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## **Downtown Burlington's real estate market remains strong through the COVID-19 pandemic - by Ryan Nick**

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Vermont has led the nation in its pandemic response including some the highest vaccination rates in the country. The aggressive recovery campaign has let Vermonters and tourists alike return to Downtown Burlington and the Church St. Marketplace in droves. The city has been able to host numerous outdoor events this summer, taking advantage of both Vermont's excellent summer weather and our biggest asset, the environment. Even in Vermont's biggest city, we were able to use our streets, parks, and waterfront in new and creative ways to bring people together.

Many people from out of state moved here to experience what Vermont and Burlington have to offer, including thriving research universities and emerging tech startups. HULA Lakeside is Burlington's new tech campus that provides amazing office and coworking space to our businesses and entrepreneurs in a brand-new facility on the shores of Lake Champlain. Beta Technologies is leading the industry in battery powered flight and is rapidly growing their workforce to keep up with the demand for environmentally friendly air travel. They're currently constructing a new facility at the Burlington International Airport to accommodate their growth.

The Church St. Marketplace, an outdoor, four-block pedestrian mall, still has near 100% occupancy, and has attracted new tenants during the pandemic, including Chase Bank and Black Diamond Sportswear. Church St.'s unique pedestrian-friendly model allows visitors to enjoy great shopping, fine dining, and spend the day outdoors, making it a safe and comfortable option for everyone to enjoy. In addition, the mix of locally-owned boutiques, many reporting record sales, and national brands encourage shoppers to come down to the marketplace to get unique items they can't buy online while still providing a place to dine and shop for everyday items at a new Ace Hardware store and a very successful food co-op.

After resolving a few hiccups, the downtown mall is soon to begin construction on 45,000 s/f of new street scape retail, 422 space parking garage, and 426 housing units. Additionally, the project will reconnect two city streets cut off by early 1970s development patterns. This project will further encourage Vermonters to live and work in downtown Burlington and bring the current residents

much needed amenities.

Statewide, there is a shortage of both housing and industrial space, as well as prime commercial land for development, driving the demand in these markets skyward. Vermont's strict land use laws make construction slow to start and new development difficult to navigate, so this shortage is expected to exist for the foreseeable future. In addition, owners tend to hold on to their properties as a long-term investment making buildings and commercial/industrial land available for purchase few and far between. Due to the influx of new businesses and residents, the market has seen some unusually high prices for properties that were new to the market. There are still deals to be found but buyers and tenants should expect to move quickly should an opportunity present itself.

With the worst of the pandemic hopefully behind us, Vermont is well positioned to take advantage of our new residents and businesses and move into a post-COVID world.

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