

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
Lakeview Cemetery
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Minutes

Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting

Thursday, April 26, 2023, 12pm

MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON AT 645 PINE ST, FRONT CONFERENCE ROOM, AND VIA ZOOM

Attendance:

Committee Members: Chair Becca Brown-McKnight, Councilor Mark Barlow, Councilor Carter Neubieser

City Staff: Deryk Roach – BPRW, Gary Rogers – BPRW, Doreen Kraft – Burlington City Arts, Mary Danko – Fletcher Free Library, Holli Bushnell – BPRW

Meeting called to order at 12:11 pm by Chair Becca Brown-McKnight

Approval of Agenda

Mark Barlow moved to approve the agenda, Carter Neubieser seconded, and all were in favor.

Approval of Draft Minutes from 11/29/2023

Barlow moved to approve the minutes, Neubieser seconded, all were in favor

Public Forum

Public forum was opened at 12:12pm. As no one present wished to speak public forum was closed at 12:12pm.

Discussion: City Plans concerning unhoused individuals residing in parks–

Brown-McKnight kicked off the meeting by sharing her excitement to be part of the Parks, Arts, and Culture Committee. As this item is the highest requested topic by Burlington citizens she felt it would be an appropriate place to start. She added that she had spoken with BPRW Director Cindi Wight on this topic, but also noted that Wight was not able to be present and Parks Maintenance and Operations Superintended Deryk Roach was sitting in on the meeting in her stead.

Roach shared that, though various situations are changing quickly and his information might not be the exactly accurate he would do his best to provide an update. Roach noted that Special Assistant to End Homelessness Sarah Russell is the most up to date member of city staff in regards to what's happening between all partners working on issues surrounding the unhoused.

Roach continued by sharing that the team met that afternoon to discuss the ongoing issues. There is a draft policy that has been developed and is in use between all departments as BPRW is one of 3 significant land owners for city property in addition to DPW and the city in general. These departments have partnered to identify camping and encampments, process these sites, and ultimately clean all trash from camping sites. There is also a process to identify all individuals residing in parks/city land.

City ordinance prohibits “camping” in all city parks. That said, if someone is residing in a park site, the city will look at who they are and what they need instead of just directly removing them. Urban Park

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Ranger Neil Preston does the initial approach when a camp site has been identified and assesses the needs of the residents, and CSLs working under the direction of Lacey Smith make additional contact. . Policy is people first – to make sure staff know who the unhoused individual is and help get these individuals connections to services both of which takes some time. For example, it can take around a month to get an id for someone who doesn't have one. It can take 1-5 months to get folks into programs. Getting people the support they need was easier when there were more temporary shelters (especially ones that don't require sobriety). But the city has now ended these shelters and people don't have places to go. Additionally, the State is ending their programs too, and that's why we're seeing more people migrating to parks.

Roach continued by sharing that BPRW handles the majority of property management and clean-up of encampment handling the storage of belongings, disposal of refuse, and deep cleaning of the sites. This work includes "abandoned" sites as well. Sometimes "abandoned" sites are reactivated night to night and only left vacant during the day, making clean up a constant process. Staff will clean up the grounds, remove any and all paraphernalia, pay for trash bill, and record the work completed in our work order system, closing out any see-click-fix items. Cleaning challenges include not being able to process everything and simply not having enough staff to complete the work. The City has thrown away people's belongings before and we are trying to never do it again by not rushing to judgement or processing sites too quickly. What's needed is more educated and trained managers and staff to combat the increased amount of labor required to handle the issue. Roach added that this current team has been built over last 12 years but there is room to grow.

Brown-McKnight added that Wight mentioned in their discussion that policy is subject to change with new administration so the current process may get updated. Additionally Wight also mentioned the ongoing problem of when a new encampment/tent happens over the weekend. In these cases it takes more time to start the process because our staff mostly works Monday through Friday and there are no additional funds for weekend support.

Barlow commented that he has started to hear about a re-encampment in the urban reserve of approximately 11 tents. When he asked Russell about any policy changes regarding encampments Russell responded that there have been interdepartmental meetings in the past week to discuss plan.

Barlow also noted that there are 2 long-abandoned encampments in the reserve – one which is currently under water and the other in the scrub brush just south of the dog park. These spaces have not been remedied and with so much on BPRWs plate Barlow proposed looking for volunteer assistance in cleaning up the area.

In terms of policy, Barlow feels the focus needs to be more intentional about the impacts encampments have on property and staff. He added that both councilors and citizens are very attentive in regards to the anticipated rise of unhoused individuals over the summer. The pressure is rising and hopefully the city can get something in place and get ahead of issues instead of playing catch up. This is our opportunity to get ahead of things in this fresh new year instead of being reactionary.

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Neubieser stated that he feels this topic will probably be one of the larger issues PACC discusses over the next few years. Similar to Barlow, he would like to see the issue handled better overall. He also wants to note that this is an issue where the state has failed and pushed at risk people into bad situations, leaving the city to take up the slack. Simply saying we can't let encampments spring up through policing is still reactive and not getting us to a place where we can really prevent unhoused issues. He doesn't want to be dismissive but he feels that residents can feel like they're being dismissed when sharing their frustrations with the unhoused. This issue needs state leadership and funding to really solve the problem. Neubieser also notes that there are specific issues in wards 1 and 2 that need observation.

Doreen Kraft shared that work with the state on this issue is ongoing. She also feels that partners in surrounding cities could and should be part of the discussion. Though Burlington disproportionately deals with the cost of these issues, strengthening partnerships and working together to jointly seek funding and resolution might be more productive than going it alone.

Barlow recalled a situation last year where CVOEO relocated unhoused folks next to tennis courts at Leddy Park and then had to spend a week trying to move them elsewhere because their camping disrupted the planned tennis camp. The camp had to change locations while the unhoused individuals were relocated. To him this was a perfect example of the need to be intentional in our planning and support of these individuals.

Brown-McKnight shared that she would love to see Mayor Mulvaney-Stanak invite Gov. Scott to Burlington to see the problem, as she is not willing to give up on the idea of state level assistance. Brown-McKnight feels that Burlington gets ignored by the governor's office because there is an anti-city bias in the state. Having Scott walk through encampments to see what's going on and what needs to be done would hopefully show him how dire this situation is. She feels it is time to get loud to resolve this, enforce guidelines, and put boundaries in place to prevent staff burnout and community frustration.

Neubieser was supportive of Brown-McKnight's ideas (though he did note that Scott did not attend Mulvaney-Stanak's swearing in, which doesn't bode well) and appreciates the people forward approach the city is taking. He also pointed out that it's a more pragmatic and cost effective approach to provide services. Just arresting people isn't a solution. It makes things much worse.

Roach encouraged the committee to attend the next Comstat meeting. Scott Babcock is the city staffer and past meetings have been recorded. Comstat has had ER docs, substance abuse specialists, and other guest speakers, and will be meeting 4/26 at 10 or 10:30am. Mayor Mulvaney-Stanak will kick off these meetings, and they're a great resource on understanding the big spiderweb of unhoused issues as well as provides info on state efforts.

Barlow asked if any progress had been made in regards to the management of the urban reserve. Roach reports that BPRW is still taking the lead as there are not enough CSLs to take it on. CSLs are focusing on city buildings because the urban park rangers can do more in parks.

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Brown-McKnight asked what residents should do when they see an encampment. Roach suggested contacting see-click-fix or calling BPRW. See-click-fix is automated and has GIS location for staff to find which makes it a little easier for staff. Roach added that there are privacy settings that can be put into place once something officially becomes an encampment issue in case there is private info that has to be shared and the city never digitally shares personal information.

Graffiti Clean-up –

Roach shared that Graffiti city wide is relatively centralized. This includes all acts of intentional vandalism which has confused some people when using see-click-fix. There are around 500 current locations city wide. BPRW owns about 1/5 to 1/8 of those locations and is prioritizing clean up based on the content, location, and number of requests to clean it up. At present there are 21 total substantiated graffiti removal requests, 3 of which are in public buildings, and there are a lot more requests in the system that are likely redundant.

Based on what was used to do the graffiti and what kind of substance the graffiti was done on, the city goes in with different solutions – paint over, clean by hand, clean by machine, leave the graffiti, or replace the graffiti with public art. The removal project worked best when BPRW had dedicated staff to do it as the one assigned staffer was full time and processing between 25 and 30 work orders a week. The city has taken several preventative steps as well as their standard remediation such as applying silicon spray to frequently graffitied areas. This time of year is the worst time for graffiti because no cleaning has taken place over the winter and there isn't any vegetation to cover it. Permitting & Inspections deals with graffiti on private property, BPD deals with light polls and utility boxes, BED and Water handle their buildings, DPW is working on garages and street signs, and BPRW handles removal in parks. At the moment, BPRW has just 10 weeks to get everything ready for summer visitors; water has to be turned on, buildings readied, parks activated, and tons of graffiti needs to be cleaned up. BPRW will either dedicate 2 employees or set aside 1 day a week for all employees to do cleaning. The department is not yet at full seasonal strength, so the work may not be completed until end of May, but it is in the works.

Barlow asked about the possibility of community volunteers assisting with graffiti removal, wondering if there's a model that could be used or if there is a liability issue. Both Brown-McKnight and Neubieser echoed his sentiments, feeling that the community is really willing to step up and help. Barlow added that PACC is eager to help however they can and Roach thanked them for the acknowledgement of the time and care this work takes.

Topics for Future Meetings –

Future topics include 1% for public art (BCA). BPRW no longer fixing public art. New process for public art in parks. How can art be a partner in the fight against graffiti. Summer programming and the city's move to use a single software across multiple departments. Barlow pointed out that there is a hanging item from the last configuration of PACC regarding the use of councilor initiative funds for a mural. He explained that this request is slightly different because this is a business leasing a building from a

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property owner who wants to put up mural. Bushnell informed the committee that the project is on hold. An update on the Urban Park Ranger program has also been outstanding for some time and has been waiting for some clarity on the program/role as Rangers are not doing what was initially intended for their role.

Future Meeting Dates –

The committee agreed to a monthly meeting date on the 4th Thursdays of the month at 12pm. Should there not be enough topics for discussion meetings will be canceled. Meetings will take place at 645 Pine St in front conference room.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:04pm. Neubieser moved to adjourn, Barlow seconded, and all in favor. The next meeting will be held on 5/23/2024 at 12pm 645 Pine St in the front conference room.