

# Age Friendly Burlington

*Liveable Communities for All Generations*



Burlington Centennial Neighborhood Walk Audit

Survey Results – May 30, 2018

## Introduction

The 50-plus population is the fastest growing age group in the nation and is projected to increase by 23 million, or 21 percent, by the year 2030. Given the aging baby boomers, older adults will continue to be a significantly large proportion of the population for years to come. In Vermont, adults age 65-plus make up 15 percent of the total state population- and rising. The continued growth in the older adult population must be considered as these adults strive to maintain their independence and quality of life as they age.

The growing population over 50 represents both a transformative force by itself and a net asset to the city of Burlington. In 2006, AARP Vermont launched the Burlington Livable Community Project, a collaborative approach to planning for the demands an aging population will place on Burlington as a city, its residents, and its resources while recognizing how older adults will continue to fuel economic activity far longer than past generations have. Today, AARP Vermont's efforts for a "Livable Burlington" aim to provide direction, assess needs and resources, and develop recommendations in the areas of housing, transportation and mobility, and community engagement. In support of this effort, in May of 2018, AARP Livable Community Volunteer Team organized a neighborhood walk-audit to gauge concerns and needs as residents strive to stay in their homes and communities as they age.

The team set out on May 30, 2018 to conduct a walk audit to further the goals outlined in the action plan under outdoor spaces and buildings. AARP staff, volunteers, committee members of AARP Livable Community Volunteer Team along with community members, and State and City staff surveyed the intersections, sidewalks, and crosswalks in Burlington to shed light on the opportunities to enhance pedestrian access, improve health and further efforts to make Burlington an age friendly community. The survey reveals gaps in the town's pedestrian infrastructure and stresses the importance of designing safe and accessible roadways for all users of all ages. The following report provides an analysis of the data collected in the Centennial Neighborhood of Burlington.

There are positive attributes of this area such as beautiful vegetation and a vibrant park however, the issues of accessibility are truly scary to all members of this community. Large trucks occupying multiple lanes while turning, great difficulty in crossing the street in several places, and a lack of signals affect everyone of all ages who need to navigate through the designated area, whether by car, bicycle, or on foot. This report articulates those concerns of community members and provides recommendations on how to improve the livability of the Centennial Community for all generations.



## Complete Streets

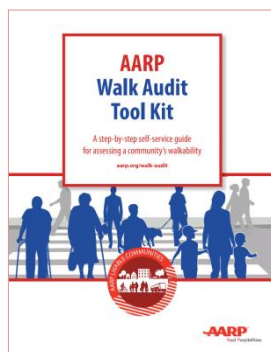
Vermont adopted a Complete Streets law in 2011, which has changed the approach to our state's roadways – it requires town and city officials to consider all users when planning, designing, constructing and maintaining our roadway – to include pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders. AARP Vermont places the implementation of this law as a high priority as we work to further our mission to champion more livable, age-friendly communities. By utilizing planning language such as “complete streets” that considers access and mobility – communities can ensure residents have a healthy, more livable community.

Building vibrant, walkable, and healthy communities is a complex and many-layered process. There are many different factors to take into account including safety and enjoyment of all methods of travel, infrastructure quality, and ease of access to different modes. Mixed-use development within town centers can increase housing affordability, economic diversity, and accessible amenities. When coupled with an interconnected system of sidewalks, and bicyclist and pedestrian infrastructure it supports a vibrant livable community. Adopting planning language in your Town Plan, Zoning and Bylaws to promote mixed-use development, bike and pedestrian facilities will support healthy, active living for people of all ages and ability.



## Methodology

AARP's Sidewalk and Streets Survey Tool was used to conduct the walk audit on Wednesday, May 30, 2018 from 2:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. with 12 participants. There were 4 community members, 1 Department of Public Works representative, 2 Regional Planning Commission representatives, 1 individual from Vermont Department of Health, and 4 AARP Staff and Volunteers. The AARP survey tool was designed in collaboration with members of the Institute of Transportation Engineers.



During the walk audit, the condition of sidewalks along the roadway were examined and photographed, with some emphasis on the following:

- Crosswalks and Crossing Signals
- Pedestrian Safety
- Sidewalks
- Important signage
- Driver behavior

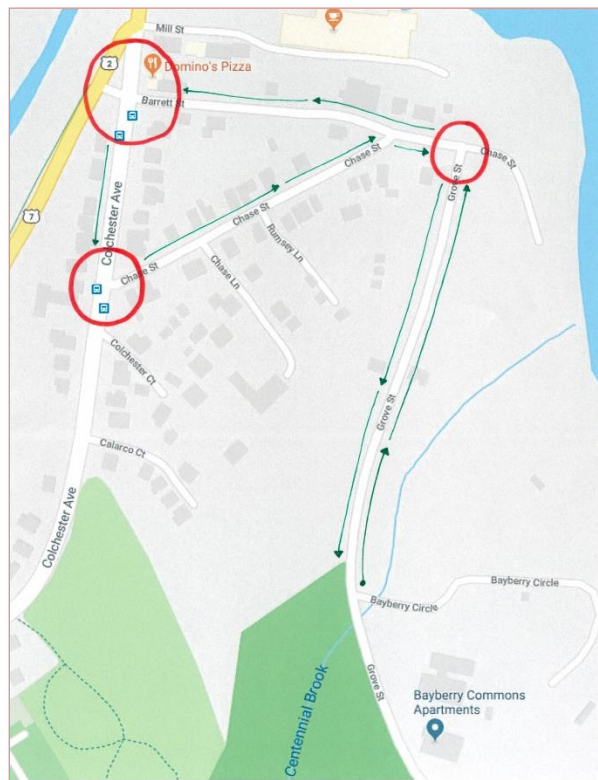
## Walk Audit Results



The 12 participants took part on the May 30, 2018 walk audit of Burlington's Centennial Neighborhood beginning at the Bayberry Commons on Grove Street, north on Grove, left onto Chase Street turning into Barrett Street to the 5-way intersection prior to the bridge, north on Colchester Ave, left onto Chase Street, and right onto Grove Street to return to Bayberry Commons:

On the walk audit the participants noted the following results:

The Centennial Neighborhood is attractive and inviting along the Chase Mill Bridge for both motorists and pedestrians; there is a variety of services and amenities available and the river path provides a wonderful asset for the community. Pedestrian infrastructure, however, was rated from fair to poor in regards to crossing, safety, and sidewalk conditions. The three problem intersections are highlighted in the map.



**Overall Findings:** The participants found the intersections that were surveyed to be in **fair condition** for the walkability of the neighborhood. Few amenities were found that supported access for people with disabilities, such as audible signals and textured curb cuts. Pedestrian safety should be improved and traffic calming measures are needed to address the heavy flow of motorists.



**Driver Behavior:** Rated as **fair**. Speed was a concern as was drivers rolling through stop signs, not stopping behind crosswalks. The traffic noise was at a good level and did not prohibit enjoyment and added to the comfort and appeal of the neighborhood. We observed a mix of some drivers yielding to pedestrians and many who did not yield. Several large trucks were observed turning at the intersection of Chase Street and Grove Street. They required all lanes to navigate turns in both directions

Drivers at Grove Street and Chase Street rolled through the stop sign at all three intersections. The drivers would also stop past the stop line on Grove Street. It was noted that drivers on all streets were traveling faster than the mandated 25 MPH.



#### Observations and Recommendations

- Stop sign is too far away from pedestrian crossing at Grove Street and Chase Street junction.
- Explore uses of traffic calming.

**Comfort & Appeal:** Predominantly rated as **fair** but some individuals considered it **good**. The overall comfort and appeal is a picturesque neighborhood with lots of trees, a nice pocket park at Chase Street and along Grove Street, but many of the assets and amenities can be difficult to access because of the street debris, lack of lights at intersections, and no rain/snow shelters at the bus stop.



### Observations and Recommendations

- Excellent pedestrian crossing signage and benches at Schmanska Park, but park is not handicap accessible because of curb cut-out at entrance
- Most greenspace was private property, but provided excellent shade and was well maintained.
- **There are no benches or places for people to rest along the sidewalk or for any of the bus stops.**
- There were no waste or recycle bins along the route except in Schmanska Park. There was a noticeable amount of debris along the sidewalk, such as recycle bins that were difficult to get by.
- The bus sign was taped to a utility pole notifying users the stop was discontinued.
- Public transit stops are in key locations, but there was no bus sign at the bus stop or crosswalks to allow safe passage from the bus.
- Way-finding signs are very useful and add to the comfort and appeal.



**Intersections & Crossings:** rated as **poor**. We observed a few tricky intersections for pedestrians and motorists alike.



### Observations and Recommendations

- Safer intersections for pedestrian crossing are a top priority.
- Crosswalk paint was faded providing poor visibility at many crosswalks and lacked truncated domes.
- No push-to-walk signals are available on Colchester Avenue, Chase Street, and only on 2 pedestrian crossing sections near Schmanska Park on Grove Street.
- There are no pedestrian signals or audible signals to protect pedestrians from the Colchester/Barrett/Riverside/Bridge intersection. Pedestrians are left to dodge oncoming traffic between lights and breaks in the traffic pattern.
- Bicycle path ends near the intersection of Chase Street, Riverside Drive, and Colchester Avenue and there is no safe route for bicyclists to cross the road. The sidewalk is the only safe path down by Riverside Drive.
- Lack of clearly marked crosswalks, pedestrian signals, and truncated domes makes it extremely dangerous and difficult for accessibility and safe travel.
- At the intersection of Chase Street and Grove Street, heavy traffic – 36 vehicles – including 4 pick-ups and 3 large vans, made it difficult and unsafe to cross especially at school drop-off time.



**Sidewalks:** Rating of **fair**. The condition of sidewalks and streets can make life much easier or much more difficult for pedestrians, particularly those who cannot or do not own or drive cars. The sidewalk conditions along this walk were widely diverse.

### Observations and Recommendations

- Sidewalks along Grove Street from Bayberry Commons to the intersection of Chase Street were in good condition but lacked truncated domes. However, the sidewalk was only along one side of the road.
- Sidewalk into Schmanska Park was not accessible.
- There are several curb cuts that lack textured markings for people with visual impairments.
- The sidewalk along Colchester Ave, Barrett Street, and Chase Street needs repair.





## Conclusion

**Why does Walkability matter?** Walkable communities provide residents with economic and health benefits. By designing the community to allow for housing and local businesses to be within walking distance (i.e. ½ to 1 mile), residents have the option of walking to and from destinations rather than depending on a personal automobile. There is a direct correlation between walkable communities and housing values in those communities. The Walking the Walk study found that homes located within a walkable community commanded a price premium of \$4,000 to \$34,000. The health benefits associated with walkability include lower rates of disease due to reduced obesity rates and cardio activity, as well as considerably psychological benefits.

Connectivity of sidewalks, safety of crosswalks, and availability of seating are all elements worthy of consideration when reviewing the current infrastructure and future needs of Burlington. Pedestrian safety in this neighborhood is severely lacking and needs improvement. Making safety of pedestrians a priority will help support a more age friendly Burlington.



## Recommendations

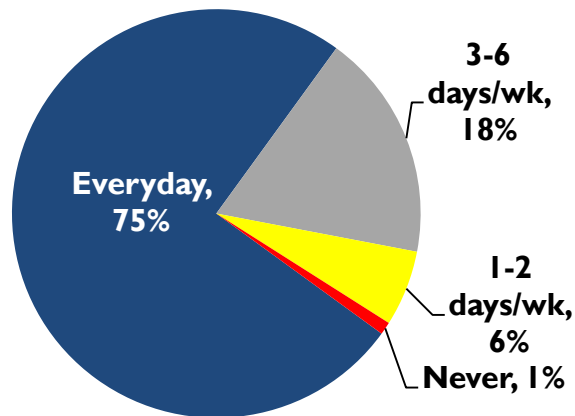
1. Install signage, push-to-walk, and audible signals for safer pedestrian crossing at the intersection of: Barrett Street and Colchester Ave, Barrett Street and Riverside Ave, Colchester Ave and Chase Street, Chase Street and Grove Street.
2. Provide benches and places to rest along Colchester Ave, especially around bus stops. This will further enhance comfort and appeal.
3. Improve pedestrian accessibility and safety by installing truncated domes at cross walks.
4. Explore prohibiting trucks from using Chase Street to Grove Street, and enforce the law prohibiting large trucks traveling side streets.
5. Adopt traffic calming measures such as plantings to enhance safety, comfort and appeal.
6. Traffic calming measures are needed along entire route where driver behavior is poor and speed is a concern when crossing the street.
7. Increase signage along the roads for pedestrians, particularly in areas where crosswalks are highly worn.
8. Consider rapid flashing beacons and pedestrian signals at key crosswalks.
9. Consider a tabletop intersection at Grove St. and Chase St. to reduce vehicular speed.
10. At crosswalks with a “walk” button, there needs to be a “no turn on red” arrow to ensure cars yield to pedestrians.
11. The city of Burlington should invest in a scoping study of Grove St., Chase St., Colchester Ave., and Barrett St. to address the various barriers to safe mobility and connectivity.



## Burlington Citywide Livability Data<sup>1</sup>

Frequency of Outings and Current Modes of Transportation Nearly (93%) all Burlington residents age 45-plus say they get out of their home every day or three to six days a week, in a typical week. The frequency of leaving their home decreases with age.

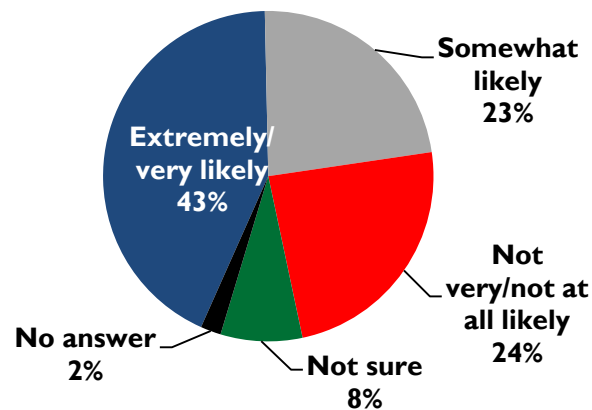
**Frequency of Outings in a Typical Week  
Among Burlington Residents**  
(n=500)



### Walking

Many Burlington residents age 45-plus say they would walk in their community if there were better conditions for pedestrians. Over two in five respondents say they would be extremely or very likely to walk if there were better sidewalks and crosswalks for pedestrians, and about another quarter says they would be somewhat likely to walk.

**Likelihood that Burlington Residents Would Walk if  
Conditions Were Better for Pedestrians**  
(n=500)

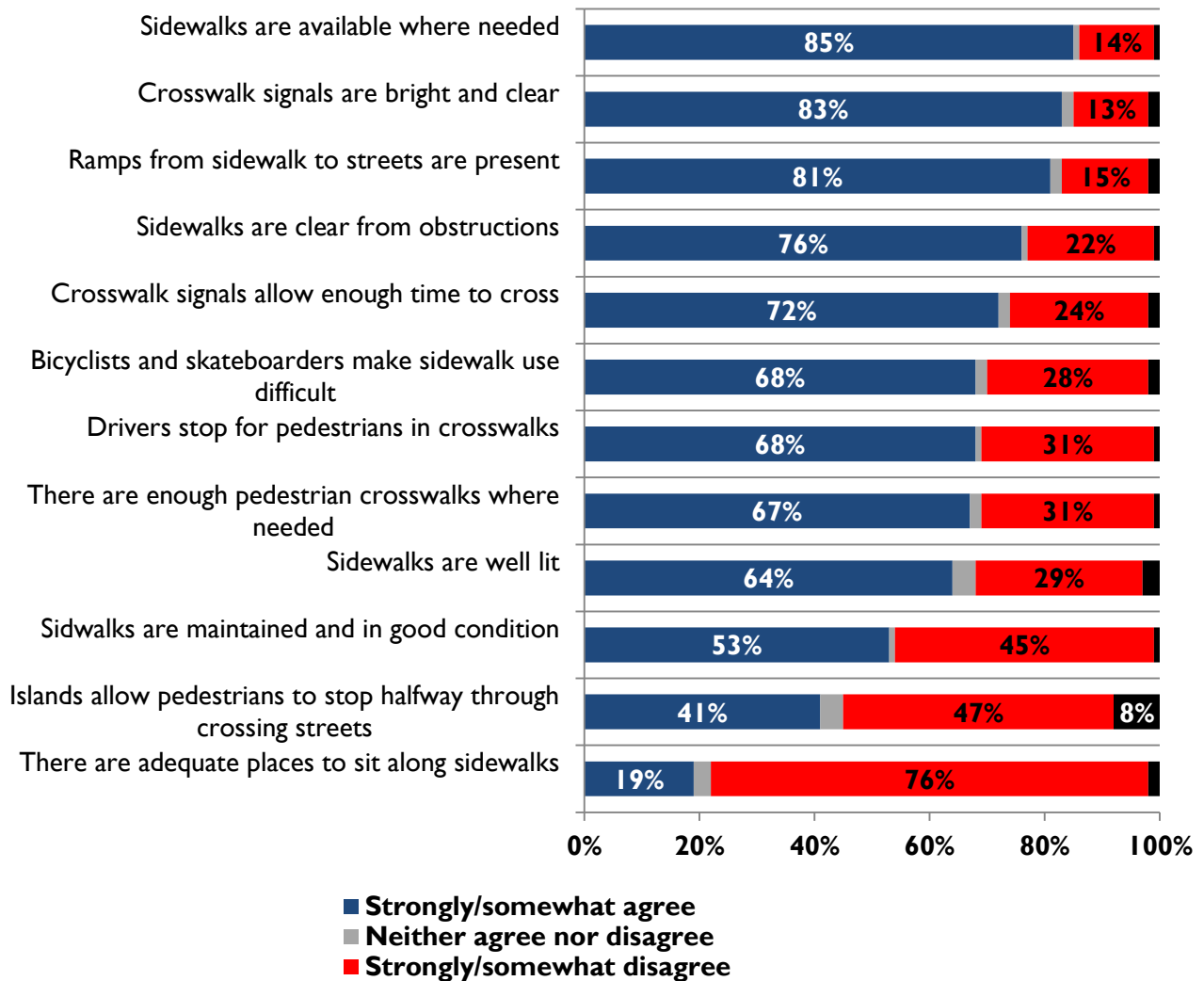


<sup>1</sup> Joanne Binette, *The Path to Livability: A Citizen Survey of Burlington, Vermont*. (AARP, 2015), 9, 14, 15, 17.

Pedestrian Accessibility

A large majority of Burlington residents also agrees that Burlington has sidewalks that are free from obstruction and crosswalk signals that allow enough time for pedestrians to cross. About two-thirds agree that drivers stop for pedestrians in crosswalks, there are enough pedestrian crosswalks where they are needed, and sidewalks are well lit. While about half agree that sidewalks are well maintained and in good condition, nearly the same proportion disagree with this statement.

**Level of Agreement about Walking Conditions in Burlington**  
(n=342, respondents who say they walk)



## Street Safety

Burlington residents age 45-plus believe there are street safety issues for bicyclists, people with disabilities, and older people. Half of Burlington residents believe the streets of Burlington are not safe for bicyclists. Two in five feel the streets are not safe for people with disabilities, and about a third say streets are not safe for older people and children. On the other hand, about two in five believe the streets are safe for bicyclists and people with disabilities; and over half feel streets are in fact safe for older adults and children.

### **Do Burlington Residents Believe the Streets Are Safe for Residents?**

(n=500)

