

Ward 6 NPA Meeting Agenda

Thursday, March 7, 2024

Location: 391 Maple Street, Room 206, in the SD Ireland Family Center at Champlain College

6:30 call to order

- Public Forum: Sarah Timm, Burlington Police Dept, providing info about contact with the Burlington Police Department Press Releases and public service announcements
- Next month: Information about the eclipse

6:40 Greg Epler Wood, Ward 6 Clerk

- Processed 1893 ballots. Processed 680 mail in ballots before election day. Highest turnout for Town Meeting Day since the year Karen Paul was first elected. 185 new registrants – many were students. All resident voting for local election – 10 non-citizens voted in the local election, 64 city-wide. 728 did not bring their mail-in ballots. At least 3 voted in the presidential primary because they'll be 18 by November but aren't yet.
- One critique that they received was that mail-in ballots should not be distributed now that COVID is not as intense.
- Greg commends the hard work of the Inspectors of Election, and 40 folks working the polls.
- Question: does the early voting reduce pressure on staff and facilitate voting? Greg can't recall what it was like before.
- Question: do write-in votes become a problem? It does add time to counting.
- Brian Pine: voting numbers are significantly up since we started mailing ballots

6:55 Rep. Tiff Bluemle (online)

- Budget: shaped by 3 realities
 - Not a lot of federal funding (change from last 4 years)
 - Dealing with flood damage
 - Starting the budget process with a \$15 million hole.
 - The Governor's proposed budget doesn't reflect the costs of doing what the state needs to do. Underfunding
- Housing:
 - Act 250 reform continues. Tiff thinks we'll pass something, and it will be helpful, but won't solve the problem.
 - CHT has tried to clarify what we're shooting for, and what it will cost. Makes it clear that we need to develop additional funding to address the full range of housing needs.
- Health Care
 - Working on affordability – study on the cost of expanding Medicaid and better reimbursement for care providers.
- Climate and environmental
 - Updating the Renewable Energy Standard
- Substance Abuse--- waiting for Senate to take up a bill to create overdose prevention centers. Urges us to contact our Senators

- Thanks to Karen Paul for coming to the Statehouse on a regular basis to advocate for key issues and create a presence for the City of Burlington.

7:10 Rep. Barbara Rachelson

- Consider contacting not just Senators but also the Governor in support of safe injection sites.
- Criminal Justice
 - House passed a bill to close a loophole on auto theft.
 - Also passed a bill to address retail theft, so that multiple thefts under \$900 can get linked together to lead to a felony charge.
 - Also working on a bill to seal records for people who don't re-offend (as a compromise because the Governor won't sign a bill on expungement)
 - Also advocating for more lawyers and judges to deal with backlog in criminal court
- Question: if criminal records are sealed, how will employers know whether they can be trusted?
 - First, there has to be a number of years before the records are sealed, like 8 years.
 - After this much time has passed, the data shows that that person is no more likely to commit a crime than anyone else.
 - And this wouldn't apply to sexual assault or other violent crimes.
- Question: Looking for information about how shop owners should respond, and about what leads people to commit retail theft.

City Place Project

- Brian Pine, CEDO
 - City's role is to ensure that public improvements that are part of tax increment financing are implemented and repay the tax increment
 - City Place Partners (included Dave Farrington) were able to take over the project in its entirety in 2022. Added Jerry Hotel Management Group as a fourth partner.
 - People ask why did we add a hotel - it's what was needed to make the project actually happen in the face of all the challenges related to COVID.
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- Dave Farrington, Farrington Construction
 - Ward 6 resident
 - With Scott Ireland and Al Senecal, have been involved in the project from the start, when Sinex was doing it. Sinex asked them to invest. When his relationship with Brookfield went south, they became more involved and Sinex eventually left.
 - Broke ground Nov 2022.
 - Expect to be complete early 2025.
 - Partnered with a hotel management group.
 - Got a lot of questions about why hotel, given how much we need housing. But it just wasn't going to work, given cost increases. Needed added revenue to pay off added costs.

- South Building: ground floor retail, second floor hotel lobby/restaurant/bar. 161 hotel rooms, including extended stay on floors 3-5. 50 apartments on floors 6-10.
- North building will have 300 units and another small hotel. Mixed income. Expect to complete summer 2026.
- Parking garage inside the U-shaped North Building.
- All storm water will be stored onsite until storm is over. LEED gold certified. All electric.
- Question about how this will impact traffic, given proximity to the bus station.
- Question about when the affordable housing will come on line.
- Question: What are the plans for Macy's and LLBean buildings? This is still in Don Sinex's bailiwick
- Anticipate additions of \$100 million to the City's Grand List

Champlain Inn, Paul Dragan, CVOEO, Amy Demetrowitz from CHT

- CHT owns the building, CVOEO provides services. They have a similar relationship on other properties.
- CVOEO learned that the previous owner of the Champlain Inn couldn't continue to run it. CVOEO stepped in October 1. Previous model required that everyone leave during the day – they no longer do that. They increased the staffing. Still a low barrier shelter. Working to move people to permanent housing, but it's a challenge because of housing shortage. Provide food, financial advising, health services. Moving towards single, double, or triple occupancy instead of mass shelters. People need their own space and they need services.
- 26 permanent residents, plus a warming shelter with another 12 people staying there. Everyone has to be working on a housing plan, which can take a long time.
- They prioritize people who are unsheltered and living on the street.
- They do not have a time limit on how long people can stay, although there are behavioral requirements.
- VHCB has given a grant to rehab the building.
- Plans for renovations
 - Outside: putting up an exterior fence to create some privacy from the street and improve security. It will create a courtyard effect.
 - GMT will be putting a bus shelter right out front
 - Installing sprinkler system. Improving plumbing. Installing heat pumps (for heating and cooling).
 - Making the common space accessible (installing a lift).
- Question about drug use:
 - We do not do any drug testing, although there are rules against bringing drugs on site. They will do periodic bag checks as people are coming in.
- Question about fencing:
 - Residents want privacy, and that was prioritized over the aesthetics from the outside.
- Comment about the importance of having a cross walk, esp for people using the bus.
- If there are any issues, contact CVOEO's Outreach Team
- Question: are there opportunities for volunteer support?
 - Feeding Chittenden provides meals

NPA Business:

Election of Romeo Hermann to the Ward 6 Steering Committee