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The town of Burlington brings the "P" in public-private partnership

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The town of Burlington, Connecticut, in Hartford County, in response to development pressure has prepared a comprehensive plan of development for approximately 140 acres in the town's center. When asked what is different about this effort from others in the region first selectman Ted Shafer said, "We developed this plan and strategy with the existing property owners and current business owners of the area. This was an effort to build and attract commercial development in such a way that maintains Burlington's historical and rural character that continues to draw so many new residents to this charming bedroom community."

Burlington is situated in the rolling hills of western Hartford County and enjoys a residential growth rate of almost 39% over the past three decades. The town's mean family income has nearly tripled in the same period to \$132,0691 with the majority of these newcomers in professional, scientific, management, and finance professions. "These are highly educated, high income earners who demand excellence in their community in terms of academics, recreation, sports, and convenient access to goods and high quality services" said Economic Development Commission chairman Tod Kallenbach. The town is a favorite for both permanent and durational ESPN employees from their headquarters just south in Bristol. Burlington has become one of the most desirable residential communities in central Connecticut for families and was rated Connecticut's best Small Town in 2012 by Hartford Magazine based on criteria related to education, community services, and overall quality of life.

The recently completed Village Center Development Plan represents a common vision among current business owners, land owners, municipal officials, and community residents. The planning effort was in response to multiple newly approved development applications and an Economic Development Strategy prepared in 2005. The Economic Strategy looked at the entire town and found that due to the high traffic volumes, geography, existing business concentration, and available land that the area to concentrate development in was the town center. Over the next seven years the findings of the study rang true. A four lot commercial subdivision was created shortly thereafter, two mixed-use professional office/medical and residential developments, and most recently in 2012, a seventeen unit market rate residential development is now under construction. This development pressure did not go unnoticed by the residents or community leaders.

Burlington, whose economy like many in Connecticut was historically agriculture, still enjoys the rural and period-specific amenities like a town green and historic architecture. Realizing that the masses of new residents appreciate the imprint this history has left on the community the town identified the need to balance the preservation of these aesthetics and character with the desire for economic development. As a result, the board of selectman created a committee of experts and stakeholders to prepare a master plan of development to demonstrate that it is possible to preserve

the rural New England character with an intensification of economic development.

This effort went far beyond planning and to date the town has invested almost one million dollars of public funds into the area, primarily in public infrastructure to support development in the town. Additionally, the town is actively engaging business who may be interested in servicing this high income, high-end residential community with goods and services by offering tax incentives and development cost-sharing. Burlington is at the forefront of Connecticut towns in positioning itself for scalable commercial development in its town center.

Footnote:

1. 2006-2010 American Community Survey Selected Population Tables, Table DP03

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