrastructure. Focus areas for development were identified, including the North Ave Alliance Church site, with proposals for mixed-use buildings and mobility hubs. The community's desire for more social spaces, commercial areas, and improved walkability was noted, with specific attention to enhancing connectivity and accessibility.
- M. Gaughan expressed concerns about the vision for the North Ave Alliance Church site and whether there was prior engagement with the church community. Staff acknowledged these concerns and noted that while they haven't directly engaged the church, they plan to do so before moving forward with the plan. There was also discussion related to the possibility of incorporating the existing church or the nearby Elks Lodge as community spaces in future developments.
- There was a discussion of the long-term vision for developing city-owned land in Burlington, with discussions centered on a phased approach that retains existing businesses while accommodating new housing units. The team explored scenarios for developing Star Farm Park and Ethan Island Park, emphasizing the need for community engagement and a new procurement model that would allow the city to control project details like affordability and sustainability. There was strong support for fixing the unsafe intersection at Ethan Allen Parkway and North Avenue, though some confusion about the extent of proposed developments. The team also discussed using CHIP legislation and impact fees to support park development and infrastructure improvements.

d. Commissioner Items: N/A

6. Accept Minutes + Communications

Delayed until next meeting

7. Adjournment

Action: Motion to Adjourn @ 8:47pm

Motion by: R. Nick

Seconded by: A. Friend

Vote: All in Favor

Burlington Planning Commission

149 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401

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Andy Montroll, Chair
Michael Gaughan, Vice Chair
Erhard Mahnke
Ryan Nick
Alexander Friend
Erin Malone
Julia Randall

Burlington Planning Commission

Tuesday July 8, 2025, 6:30 P.M.

Hybrid Meeting via Zoom and in City Hall's Bushor Conference Room

Draft Minutes**Commissioners Present:**

☒ Andy Montroll ☒ Michael Gaughan
☐ Erhard Mahnke ☒ Erin Malone
☒ Ryan Nick ☐ Julia Randall
☒ Alexander Friend

City Staff Present:

☒ Charles Dillard, Director
☒ Sarah Morgan, Senior Planner

Public Attendance: Sharon Bushor

1. Agenda

Call to Order: 6:30pm

Changes to Agenda: N/A

2. Annual Organizational Meeting

The Commission will hold its annual organizational meeting to elect officers and appoint members to its committees to serve for FY2026:

Executive:

Andy Montroll, Chair
Alex Friend, Vice Chair
Erin Malone, At-large
Staff: Charles Dillard

Commission Clerk:
Sarah Morgan

Ordinance

Alex Friend
Julia Randall
Ryan Nick
Miles White (DAB)
Staff: Sarah Morgan

Long Range Planning

Erin Malone
Michael Gaughan
Erhard Manke
Zoe Richards (Conservation Board)
Evan Gould (DRB)
Staff: Sarah Morgan

3. Chair's Report : None**4. Public Forum**

<u>Name(s)</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Sharon Bushor	Comments related to Future land use map. Doesn't think that past meetings were a good representations of Burlingtonians and so has sent link to Land Use Map survey to city councilors and friends. Open Space Plan – wants conservation board to hold public meetings to allow more people to learn about the Open Space Plan.

5. Director's Report

Responded to Sharon Bushor's comments. Overview of Act 181 and Future Land Use Map

6. **Comprehensive Plan Scope Update**

Staff led discussion related to the scope of the Comprehensive Plan

Summary of discussion:

- 2019 plan marked a significant shift in presentation and organization compared to previous versions. A. Montroll emphasized that while the content wasn't entirely discarded in 2019 Plan, the new format was more useful and easier to handle, leading to major zoning changes like the downtown form-based code and neighborhood code. Staff emphasized the importance of keeping the Planning Commission involved throughout the process, as the commission has the ultimate responsibility for the plan before it goes to City Council. While Charles, Sarah, and other relevant team members will lead the drafting process, input from the commission and community will be crucial for shaping the final plan.
- City Planning, DPW, and other departments will collaborate to issue a single request for qualifications for four separate contracts funded by different sources. Bushor outlined the management structure, with each plan having its own manager, and noted that the overall effort will use scenario planning to achieve community consensus on a city vision by 2026. The discussion highlighted the need to address housing infrastructure, flooding concerns, and the impact of changes in anchor institutions like UVM and the Medical Center, while also emphasizing the importance of equity in the planning process.
- Staff discussed the need to create a user-friendly website and printed materials for the comprehensive plan, emphasizing the importance of relevant and legible content. C. Dillard also highlighted the involvement of the city's data team in updating and analyzing data for the plan.
- The timeline for the comprehensive plan was outlined, including the release of an RFQ by the end of July and the start of scenario planning in January.
- Discussion of Burlington's complex needs. Economic development strategy is vital. Planning will be working with REIB in order to make sure that the Comprehensive Plan is inclusive and equitable.

7. **PlanBTV New North End Project Update**

S. Morgan also provided an update on the Plan BTV New North End project, detailing the consulting team's work on transportation, mobility, and growth areas. Upcoming neighborhood design workshop on July 23rd to review concepts for the new North End.

8. **Minutes + Communications**

Action: Accept minutes + Communications

No communications to accept. No objections to minutes, minutes are approved.

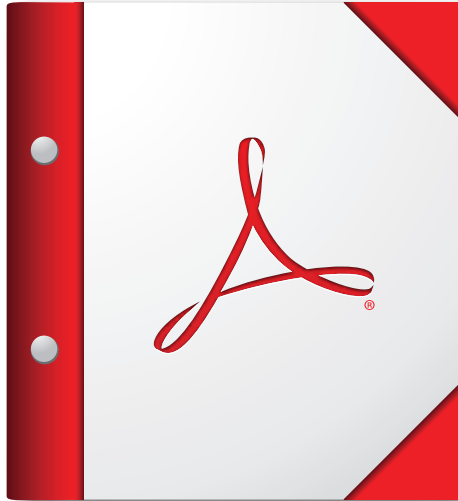
9. **Adjournment**

Action: Motion to Adjourn @ 8:25pm

Motion by: R. Nick

Seconded by: E. Malone

Vote: All in Favor



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