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## **Situated on the shores of Lake Champlain, downtown Burlington is poised for growth - by Jeff Nick**

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Anchored by the Church Street Marketplace ([www.churchstmarketplace.com](http://www.churchstmarketplace.com)) downtown Burlington, VT, continues to thrive in today's changing retail environment. Since its conception in 1981, the 252,000 s/f pedestrian mall in the center of town has been a huge success, weathering recessions and economic slowdowns with occupancy rates rarely dipping below 95% and occasionally hitting 100%. When vacancies occur, quality retailers and restaurants jump at the chance to fill them. Recent vacancies have resulted in new stores opening including Free People, Slate, Fat Face & Little Blue House.

The marketplace is home to over 100 retailers, restaurants & cafés, and a vibrant outdoor dining scene. The surrounding blocks host an array of offices, residential apartments, a new 350-unit college dorm, and more than 680 hotel rooms. The four block marketplace district maintains a balanced mix of local and national retailers. Longtime local boutiques such as Expressions, Ecco, and Whim co-exist nicely with the likes of Banana Republic, lululemon, and GAP.

Even before the marketplace's pedestrian mall was completed 37 years ago, Church St. has long been the area's central hub for commerce and night life. Despite a market shift to more suburban big box retail outlets, the marketplace has been able to maintain a strong position in greater Burlington's retail market. Local business leaders, along with the support of elected officials, the Burlington Business Association, and The Church Street Marketplace Commission are now looking into ways to strengthen Burlington's brand and the marketplace experience by broadening its boundaries down adjacent side streets and potentially to Lake Champlain's waterfront.

The marketplace is overseen by a 9 member city commission and is run by a dedicated staff, who takes pride in their work. They are constantly working to promote the district and maintain the street to the highest standards. They have been successful in continually drawing visitors to the marketplace by offering a wide variety of annual events. The Discover Jazz Music Festival kicks off the summer season in early June, offering jazz venues dispersed over a wide area of downtown Burlington, including the Church Street Marketplace and the Lake Champlain Waterfront. The event draws crowds in excess of 50,000 each year. Other events include the People's United Bank Marathon, The Festival of Fools (highlighting vaudeville acts and street performers), an annual

sidewalk sale, numerous parades, and the annual Santa Parade and Tree Lighting ceremony.

The entire downtown central business district is also strong and undergoing a major transformation with the redevelopment of the former 334,000 s/f Burlington Town Center mall.

To facilitate this project, the city has followed its city plan and after a lengthy public process, implemented a new form based zoning code allowing buildings in the downtown core to top out at 160 feet.

This project will include a new 900 space parking garage, 230,000 s/f of class A office space, 126,000 s/f of new street scape retail and 272 housing units. Additionally, the project will reconnect two city streets cut off by early 1970s development patterns.

Situated on the shores of Lake Champlain with scenic views and strong business climate, Burlington is poised to see future growth for years to come.

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