

Ward 4 & 7 Neighborhood Planning Assembly (NPA):

Minutes

Wednesday, February 28th 2024

6:30 PM - 8 PM



Facilitator: Sarah Diaz

Note Taker: K.C. Carpenter

6:00 PM Community Dinner

- Thank you to Sugarsnap Catering for donating tonight's dinner!

6:30 PM Introductions - all present shared name, pronouns (if desired), and ward

6:40 PM Vote in New Steering Committee Member(s)

- Nomination for Hunter McMahon (Ward 7) - not present, will postpone vote to next month's meeting
- Nomination for Caitlin Ettenborough (Ward 4) - voted into the steering committee unanimously

6:45 PM Town Meeting Day Candidates Introduction

- City Council Ward 4:
 - Dan Castrigano
 - Sarah Carpenter
- City Council Ward 7:
 - Evan Litwin - not present, statement read by steering committee member Olivia
 - Lee Morrigan
- School Commissioner Ward 7:
 - Monika Ivancic
 - Bill Oetjen
- School Commissioner Ward 4:
 - Martine Larocque Gulick - not present

7:05 PM Candidate Forum

- Question to Bill Oetjen: "Are you the person who has been putting up anti-trans stickers around town?"

- Bill: “No.”
- To Lee: “How will you communicate to Ward 7 residents and how can they communicate to you?”
 - Lee: Community engagement is very important to me. Want to continue something like Miro’s weekly coffee mornings.
- To Lee: “I am an immigrant, former refugee. How will you communicate with immigrants and refugees who cannot communicate in English?”
 - Lee: Connecting with people who will be that bridge. Could be informal or formal, such as hiring translators. Not enough that city has translated materials.
 - Monika: School district has liaisons to support families meet their needs across language and culture barriers.
- To Monika: “What will you do to change the direction of our student performance levels? Have been going down for 17 years.”
 - Monika: Pandemic led many students’ scores to drop. Have a strategic plan in place to improve performance. Prioritizing belonging and well-being. Want to get all children at reading level by Grade 3.
- To Evan: “Recent allegations have been made regarding a statement... [unintelligible]. Candidates, is this type of behavior acceptable to build a world of peace and what would you do to mitigate hate?”
 - Bill: Hard to understand the accusation. If I am understanding the accusation, is it acceptable? No. Kids need to be held accountable for that kind of speech.
 - Sarah: No, no hate words are acceptable. We should hold ourselves as a model for the community. Council has been bombarded by trolls in our Zoom meetings including last night with antisemitic remarks. Frustrating that this is happening and we have to stand up for it.
 - Lee: Simple concept that it’s never acceptable for a white person to say the n word. I am a staunch advocate of trans people; I am a proud trans person. The most effective form of resistance is joy. Re: BIPOC community, I have worked for years to deconstruct my own whiteness and learn what it means to be a good ally. You can Google me and find about my court case.

- Monika: That kind of behavior is unacceptable, especially for our elected officials. I think we need to be examples for each other, to point out when we hear hateful speech. When things like that happen, perhaps use restorative practices or the CJC to resolve these issues. Only love will outdo hate.
- “Where do you think the state’s help is necessary when it comes to our housing crisis and where do you think the city council can act?”
 - Sarah: There is very little affordable housing that comes without state subsidy(?). City council cannot do that through local property taxes. What we can do is facilitate the development of housing. Neighborhood Code, South End, City Place, Memorial Auditorium. We need to see if there’s anything we’re doing to prevent housing. It’s ok to have a new building next to you, window to window. If you want your 10 acres, you’re not going to get it in Burlington.
 - Lee: Step 1 talk to Sarah Carpenter, affordable housing guru. About a year ago, city council discussed turning a vacant office building into temporary housing. Governor rejected on grounds that our need in Burlington wasn't high enough. Lee used their position on the parks commission to invite gov to walk with them and show them the city. Has continued to invite him and is going to keep inviting him.
- To Monika: What will the school board do about bullying happening right now in the schools? Students are isolated and not learning, not receiving services. Bullies are not being held accountable.
 - Monika: I’m sorry that you’ve had that experience. I would like to talk with you more about this personally afterwards.
- Candidates all shared ways to contact them:
 - Bill Oetjen: [did not catch] - burlingtonvt.gov?
 - Sarah Carpenter: sarahforbtv.com
 - Lee Morrigan: leeforburlington.com
 - Monika: contact info at Burlington School Board’s page

7:38 PM Thank you for food donations to North End Food Pantry

7:40 PM School District Budget Presentation

- Visit bdsvt.org/budget for complete budget and voting information.
- Want to be sure we are getting equitable funding
- Things that impact our budget:
 - Wages and benefits
 - Health insurance premiums estimated to increase by 16.4%
 - BHS/BTC bonding
 - Impact of bond: we believe the money we have borrowed is itself making money
- The budget we've developed is not adding in any new programmatic spending that isn't offset by reductions. Level service budget.
- Impact of Common Level of Appraisal - ensures every taxpayer is paying on the property value of their property, has nothing to do with school budget.

7:52 PM School District Forum - questions from NPA members

- "What happens if this gets voted down?"
 - If it doesn't pass, we go back and rework what we've presented. We would continue to exist on this current year's budget. No way for that not to have a massive and disruptive impact.
- "I have no way to understand this. Concisely, how does one learn how to understand this? Give me 3 resources or methods."
 - We will stick around after and are happy to talk about this. It's an ultra-complicated system. There is a one-pager that offers a high-level overview along with details. Whole budget on website as well, and includes school board discussions and annual report.
 - NPA member: great resource on VSBA - simple powerpoint to understand the 4 variables.

7:58 PM Community Announcements

- Sarah Carpenter: don't put ballots in the mail—too late. Bring them to a ballot drop box.
- Vicki: bylaws committee: join us on March 6th at Robert Miller Center.
- NPA member: you don't have to have a ballot to vote, just show up in person on voting day. Can register same day. Also first election in BTV where we are doing non-citizen resident voting.
- Carmen: if you have barriers to getting to vote in person: call city clerk and they will send a justice of the peace.

- Ivan (NPA member): I am a working artist and created the Everyday Neighbors calendar. We have succeeded in getting more than 1,000 of these out into the community for free. One of the ways we've been able to support that is through a parallel solidarity copy sale. Out of the 1250 printed, we're down to the last few dozen. Selling them tonight in case anyone wants to purchase.
- Olivia: Fletcher Free NNE open house tomorrow 4-5:30pm

8:06 PM

Adjourn

- Next meeting will be March 27th, 2024