

**Burlington Business Association
Business Summit Presentation
January 7, 2010**

**“FOUNDATIONS for growth SET IN THE PAST” 1960’s & 1970’s
Bill Truex/Rolf Kielman**

Times were different 40 years ago (1970):

Single income families were the norm

Annual family incomes were 10 to 15K or less

New cars could be had \$2,500

And a new home for \$25,000

Custom designed homes were built for \$18/s.f.

Dinner out for a couple, incl. drinks and tip \$25

Rotary dial telephones only available service

Household TV’s in use for only 20 years

Color TV in use for only 10 years

The Electronic Age was still a decade away

Mimeograph machines were in use, no copiers yet

The IBM Selectric typewriter was state of the art, - no word processors or personal computers

Burlington’s City Government was different in 1970 also:

Mayor (Frank Cain, then Gordy Paquette), Treasurer (Ray Contois), Board of Aldermen / City Council and 17 City Commissions could hire and fire their own staff

There was no Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO) yet

And no Public Works Department

Planning Commission / Urban Renewal Agency (BPC) – had the planning and development authority for the City by State Statute

Burlington’s Development Status in 1970:

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- s1 An Interstate Highway #89 **connection between Burlington and Montpelier** was completed in the **mid 1960’s**. And, the **total highway completed** from New Hampshire to the Canadian border **by 1970**.
- s2 The State Highway Department developed an **Urban Area Highway Plan in 1965** and as part of that they planned a
- s3 **“Business Loop around Burlington’s Central Business District”**.
- In **1970** the Burlington Planning Commission adopted a design policy for the new highway to provide access **“to - not - through”** downtown Burlington.
- s4 By **1970** the **“North end Connector”** (1/2 of the 1965 Interstate Highway design) and one access ramp of the limited access highway was completed to Park Street.
- The Planning Commission **rejected** the notion of a **highway** coming through a residential section of the **“Old North End”**.
- s5 The Planning Commission **rejected** notion of an **elevated highway through the Burlington Waterfront**. And, the Planning Commission **rejected** the notion of a **clover leaf intersection at the foot of Main Street**
- And, in **1970** the Planning Commission **rejected** the notion of a **limited access highway** from the I-189 to Main Street **in favor** of an **on grade accessible parkway** (the “Pine Street Connector”) **from the south** connecting to Lower Battery Street.
- s6 The **Design Review Board** was instituted as an advisory board to the BPC in **1968**.
- By **1970** the **strip development** of Rte #2 (**Williston Road**) was **well underway** and several auto dealers and Gaynes Department store had moved out of downtown to the strip.
- s7 The **Shelburne Road strip** development was **just starting** in with the Grand Way (Grand Union) and Seaway (**Sears**) shopping centers **leading the way out of Burlington to the south** at the I-189 and Rte #7 intersection.
- s8 The Planning Commission hired its **first full time staff planner** (Frank Gerred) in the **early 1970’s**.
- s9 The City’s first **Comprehensive Master Plan** was adopted in 1973, followed shortly thereafter by adoption of the implementing tools, a new **Zoning Ordinance and Sub Division Regulations**.
- S10 The **focus** was **on the redevelopment and strengthening of the Central Business District** (CBD)

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- S11 and expanding the concept to **include the UVM/Medical Center complex** and the **industrial**
- S12 **waterfront - into a higher density “Regional Service Core”.**
- S13,14 The **languishing Waterfront** would come along **in a couple of decades**. And, the top of the hill UVM/Medical Center complex had the responsibility of planning for its own needs and obtaining approvals from the City for development.
- s15 In the late fifties the city fathers identified the need and obtained funding for an **“Urban Renewal Project”** with an eye on combating the inevitable sprawl witnessed earlier in other communities across the eastern seaboard. This required relocating all residents and businesses within seven city blocks and creating open space with all new buried utilities infrastructure in place. The land was completely **ready for private redevelopment by 1970**.
- s16 The first developer, Horizon, Inc., a group of local investors, was found in default of its contract after completing **the first building in the project by 1965** but was unable to finance other projects in accord with its contract with the city.
- A second developer, Cousins Properties, Inc. / F.M. Burlington built two speculative office buildings in the late 1960’s. Cousins, from Atlanta, Ga., lost its management team in a tragic corporate airplane crash into Lake Champlain in a snow storm one January evening. Cousins withdrew from the project and presented the city with a new development team, Mondev, Inc. /F.M. Burlington, based in Montreal, in the late 1960s.
- s17 Work on the city’s Master Plan included the concept of developing a **strong pedestrian connection between Urban Renewal**
- s18 **and the existing CBD** to integrate the two and eventually the waterfront into a common, noncompeting and expanded regional business and residential district.
- S19 The **existing eight block CBD**, with Church Street at its focus, was surrounded and perhaps confined by the dominant religious institutions of the time.
- S20 The desired strong pedestrian connection integrating the downtown seemed to be blocked by the churches.
- S21 As fate would have it, on **Washington’s Birthday, in February of 1971**, a series of eight arsons struck Burlington over a period of thirteen months.
- S22 The first was the **fire that destroyed St Paul’s Cathedral**, enabling St Paul’s to become a developer and

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- S23 relocate on the corner of Battery and Pearl Streets.
- S24 The redeveloper acquired the St Paul’s property and the Jupiter Dept. store on Church Street
- S25 and then presented the city with a plan to create a strong urban connection with Church Street;
- S26 The plan which included a two level climate controlled shopping link with a department store as an anchor at the west end with Church Street as the anchor to the east. The Planning Commission successfully petitioned the Street Commission to close one block of St. Paul Street and one block of Pine Street to enable the continuous shopping linkage between the two.
- S27 In stages throughout the early 70’s the Burlington Square Mall was completed. The department store would wait until the turn of the century. And the rest of the project would be developed over the coming decades with the final urban renewal parcel slated for construction start in 2010.
- S28 Concurrently, the City continued to focus on making downtown a people oriented place.
- S29 Europe’s first pedestrianization of a downtown street was the Stroget (pronounced Stroiyet) in Copenhagen.
- S30 It became the inspiration for converting Church Street into a pedestrian mall.
- S31 In 1970 the Burlington Business Association’s founders, the Merchants Bureau, held one day side walk sales annually,
- S32 this provided a perfect opportunity for a one day demonstration street closing.
- S33 Landscape materials were donated by the four regional nurseries and other local businesses,
- S34 sculpture loaned by local artists
- S35 provided interest and
- S36 a simulation of a landscaped environment,
- S37 and, it was a test to see if the merchants could live without parking directly in front of their stores. It was deemed a success.
- S38 The following year, 1971, provided an opportunity
- S39 in conjunction with a state crafts fair to conduct a one week trial closing.

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- S40 It too was a success and provided the basis for testing various opportunities
- S41 such as gaining permits for restaurants to serve food on the street.
- Funding was sought, and gained, to research other “malls” for success and failures.
- S42 A team was sent out across the country and many lessons were learned,
- S43 Perhaps, the most important was that the Street needed to be managed as a private operator would manage the public spaces of a shopping mall. Thus the major recommendation was to create a commission to manage and care for the street.
- In the early 1970’s the private, local bus company, Burlington Rapid Transit went out of business with its local bus service, and without skipping a beat
- S44 the Chittenden County Transportation Authority was created, acquired buses and picked up the passenger service. This proved to be a real success story. As the CCTA went on to win many awards and became a familiar entity to the federal agencies involved with mass transit.
- Out of this relationship grew a major funding opportunity based on the Urban Mass Transportation Agency’s, Auto Restricted Zone program. An equally bold concept for Church Street emerged entitled,
- S45 “A Marketplace Concept for American Cities”.
- S46 Based on a bus “Transit Loop” that brought all county bus passengers within one block of the entire expanded CBD, and an Auto Restricted Zone, Church Street,
- S47 a two level pedestrian street that tied in with Burlington Square was designed.
- S48 The lower level utilized the existing basements of all the buildings fronting on the street and added about 300,00 GSF of prime climate controlled shopping to the downtown.
- S49 The upper level was basically a pedestrian surface mall with access and light well openings down to the lower level.
- S50 The surface character of the street and the dominance of the Church to the north was maintained by keeping most of the structures at or below railing height.
- S51 Phase one of the project was to solve the parking issue by building the “Marketplace Garage”.
- S52 With the assistance of an Economic Development Administration grant

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- S53 the garage was completed, on one of the arson ravished sites, in 1978.
- The two level scheme was considered to bold – and was scuttled,
- S54 a surface solution devised, and the concept developed - resulting in today’s Marketplace,
- S55 funded by the Urban Mass Transportation Agency (UMTA) and the City, it was completed twenty years after the Stroget in 1982.

Closing statements about the City:

At the beginning:

"Burlington, the little city on Lake Champlain was developing a vision for itself. Through the energy and imagination of several key citizens and politicians, the City was attempting to devise a strategy that would help avoid the urban migration to the suburbs happening in much of America. The downtown of Burlington needed a core of services and activities that would enhance life in the city. A clear vision was needed for that vitality to remain centered in the City of Burlington as we knew it."

At the end:

"So now try to imagine our city without the Marketplace and core of services that support our downtown. While perhaps not always clearly in focus, the idea of a pedestrian friendly "living room" at the center of our city became the community's goal. With the opening of the Marketplace in 1982 that goal had been realized and the density of support services required to keep the city vital has been enhanced ever since. We must continue to work to maintain that vision."