

The Boston Globe

North

Burlington a boom town

By **Brenda J. Buote** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT APRIL 21, 2013



ESSDRAS MSUAREZ/GLOBE STAFF

The Corbos had many bidders for their Burlington home.

Low residential property taxes, top-notch schools, beautifully maintained parks, and a Third Avenue retail boulevard that is being compared to Boston's Newbury Street.

Just 13 miles northwest of Boston, Burlington has it all.

"The amenities you would typically find only in Boston, you're now finding here," said Sonia Rollins, a local realtor and former town selectwoman. "Younger professionals who maybe don't want to live in the city but want the amenities, they're moving to

Burlington. Retail here is strong and vibrant, and the eating . . . you can't match it outside of Boston."

Stacy and Jeff Corbo know firsthand how fast homes are being snapped up in Burlington. Now that they are looking to move up the property ladder, they are finding the price tag for a larger home in the town they love beyond their reach.

The couple listed their modest three-bedroom cape on March 20. By the 21st, they had 11 showings and multiple offers. They accepted an offer that was over their list price of \$324,900 and expect to hand over the keys to the new owners May 20.

"Going into it, we were hopeful it would sell quickly, but still I was surprised — and relieved — that it wasn't a long process for us," said Stacy, 38. "Keeping the house clean for multiple showings would have been difficult with two boys," ages 5 and 3.

"When people think of Burlington, they think 'there's a mall, there's great retail, I can eat whatever I want,'" said Rollins, who worked with the Corbos. "But if you peel back that layer and look a little deeper, you start to see the value you're getting in Burlington. The town is very well run and you're not paying any user fees."

For the larger home they now seek, the Corbos have expanded their search to include Wilmington, North Reading, and Chelmsford. They may end up living temporarily with Jeff's parents in Burlington while they house-hunt.

Burlington, once a sleepy agricultural community snubbed by the railroads, expanded at an explosive rate between 1955 and 1965, following the construction of Route 128. Today, it is a retail and commercial powerhouse, attracting Keurig, Wegmans, and



ESSDRAS M SUAREZ/GLOBE STAFF

Stacy and Jeff Corbo and her two children Gavin, 5, and Eli, 3 in front of their Burlington home which was at the time under contract after it was on the market for only one day.

“

'Home inventory is at its lowest level since 2000, with homes priced under \$400,000 on the market less than a week, on average.'

celebrity chef Bobby Flay, who recently opened Bobby's Burger Palace in the Burlington Mall. Two of the region's largest employers — Lahey Clinic and Oracle — also call Burlington home.

By day, the city estimates some 150,000 people flock to town to work, dine, shop, or play. When night falls, the town's population drops to 25,052.

Commerce and industry contribute 60 percent of Burlington's overall tax levy, making it possible for the town to keep the residential tax rate low. Of the 57 Massachusetts cities and towns covered by Globe North, only 13 offer homeowners lower average tax bills; most in lower-income cities including Lynn, Lowell, and Lawrence.

In Burlington, the owner of the average single-family home assessed at \$382,764 pays \$4,536 in property taxes. Because of the strong commercial tax flow, the town funds a broad range of services and programs, from iPads for every high school student to a recreation department that offers a variety of programs throughout the year. Perhaps equally important, there is no charge for trash pickup, school bus transportation, high school athletics, or other extracurricular activities.

If all of these amenities are appealing, you had better act fast.

"Burlington is the last affordable community going south on Route 128," said Jim Murphy, president and chief executive officer of the Burlington Area Chamber of Commerce. "Home inventory is at its lowest level since 2000, with homes priced under \$400,000 on the market less than a week, on average."

Incorporated in 1799, Burlington sits within the watersheds of three rivers: the Ipswich, the Mystic, and the Shawsheen. The once-sleepy town remained an agricultural community well into the 20th century, having been largely ignored by the railroads.

The town's long slumber ended with the construction of Route 128, which spurred unprecedented development. During one 10-year period, from 1955 to 1965, Burlington was the fastest-growing town in the state. Its population increased dramatically between 1950 and 1970, US Census records show, ballooning from 3,250 residents at the start of that period to 21,980 20 years later.

Many of the homes in Burlington were built in this era of rapid expansion, said Rollins, who served on the town's Board of Selectmen from 2004 to 2010. Today, there are few buildable lots remaining.

Much of the new construction in town occurs as developers buy the ranches and split entries that were built in the late 1960s and early 1970s and raze them to make way for sprawling center hall Colonials.

Housing prices in Burlington run from \$300,000 for a small ranch to the low- to mid-\$700,000s for a newly constructed 3,000-square-foot Colonial, Rollins said.

In response to a surge in demand for housing that appeals to the young professionals who work in Burlington and older couples looking to downsize, the town also is seeing an uptick in the number of multifamily homes, condominiums, and apartments. Last week, Realtor.com listed five condos, ranging from \$418,900 for a two-bedroom, two-bath, 2,300-square-foot unit to \$585,000 for another with three bedrooms and four baths in 2,200 square feet.

[Nordblom Co.](#), which controls the land in the 285-acre Northwest Park off the Middlesex Turnpike, is converting part of Third Avenue and surrounding streets into an urban-style retail and restaurant center that will be anchored by a 140,000-square-foot Wegmans supermarket and a 27,000-square-foot [Kings Bowl](#). The 4.6 million-square-foot development is expected to add significantly to the town's meal tax revenue, which is anticipated to reach \$1.4 million this fiscal year.

[Northwest Park](#) also will include 200 apartments, 10 percent of which will be designated as more affordable. The units, designed to appeal to the growing number of high tech and medical industry employees who are coming to Burlington, are scheduled for occupancy in the summer of 2014.

"People come here and they don't leave because there's so much to offer to families," said Town Administrator John D. Petrin. "We show it from the number of churches we have to the types of programs we offer. We still have neighborhood rec programs and neighborhood parks.

"We have concerts and movies on the common during the summer and a vibrant Fourth of July parade and fireworks. We take a lot of pride as a community."

Brenda J. Buote may be reached at brenda.buote@gmail.com.