



• DESIGN • REVIEW • GUIDE •

The Process

Burlington is well known as a community with a high quality of life, small and cohesive neighborhoods, a vibrant downtown and waterfront – all within a spectacular setting on the shores of Lake Champlain. This deserving reputation is due in part to the City's small size, entrepreneurial spirit, civic-minded citizens and activist government. One of the many factors that makes Burlington such a great place to live, work and visit is the community's attention to detail, and respect for its setting, heritage and quality urban design.

Burlington's Design Review process strives to protect the city's unique qualities and strong sense of place by carrying out citywide development and design objectives. The purpose of this *Design Review Guide* is to help applicants in preparing projects to be reviewed by the Design Review Board and the Burlington Planning Commission. Through materials such as this, the Department of Planning & Zoning seeks to make information available well before the final design of a project saving the applicant, and the city, time and money.

WHAT IS DESIGN REVIEW?

Design Review is a part of the zoning permit process that pays special attention to areas within the city that have historical, architectural or cultural merit. Burlington has used Design Review since 1978 as a tool for maintaining the city's special character and appeal, and high quality of life.

The purpose of Design Review is to protect the character of these special places, and to ensure that new development, or changes to existing development, are compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. Design Review works to keep Burlington from looking and feeling like "Anywhere, USA."

The Design Review process considers a wide range of design issues. These include such things as open space and natural features, pedestrian and traffic circulation, building scale and massing, architectural history and details, signs and advertising features, landscaping, site lighting, utility connections and stormwater runoff. Each issue considered may appear individually small. However, in combination, they can make the difference between a bad project and a good project.



Burlington City Hall

HOW DOES DESIGN REVIEW BENEFIT THE CITY?

Design Review is a very important tool for protecting community character and revitalizing areas targeted for development. It allows the City to look beyond the specifics of a proposed development, and consider its context and how a project will fit and benefit its surroundings. Design Review benefits the community, and individual property owners, in many important ways.

Reinforce Community Identity

Burlington clearly has a special character. Think about your neighborhood, the waterfront or downtown – if you saw a photograph of one of these places, could you tell it was Burlington, or does it just look like any other place? A great many communities across the country are struggling to regain their identity. We all want to improve our quality of life and make our city more attractive for investment. Burlington already has a strong character and high quality of life. Design Review helps protect this asset for future generations.

Enhance and Protect Property Values

Design Review helps assure property owners that their investment will be protected. Just like traditional zoning prevents landfills from locating in a residential neighborhood, Design Review tries to ensure that the character of the neighborhood is maintained.



Historic Renovation

Improvements in the quality of design stabilize, and in some cases enhance, the value of private property. This in turn makes property more attractive for investment and benefits the overall character of the neighborhood and city.

Promote Economic Development

Design Review is an especially important tool for commercial districts where increased private investment and maintaining an image of vitality is the goal. Places like the Church Street Marketplace and the Downtown Waterfront rely heavily on Design Review to protect and enhance public and private investments, and to support and encourage new development. The same is true for many other places around the country and abroad that are striving to protect their vitality and character.



Church Street Marketplace

HOW DO I KNOW IF DESIGN REVIEW APPLIES TO ME?

The *Burlington Zoning Ordinance* identifies several areas within the city that are subject to Design Review. These areas include the downtown, the Intervale, Old North End, University Campus, waterfronts and major street corridors. Additionally, any major development project is likely to be considered under the Design Review criteria.

Staff in the Department of Planning and Zoning can easily tell you if your property or proposed development project will be considered under Design Review.

WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT FROM THE PROCESS?

Projects going through Design Review are examined by two separate panels. The Design Review Board advises the Burlington Planning Commission on design issues, and meets on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month. The Planning Commission makes the final decision, and meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursday. The public has an opportunity to review and comment on all development projects requiring a permit, and there is a 15 day appeal period after the application is approved.



Follett House

Projects are evaluated in three basic stages: (1) Staff reviews the application and provides comments to the Design Review Board; (2) the Design Review Board meets with the applicant and forwards comments to the Planning Commission; and, (3) the Planning Commission considers comments provided by staff, the Design Review Board, and testimony from the applicant and the public, before rendering a final decision.

It is often best if you can meet with the Planning Department staff before completing the plans for your proposal. They can offer ideas about particular concerns or issues that may arise during the review of your project. By meeting with staff early, these points can be incorporated into your project before you have made a significant investment of time and money.

In some cases, staff can approve small projects in just a few days. Others may take a month or more depending on the complexity of the project. By law, a decision must be made within 60 days.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

city zoning permits & general information

- **Burlington Dept. of Planning & Zoning**

135 Church St., Burlington, VT 05401
802.865.7188

city building permits

- **Burlington Dept. of Public Works**

7 Kilburn St., Burlington, VT 05401
802.863.9094

historic preservation and rehabilitation tax credits

- **Vermont Division for Historic Preservation**

National Life Bldg. Drawer 20.,
Montpelier, VT 05620-0501
802.828.3211

historic rehabilitation and preservation

- **Preservation Trust of Vermont**

104 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401
802.658.6647



Residential Infill

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