

Burlington Downtown Supermarket

After the closing of the last remaining grocery store in downtown Burlington, the city found itself in a situation similar to that of many downtown communities across the country- the migration of essential goods and services from the city center to the suburbs and outer regions of the area. Instead of shrugging their shoulders and accepting this new trend, Burlington officials decided to be active players in developing a downtown, locally owned grocery store to serve the needs of city residents.

The timing of the local Onion River Cooperative's need to expand its store space offered the co-op a unique opportunity to provide downtown Burlington with a locally owned, urban grocery store. In December of 1999, after an extensive public process involving hundreds of citizens from all walks of life, the Burlington City Council selected the co-op to be the new downtown super market.

Despite the fact that for the first time in city history a major foreign-owned corporation (one which challenged the co-op for the downtown store) gathered signatures to force a referendum vote which would have subsidized their development with taxpayer dollars, Burlington voters chose to go local and support the Onion River Co-op's proposal for the downtown store.

From the beginning of the process, the general public, as well as the co-op's 3000+membership and staff had the opportunity to comment on everything from the new store's design, to what would stock its shelves, to what the store's impact would be on the immediate neighborhood. In addition to a series of well-attended public meetings, a postage paid comment card was mailed to Burlington's residents to receive additional feedback and suggestions on the new store. Community forums were also held at the local senior center and other community gathering places in an effort to hear from sometimes hard to reach populations.

Built on city owned property the co-op re-used an existing space and incorporated green building technology, in conjunction with natural lighting, energy efficiency and toxic free material.

Burlington residents, as well as city officials saw this unique and exciting opportunity as one which would help counterbalance the trend of grocery stores leaving city centers, and thereby help to keep Burlington's downtown a vital place.

(Burlington Legacy Project: Sustainable Strategies in Action – Economic Development. *A Case Study: Siting a Supermarket Downtown.* www.cedo.ci.burlington.vt.us/legacy/strategies/05-org-supermarket-main.html)