

## Department of Planning and Zoning

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## FY2010 Annual Report

The Dept. of Planning and Zoning's 8-member staff administers two essential governmental functions: comprehensive land use and development planning; and the administration of the City's land development regulations. Through our planning function, the Department is responsible for the preparation of long-range land use and development plans including the city's Municipal Development Plan and other area-specific and issue-specific plans; conducts special studies and inventories; and, researches and drafts amendments to city land development ordinances. Through our regulatory function, the Department administers all permitting and development review functions under the City's *Comprehensive Development Ordinance*, and collaborates with other departments in the administration of other related city codes.

In support of our responsibilities, staff plays a key role in managing the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) and the Application Management and Data Automation (AMANDA) permit system in collaboration with the City's Information Technology Division. GIS allows users to analyze, view, and interpret information in a way that helps to identify spatial relationships and patterns, and prepare high quality maps. AMANDA has been in use for seven years and is integral to managing several of the City's property information, permitting and code enforcement processes.

The Department's work is guided by a 7-member Planning Commission appointed by the City Council. They formulate land use and development policy and regulations for consideration by the Council. Another 25 citizen volunteers participate in the planning process as members of the Development Review Board, Design Advisory Board and Conservation Board, playing key roles in implementing the City's land use and development regulations. Each year these volunteers dedicate hundreds of hours of their time towards the improvement of the City participating in more than 100 public meetings.

### Development Review and Permitting:

During FY10, 865 permit applications and 309 administrative determinations for a total of 1,174 requests were processed, a 15.5% increase from the previous year and the third consecutive year of record-breaking development review activity. Overall 851 permit applications were reviewed, 817 applications were approved and only 34 (~3%) were denied. Approved projects had a total estimated construction cost of \$44,720,694, and were 73% residential (112 new units), 20% commercial, 1.4% mixed use, 3.9% institutional and 0.6% office. Of this total:

- 762 applications (~89%) were reviewed administratively by Staff. 740 of these projects were approved and only 22 (~2.8%) denied. Additionally, Staff issued 309 administrative determinations regarding applicability of the *Comprehensive Development Ordinance*.
- 89 applications and 8 appeals of administrative decisions were reviewed by the Development Review Board. 77 of these projects were approved and 12 (~13%) were denied.
- 3 decisions of the DRB were appealed to the VT Superior Court.

The Department provides daily updated permit status information on our website on all applications. This information and is available by street or ward. Newly added in FY10 is a map viewer where all active zoning permit applications can be seen at: [http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us/planning/zoning/status\\_report/index.html](http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us/planning/zoning/status_report/index.html).



## **Ordinance Amendments:**

A total of ten amendments to the zoning ordinance were developed by staff and considered by the Planning Commission in FY10. The City Council adopted four amendments to the ordinance. The *Burlington Comprehensive Development Ordinance* is available in both hardcopy and digitally (CD) as well as on the Department's website.

Information on our website includes all ordinance amendments currently under consideration at: [http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us/planning/zoning/zn\\_amendment\\_index.php](http://www.ci.burlington.vt.us/planning/zoning/zn_amendment_index.php).

## **Planning Projects:**

### • **Citywide Transportation Plan**

The Planning Commission completed its review of a new Transportation Plan for Burlington. This Plan is the result of a collaborative inter-departmental effort over the past 3-years; the perspective of a 17-member stakeholder steering committee; the work of a nationally-renowned consulting team; and the review and consideration of the Public Works Commission, the Planning Commission, and the Council's Transportation, Energy and Utilities Committee. The Plan builds upon past community decisions and priorities for transportation infrastructure and systems. It is centered on three primary themes: Creating a Strong and Healthy City, Facilitating Transportation Choices, and Creating Great Streets. Once adopted, this will become the new transportation chapter of the City's *Municipal Development Plan*.

### • **Downtown and Waterfront Plan**

The Planning Commission and Department were directed by the City Council to develop a scope of work, timeline, and budget for the development of a master land use and development plan for Burlington's Downtown and Waterfront. The objective is to provide a comprehensive guide for Downtown and Downtown Waterfront development over the next 10-20 year period. The plan will be comprehensive in scope and strategic in design. This project has been a long-standing action-item in the City Municipal Development Plan since at least 1996, and is the highest priority planning project.

### • **Visualize Burlington in 3D**

For the past 2 summers, the Department has been working with students from the Champlain College Emergent Media Center (EMC) to create digital three-dimensional models of downtown and waterfront buildings. The first phase of this project developed over 160 building models along Main and Church Streets. The second phase adds another 280 buildings to the collection.

These models can be used in a number of applications including to visualize the implications of urban planning policies and regulations; simulate proposed development plans in relation to their actual surroundings; and to support shadow, noise, and wind-tunnel analyses for environmental impact assessments. Burlington's collection of models can be accessed online via Google's 3D Warehouse at <http://sketchup.google.com/3dwarehouse/>.



- **Wetlands Mapping**

Wetlands play a very important role in our natural system by providing flood water storage, filtering pollutants from surface runoff, and providing critical habitat for many plant and animal species. Current wetlands maps use 1970's-era aerial photography that are not able to identify the location of every wetland given their low resolution. Working with the Conservation Board, Planning staff and a consultant used newer 2004 color infrared digital orthophotography to update city wetland maps. This will be very helpful to property owners, permit applicants, and the City in efforts to minimize the loss of this precious resource.

- **Special Flood Hazard Area Restudy**

With financial assistance secured by Sen. Leahy's Office, Planning staff has been working with a consultant, the VT Agency of Natural Resources, and FEMA on the development of a revision to the Flood Insurance Rate Map & Study for the lower Winooski River. With additional data, more accurate topographic information, and modern modeling methodology, this analysis provides a more accurate picture of the extent and nature of the flood hazard. The result shows a significantly smaller floodway across the Intervale, and has been incorporated into FEMA's regional flood remapping effort which should be adopted within the next year.

- **Climate Action Plan**

Staff from Planning and the Legacy Project continues to work on a revision to the City's 2000 Climate Action Plan (CAP). After completing an inventory of the city's greenhouse gas emissions and developing a list of over 200 initiatives to reduce the city's emissions, recent work has involved a detailed analysis to quantify and prioritize these initiatives. Public review and final adoption of a new Climate Action Plan for Burlington is anticipated in the coming year. Additional information about this project can be found at: <http://burlingtonclimateaction.com/>.

- **Historic Preservation Planning**

The Department administers the City's Certified Local Government Program (CLG) for historic preservation planning under an agreement with the National Park Service and the VT Div. for Historic Preservation. This program provides federal funding for historic preservation related projects. This year the Church Street Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Under a CLG Grant, Planning staff worked with consultants to complete a Historic Sites and Structures Survey for the New Harlem (a.k.a. 5 Sisters) neighborhood and develop a National Register nomination for a Pine Street Historic District and expansion of the Lakeside Historic District.

