

A young man with short, light-colored hair is smiling and holding a sign. He is wearing a dark t-shirt. The background shows a city street with a crosswalk, a pedestrian crossing sign, and other people walking. The entire image has a green color cast.

I want a walkable BTV because....

Walking gives me
more time to
enjoy the city!



Great Streets for Downtown Burlington

Through many years of planning, citizens of Burlington have voiced their support for a vision of downtown as a vibrant, walkable, sustainable urban center. Great Streets BTV is about bringing this vision to life and transforming downtown's public realm over the next several decades by investing in streets that meet our community's goals.

What is a Great Street?

A GREAT STREET IS...

A Great Street is built to endure many decades and reflect Burlington’s values—values which have been articulated in community plans such as planBTV Downtown & Waterfront, Burlington Transportation Plan, planBTV Walk/Bike and many others. According to these plans, a Great Street is truly transformative, and is:

- **WALKABLE AND BIKEABLE**, safe for all modes and levels of accessibility
- **SUSTAINABLE**, both environmentally and in long-term durability
- **VIBRANT**, to support downtown’s diverse range of public and private facilities
- **FUNCTIONAL**, serving all users, flexible, maintainable and affordable



Burlingtonians have said they'd like to see improvements on the street and these are the zones where those improvements can happen.

Building Frontage

Clear Sidewalks

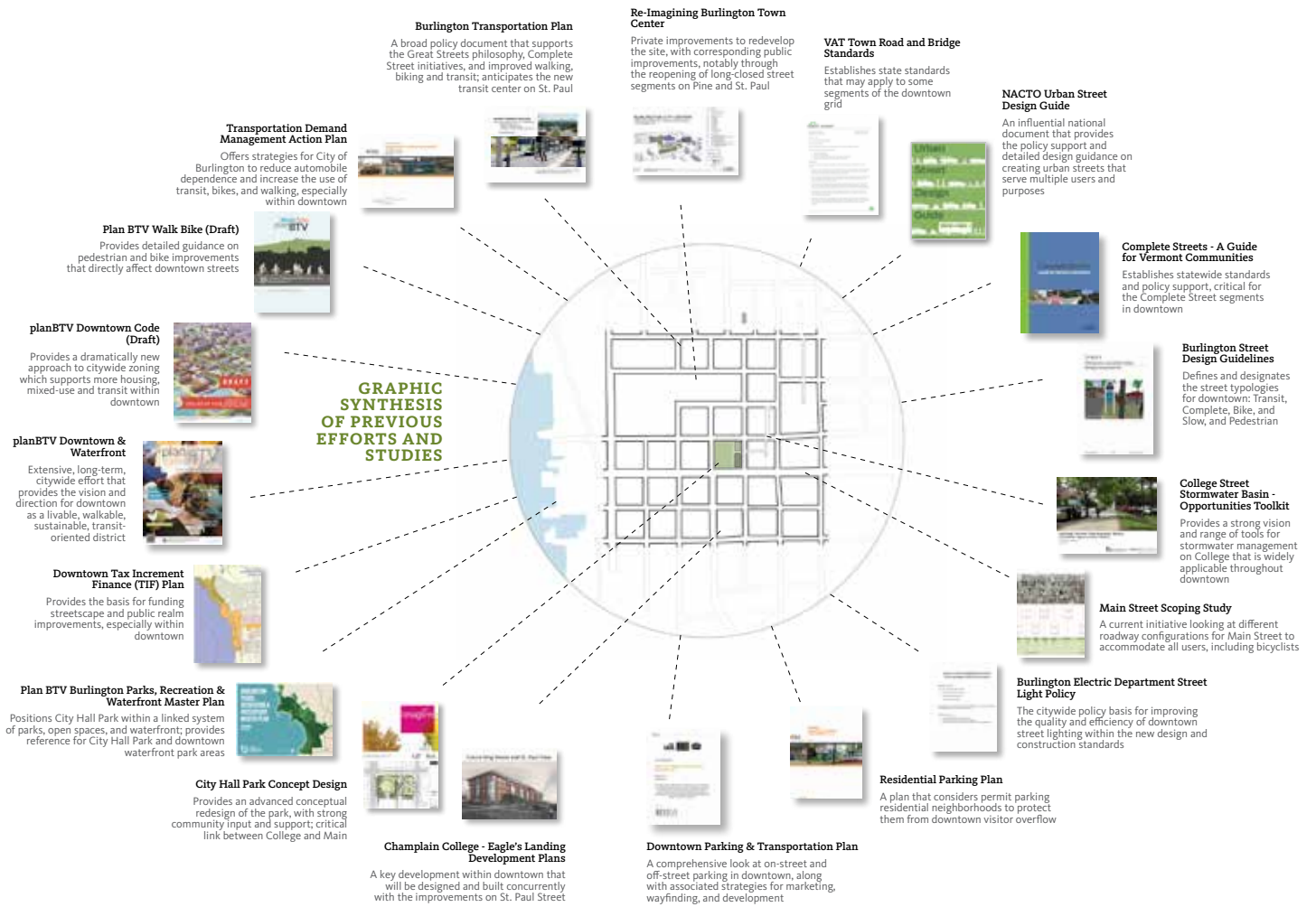
Tree Belt/ Furnishings

Bikeways & Buffers

Stormwater/ Rain Gardens

Parking/ Roadway

Projects & Studies Informing the Great Streets Standards



The Great Streets Initiative draws upon local, state and national plans and guidance, including, but not limited to these Burlington plans and studies.

Why Great Streets for Burlington?

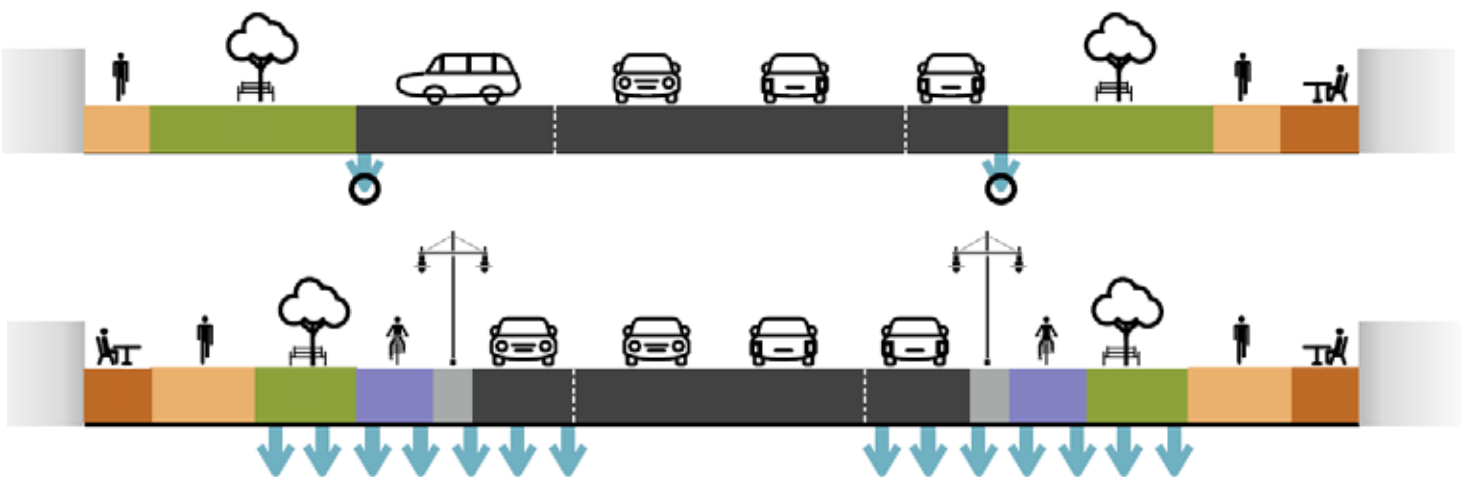
BALANCE USERS & USES

Through the Great Streets Initiative, the City of Burlington has established the goal of creating “great streets” in downtown wherever possible. Every roadway, passage, walkway, sidewalk, bumpout, and crosswalk within the right-of-way is part of downtown’s public street system—which comprises 33% of all of the land in downtown Burlington. Burlington recognizes its street system not merely as roadways for vehicles, but as the backbone of its collective public space, which reflects the values, identity, and character of Burlington. A “great street” system for downtown Burlington will merge seamlessly with public parks and plazas within it, and blend harmoniously with the built environment, pathways, and open spaces on adjacent private property. Together these integrated paths and places will create the setting for a downtown that is welcoming to all, socially vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and economically prosperous.

A great street system for downtown Burlington will also restore a balance among all of the users and uses within the public realm. Throughout most of urban history, walking has been the primary form of movement on city streets. But over the past 100 years, the growing demands of the automobile for ever more space to move and to park have tended to overwhelm all other users, not least the pedestrian. Burlington intends for these standards to correct that imbalance by once again placing the needs and experience of the pedestrian first, while ensuring that all other users and uses are accommodated in a delicate balance.

These standards build upon the principles for the design and function of the public realm found in dozens of plans, studies and design guides prepared by the City, and in some cases state and national organizations. Rooted in these plans, the standards detail both the basic requirements and options for transforming this street network by:

- addressing all features of the public right-of-way, including sidewalks, buffer areas, parking and travel lanes, bicycle lanes and medians.
- supporting roadway types that address and provide safe and adequate access for all modes of travel, including people walking, biking, using transit, or driving.
- implementing complete streets, increasing the availability and utilization of sustainable transportation options, and achieving the “vision zero” principles to eliminate traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries.
- designing streets that are responsive to and encourage vehicular travel at appropriate volumes and speeds based on their surroundings in residential, commercial or mixed-use districts.
- developing a strong connection between public rights-of-way and the buildings and structures that line them.
- reducing quantity of stormwater runoff and heat island effect, and improving quality of stormwater runoff.
- providing clear, implementable design direction for projects which will, by nature, be implemented in phases over many decades.



Streets take up around 45 acres—33% of downtown land—making them an important zone for investment. Great Streets will emphasize streets as public places, and restore a balance among all users and uses within the public realm that is appropriate to the downtown context.

A VISUAL LANGUAGE THAT IS UNIFIED, NOT UNIFORM

An additional goal of these standards is to create a visual language for downtown that emphasizes the roles of both the public and private realms in communicating its character. The urban cores of most cities have a kind of visual or formal language that is expressed in the design of their streets and buildings. This language may be manifest in construction materials and colors, vegetation, furnishings, or signage. It may emerge organically, such as from tradition or economic patterns, or, it may be propelled by “standards” which specify a particular character for the public environment based on a variety of considerations.

Burlington has many aspects of its own language, which has evolved over nearly 200 years. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of downtown’s language is its historic buildings, particularly the ornamented brick and stone facades of multi-story commercial structures. Overlaid on these are a more recent series of public investments, such as ornamental street lighting, decorative paving on Church, stormwater gardens, sidewalk bumpouts, and a wayfinding system with distinctive color and form.

But these characteristics are not cohesive throughout downtown, and are weakened by areas with no distinctive language. These standards are intended to create a coherent language for the streets of downtown—to help *unify* downtown without making it *uniform*. The standards provide a set of common street materials and elements that recognizably belong to Burlington, are elegant to look at and use, support environmental sustainability, and are affordable to construct and maintain.

In general, the standards are not intended to distinguish one street from another (with the exception of Church Street),

or one part of downtown from another (with the exception of primarily residential blocks). Downtown is too small for such variation, and it is more costly and difficult to maintain such a variety of elements. Instead, the standards, as they are implemented, should yield a fundamentally unified public space.

Diversity and variety in the visual environment is also important; they give expression to the diverse individual and group sensibilities and interests of Burlington residents. These standards are premised on the principle that within downtown Burlington, diversity is best expressed, and should most often be provided, by the adjoining buildings, shops, signs, spaces, and furnishings on the private property which abuts the public realm. Some cities insist on uniform architecture and signage. While Burlington’s zoning rules require certain underlying principles of transparency and street activation, there is a wide range of possibility for architectural expression. Questions of aesthetics and visual language are ultimately mediated by the design review bodies, which determine where projects should fall on the spectrum from conforming to eccentric. While this document is about unity in the public realm, it encourages diversity along the private edges to give full expression to the character of Burlington as a place and as a community.

These standards will guide the reconstruction and replacement of materials and infrastructure in the public realm over the next several decades. Achieving this unified visual language will come as individual streets and blocks are rebuilt, and as infrastructure and furnishings throughout downtown reach the end of their useful life and need to be replaced. This will be a big investment, and it will not happen all at once. This incremental transformation of the public realm underscores the importance of a commitment to these common materials and elements. Without this palette, individual street segments will continue to be designed as a reflection of the era in which they were built, and will continue to pose visual and functional challenges in the cohesion and maintenance of downtown’s public streets.

Burlington Street Design Guidelines

These guidelines will ensure that downtown streets are walkable, bikeable, sustainable, vibrant and functional.



Presence of windows, doors, storefronts, awnings along sidewalks



Local sources, durable, handsome



Use of soil cells or structural soils for new trees in paved areas



Major increase in trees, foliage, and shade from an approved list of species



Landmarks are recognized and featured by view corridors and special lighting



Unique installations at key locations



Special emphasis on safe and easy street crossing with wide, distinctive crosswalk treatments



Careful sidewalk design to accommodate snow plowing and storage



Efficient and updated lighting for sidewalks and roadways



Innovative handling of stormwater to slow and permeate



Investments in appropriate bikeways along key routes



More efficient on-street parking spaces, and better use of existing off-street parking facilities



Working with CCTA, integration of shelters and signage into the sidewalk landscape



Widening and improving of sidewalks throughout downtown



Special paving and bollards for places where vehicles and pedestrians share the space



Investments in protected bike parking and bike hubs

Standard Great Streets Furnishings & Materials

These furnishings and materials will result in Great Streets that adhere to the design guidelines.



REFRAMING THE “CENTER” OF DOWNTOWN

Part of Burlington’s overall vision for downtown is to reconnect Church Street, City Hall Park and the lake through a series of investments in the public and private realms. To this end, a final goal of these standards is to invest in quality materials and furnishings throughout downtown that will help spread commercial vibrancy and social activity beyond the Church Street Marketplace.

The earliest plans for Burlington show not only a chessboard of buildable blocks, but an open public square on one of the more central blocks. Such squares, often designated as the location for the main courthouse, were a common feature of new American cities with gridiron plans. Burlington’s center was indeed dubbed Courthouse Square and the city’s first courthouse was constructed there.

An open square within a grid tends to convey special importance on the four streets which adjoin it, which form a kind of pinwheel. In downtown Burlington, College, Main, St. Paul, and Church Streets have greater prominence due to their adjacency to the square. These four streets bordering the square were the primary commercial addresses during the city’s early decades. The square was a relatively utilitarian space, with roadways, places to hitch horses, and a relatively small oval lawn in the center. The open design of the square exposed the adjoining buildings on all sides except the east, where civic buildings were erected between the square and Church Street.

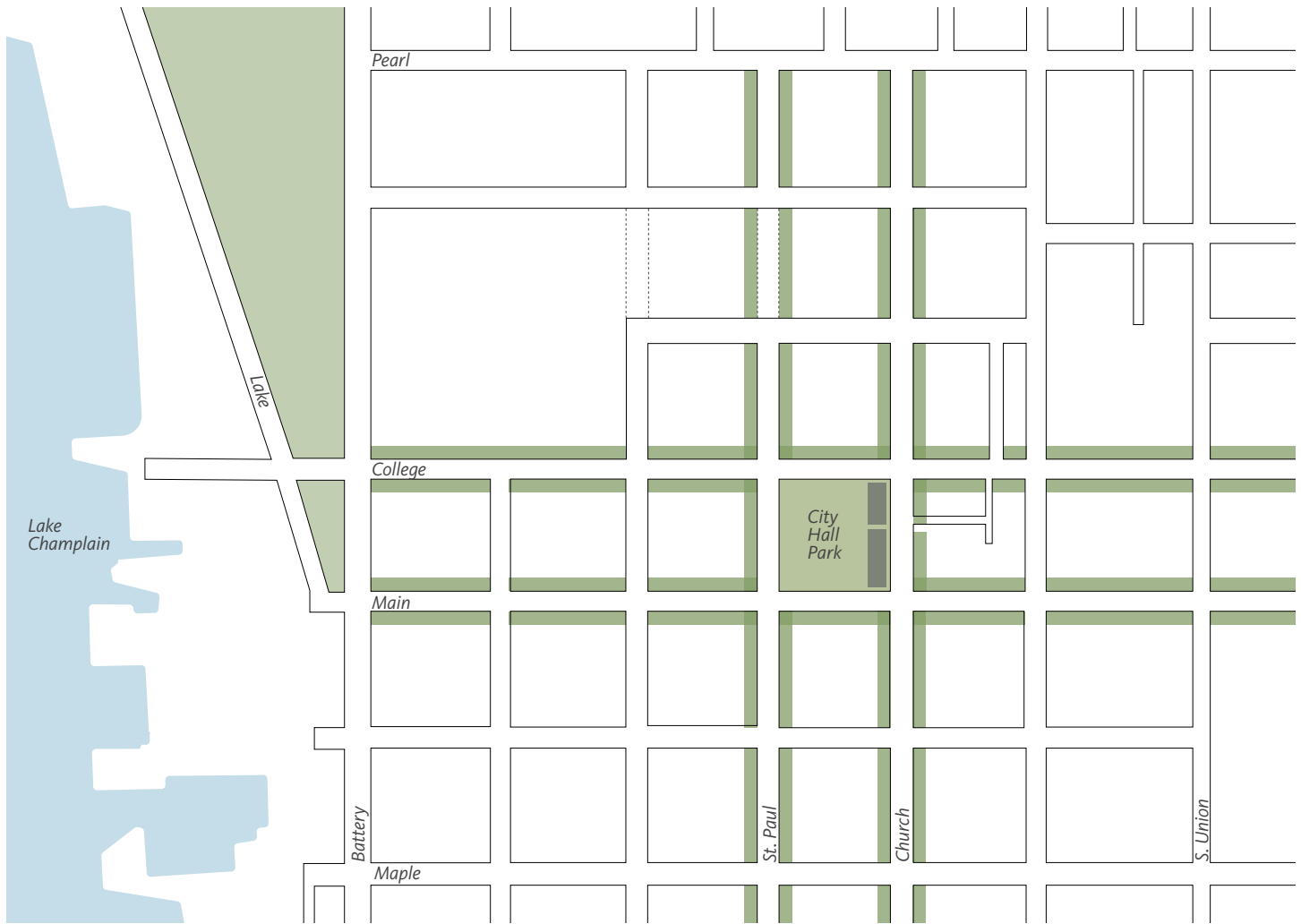
As the urban park movement took hold in the 1850s, Courthouse Square was redesigned as an ornamental park for strolling, sitting and leisure—this became an early iteration of what we now know as City Hall Park. The introduction of trees and landscaping had the effect of separating the sides of the square. In a somewhat unusual and awkward relationship, the civic buildings had their primary facades and entrances on Church Street, all but leaving their backs to the face the park.

During a period of commercial expansion in the 1880s, more and more businesses migrated away from the streets around the park, relocating instead to Church Street. Church eventually became the de facto “main street,” meeting the key criteria for a traditional American main street: it was nearly level and lined with nearly continuous building storefronts and doorways, factors which are essential for commercial activity. Church Street’s prominence was cemented in the 1980s with the banning of vehicular traffic and the creation of Church Street Marketplace. The street’s success has been key to the revitalization of downtown Burlington in the ensuing three decades.

By contrast, both City Hall Park and its surrounding commercial streets have experienced ups and downs since the early days of Courthouse Square. The park has been redesigned several times, and has recently benefited from the arrival of the Saturday farmers market during the summer and fall. During that event and others, the park (and to some extent the surrounding streets) reclaims its role as the most central and vibrant location in downtown. But at other times the square can seem relatively empty and inactive, particularly in comparison to Church Street. These two versions of the park—one as the bustling center of activity and the other as an empty space in poor condition—have simultaneously led to its degradation through overuse, as well as to its isolation and chronic challenges with behavior and petty crime.

With Church Street and City Hall Park at its core, these standards will guide public investments in surrounding streets that will improve the quality and connectivity of downtown as a whole. While there has not been an explicit master plan guiding these investments, decades of improvements to the Church Street Marketplace, the recent reconstruction of blocks of lower Church and St. Paul Streets, additional plans for St. Paul Street approved in two separate approvals by Burlington voters, the stormwater plan for College Street, and the Bike/Walk plan’s vision for infrastructure for walking and biking on Main Street are all key to achieving this goal. These improvements envision urban activity radiating around City Hall Park along two pairs of streets in particular—St. Paul and Church, and College and Main—and further activating downtown as a whole.

The Pinwheel



The Pinwheel: Prioritizing the implementation of the Great Streets Standards on College, Main, St. Paul, and lower Church Streets will recenter downtown around City Hall Park, and strengthen the connections between downtown and Lake Champlain.



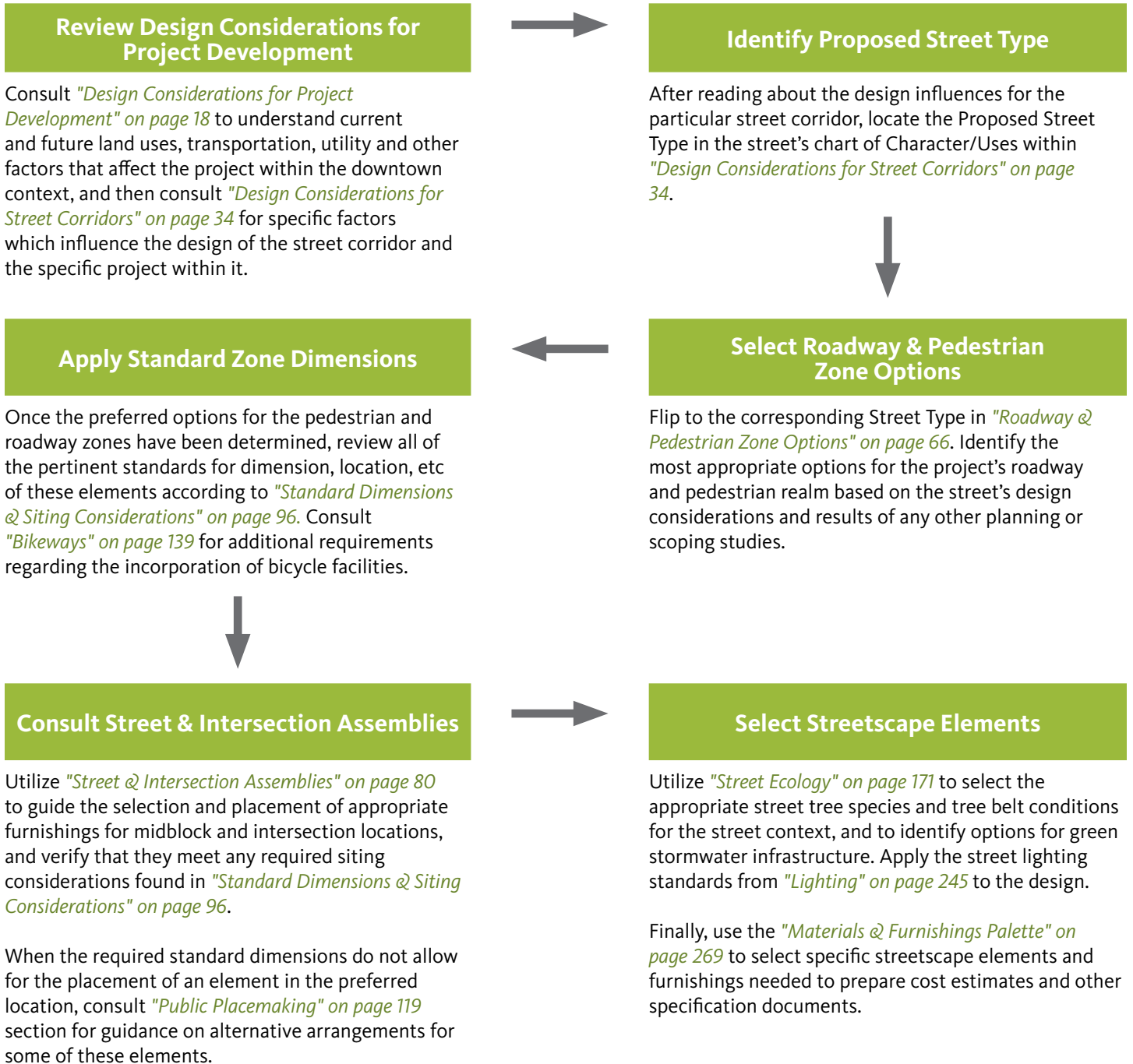
Photo credit Don Shall — <https://flic.kr/p/c3B8bG>

Using this Document

How to Use this Document

This document should be consulted at the early stages of project development, and used throughout the design process, to ensure unity in the redevelopment of downtown streets.

Start Here:



Click on the green links to navigate directly to the corresponding section of this document.

Utilize ["Glossary & References" on page 320](#) for key terms and links to other plans and projects that may need to be consulted in project development.

Who Should Use This Document

These standards will guide the design and construction of projects within the public right-of-way, and will be used by anyone involved with transforming streets in downtown Burlington. This includes:

- Planners or project managers responsible for projects within the public right-of-way, such as city officials and staff from departments such as Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Community & Economic Development, Planning & Zoning, Police, Fire, and Electric, as well as outside entities, such as transit and private utility providers who operate in the public right-of-way
- Professional street designers who are working on projects within the downtown right-of-way, including urban designers, landscape architects, civil engineers, transportation planners and engineers, lighting and utility designers, public art consultants and designers, environmental systems designers, etc.
- People who experience these streets, who will benefit from a downtown public realm that is developed over decades utilizing consistent design priorities.

These Standards **DO**:

- Identify a common palette of materials and furnishings that will provide for unity and visual integrity as downtown's streets are redeveloped over time
- Complement Church Street's beloved visual character and high level of investment, without replicating it wholesale throughout downtown
- Create a public realm that is complementary of current and future private development, and which showcase building facades, signage, etc as the unique and authentic aesthetic elements of downtown
- Draw upon city and state standards regarding the design and construction of the right-of-way as applicable, and includes all critical required elements/dimensions in a comprehensive document
- Include preferred and alternative materials/fixtures for elements within the public right of way to allow flexibility to adapt to unique street conditions, project budgets, or other constraints
- Take precedence over existing City policies/documents regarding the design and construction of elements within the public right-of-way that existed prior to the most recent date of adoption by Council (unless otherwise noted)

These Standards **DO NOT**:

- Mandate the immediate reconstruction of all streets or replacement of individual elements within the ROW; instead, the standards should be applied to streets as they are redeveloped in a significant way, and guide the replacement of furnishings when they reach the end of useful life
- Provide specific designs for each street in downtown Burlington; some streets will require corridor-specific master plans to identify future design/transportation system goals
- Inventory all conditions that may exist within the City's public rights-of-way, particularly unknown conditions such as locations of abandoned utilities, contaminated soils, etc.

Applicability

These standards apply to all projects within the downtown, except the Church Street Marketplace, when the project area includes an entire block face or more. The downtown is defined as all streets between and inclusive of Pearl to Maple, Union to Battery, and Lake Street. These standards should be consulted as the starting point for any construction project within the downtown rights-of-way. Designers should work with the City to fully incorporate recommended Street Types utilizing the preferred dimension for Roadway and Pedestrian Zones.

Relief from Standards

It is expected that full compliance with these standards is the starting point in all project design. In some cases, utility relocation, accessibility into adjacent property, transportation requirements, cost, or other unique constraints may prevent the complete redevelopment of the street and/or full compliance with these standards. Where conflicts or extenuating circumstances prevent the application of one or more standards, the City Engineer may grant relief on a case-by-case basis based on the context of the project.

Pilot Materials & Elements

Throughout these standards, some materials, elements, or treatments have been identified as "PILOT." These elements have been selected due to their adherence to the principles discussed in this section. However, in some cases, these elements may utilize emerging technology and/or materials which will require their limited application and field testing before being fully integrated into these standards. Designers should work with the City Engineer and/or applicable City Departments during early stages of project development to establish guidelines for pilot elements, including installation procedures, length of time to field test, how to evaluate performance, and how to define a successful pilot.

Amendments & Updates

These standards are applicable as of the date of adoption or update listed on the cover. A history of approvals and amendments is provided in "[Adoption & Amendments](#)" on page 323. Following City Council's initial adoption, individual elements shall be updated as needed by the action of the applicable appointed board, commission, or department, per the authorities delegated in the City Charter, Code of Ordinances, and any supplemental resolutions and/or adopted policies.

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