



PLANNING FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES: CASE VIGNETTE

LINKING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE RESEARCH PROJECT

CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

DEPT. OF CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING

W. SIBLEY HALL CORNELL UNIVERSITY ITHACA, NY 14853-6701

WEBSITE: <http://economicdevelopment.cce.cornell.edu>

A COLLABORATION WITH THE AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

PLANNING AND COMMUNITY HEALTH RESEARCH CENTER WWW.PLANNING.ORG

City of Burlington, Vermont

The City of Burlington is the largest city in Vermont but one of the smaller metropolitan areas in the United States. As the county seat of Chittenden County, the City consists of an area of 15.5 square miles and a population of 38,600. Approximately one third of the Vermont's population is concentrated in the area around Burlington. The City is healthy, green, walkable, and child-friendly (One of the "Top 10" Places in America, American Planning Association; One of America's Best Places to Raise Your Kids, Business Week; One of Top "Walking Cities" in U.S., Prevention Magazine and the American Podiatric Medical Association). Based on a survey of the characteristics of a family-friendly community, conducted by the National League of Cities in 1997, the City conducted its own study on how to make the City more family-friendly in 2002. The City develops strategies on housing, recreation, transportation, and citizen involvement to improve its quality of life.

HOUSING

Burlington is a leading community in the United States for promoting creative housing policies with the goal of balancing homeownership and rental housing. Key strategies are as follows:

- Started in 1984, the Burlington Community Land Trust is the largest land trust in the United States in terms of the number of units held in trust. To regulate the increase in housing prices and to promote homeownership, the Trust holds ownership of the land, prevents homeowners from selling their homes at a price higher than 125% of the original price, and ensures they recover all expenses associated with home improvements. The Trust also develops brownfields in the city's low income neighborhoods into housing, non-profit, and commercial space.
- The City provides operating funding for the Burlington's Neighborworks Homeownership Center, which started in 1996 with funding from the Vermont Housing Finance Agency. This is the largest program operated by the Trust. The Center helps people at all income levels purchase a home and maintain it, by educating them on debt and credit management skills.
- The City actively participates in the Section 8 program to help low-income families rent homes at a lower price.

- The City provides operating funding for the Rental Opportunity Center, which offers professional assistance to landlords and tenants and finds appropriate matches between the two. The Center receives information about available units from landlords and in return landlords receive free advertising for their apartments.
- The City supports a "housing tenure ladder" that combines security and mobility by supporting individuals and non-profit organizations to help people move from homeless shelters to transitional housing, from transitional housing to rental, and from rental to ownership. The program is applied to various housing types such as studios, family-sized apartments, detached homes, cooperatives, condominiums, group homes and co-housing.

RECREATION

Burlington uses its cultural and natural features to attract families with children by providing a range of cultural, recreational, social and economic activities. Recreational programs and areas are neighborhood-based in scale. City departments, nonprofits, and individual volunteers collaborate in creating and operating programs. For example, the Fletcher Free Library operates various family/youth programs which target children from toddlers to teenagers.

Compiled by: Jinwoo Kwon

This case study is part of a larger initiative on Planners' Role in Creating Family-Friendly Communities, directed by Professor Mildred Warner. This research is funded in part by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Additional issue briefs and case studies can be found on our website: <http://economicdevelopment.cce.cornell.edu>



The Burlington Parks and Recreation Department administers a variety of sports programs including basketball, gymnastics, football, ski, skating, and hockey. These activities are designed for different age groups – from 3 year olds to 18 year olds. The City also uses a federal grant to offer after-school programming, which is called 21st Century Program. Approximately 70% of all students receive academic support and learns arts and sports through the program. In addition, the City holds holiday parades and festivals at the Church Street Marketplace year-round.

TRANSPORTATION

Burlington considers bicycling a family-friendly transportation mode, as bicycling gives children an opportunity to go wherever they want to and it is relatively safe. The City plans to improve on-street facilities and expand bike routes throughout the City for connectivity. Second, the City attempts to improve walking infrastructure by providing two hours of free parking in downtown to encourage people to park their cars and to walk in downtown; promoting traffic calming policies such as bicycle lanes, crosswalks, textured crosswalks, speed limit, and speed humps; and participating in safe routes to school programs.



The 2006 AARP survey of 800 local residents age 50 and up found that the lack of adequate shelters, limited weekend and evening services, and the lack of benches were the top three obstacles to using transit, so Burlington is improving transit stops and extending bus service. Policies to promote bus use include discounted bus passes for children, students, and the elderly, bus service between campus and downtown

until 2:30 am, and incentives for those who do not drive to campus. Burlington also considers various design guidelines including Complete Streets – more transit stops, fewer car lanes, shorter pedestrian crossings for safety, more bike lanes, and landscaped medians.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Since the early 1980's, Neighborhood Planning Assemblies have been active neighborhood advocacy groups in each of Burlington's seven Wards by improving communication between citizens and the government. They hold monthly meetings in each Ward to discuss concerns in their communities, express their concerns in the form of resolutions, and distribute the resolutions to the Mayor, City Councilors and City departments, to encourage them to incorporate citizens' opinions in the decision-making process. The assemblies are involved in the allocation of Community Development Block Grant funds through a citizen board. In addition, the City holds Neighborhood Improvement Night once a year to encourage citizens to come and share ideas to improve the quality of life.

Finally, with the increasing number of university students in Burlington, the City has been working closely with the University of Vermont in developing and implementing action plans. The University of Vermont sponsors workshops so that students can be aware of rights and responsibilities of being a Burlington resident. The University signed an agreement to notify parents of violations, if off-campus students break city rules like alcohol and drug violations. Students are involved in developing plans through a student-led organization, the Community Coalition. Students are also hired by the City as a liaison to connect students and long-term residents.

FURTHER RESOURCES:

AARP Vermont. 2006. Growing Older in a Livable City
<http://www.snellingcenter.org/filemanager/filedownload/phpCuYqrW/AARP%20livable%20community%20rept%20-%20focused%20conversations.pdf>

City of Burlington. 2002. Burlington Family Report.
http://www.cedoburlington.org/families/family_report_intro.htm

Pine, Brian. March 23, 2009. Personal Interview. Assistant Director for Housing, City of Burlington, Vermont

Ravin, Lani. March 13, 2009. Personal Interview. Associate Planner, University of Vermont

City of Burlington. 2007. Transportation Plan
<http://www.dpw.ci.burlington.vt.us/transportation/TransportationPlan/BTP%20draft%2008-31-07.pdf>