CITY OF BURLINGTON, VERMONT

CITY COUNCIL TRANSPORTATION, ENERGY & UTILITIES COMMITTEE

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Councilor Mark Barlow, Chair, *North District*
Councilor Gene Bergman, *Ward 2*
Councilor Evan Litwin, *Ward 7*
Councilor Marek Broderick, *Ward 8*

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Transportation, Energy and Utilities Committee of the City Council

Tuesday June 25, 2024 – 5:30PM

Virtual

--DRAFT MINUTES--

Chair Barlow calls meeting to order at 5:30PM

1. Agenda

Councilor Bergman moves to approve the agenda. Councilor Litwin seconds. All in favor, passes unanimously.

2. Minutes of 5.23.24 & 6/11/24

Councilor Bergman moves to approve both. Councilor Litwin seconds. All in favor, passes unanimously.

3. Public Forum

Julia Hondell, W4, spoke about Reconnecting Bank and Cherry (“RBC”) disappointed no bike lanes on the project.

Ryan Nick, downtown resident, also speaking about RBC – strongly encourage committee to encourage public safety kiosk.

Pike Porter, joining online, suggests 2 future items: McNeil Plant clear understanding of finances; Financial feasibility study of returning housing to Chamberlain neighborhood in South Burlington. Also spoke about the need for bike lanes on RBC

Ashley Adams: no matter of greater importance than shutting down McNeil Generating Plant. Asked for independent 3rd party analysis for economic viability and energy portfolio.

Lindsey Maschler, W1 resident, asks that RBC should be looked at more closely, fully pedestrianized and a bike lane. Safer for pedestrians.

Bob Atchinson, Energy Coordinator in Plainfield and member of South Vermont biomass. Stop burning things, McNeil has outlived its usefullness.

Nick B, recently sent email with summary info of McNeil’s profits and losses going back to 2016. Shows they have lost money 7 of 9 years. Better off buying gas, nuclear – better for emissions.

4. Deliberative Agenda
4.1 Agenda Planning for TEUC

Chair Mark Barlow (MB) clarifies that the agenda item was meant to consider two specific resolutions referred from Council. Should we expand scope of this agenda item?

Councilor Gene Bergman (GB) says we may need additional monthly meetings to get TEUC work done. We have 3 general “baskets of work”: energy generation (McNeil transition, solar, energy); building decarbonization; transportation (construction, GMT, TDM, Guard, F35s, etc).

MB discusses TEUC deliverables on District Energy, including how recent budget funds this. Wants progress report from BED. Financial aspects – not explicitly anticipated in resolution. GB says it is implicit and important component.

Councilor Marek Broderick (MBr) asks for excel spreadsheet to be forwarded. Agrees with both GB and MB.

Director Chapin Spencer (CS) suggests that we can help with additional meetings, but perhaps get BED support for topic specific meetings.

MB and GB discuss possibility of topic specific TDM meeting with Charles Dillard – interim planning director. GB also discusses TDM roundtable with broad array of stakeholders.

All agree: Tentatively holding 6/11 for TDM meeting.

MB and GB suggests combining two resolution items and begin baseline info collection from DPI & BED at singular meeting on July 22 @ 5:30; Possible options: 311 North Ave (Stone Cottage); Bushor as backup; Spark Space. This will help inform future outreach for resolution deliverables.

GB suggests engaging City Attorney to list ordinances/laws that are out there to help inform BERO deliverable.

MB wonders if BED has update on McNeil and District Energy. GB would like the conversation on McNeil finances in a plain spoken context.

Councilor Evan Litwin (EL) says agenda prioritization is necessary.

MB wants to find placeholder for August off-cycle meeting landing on 8/22 @ 5:30.

GB asks if 8/22 can be McNeil specific.
MB closes item

4.2 GMT Funding & Planning
Clayton Clark, GM of GMT, gives high level overview from presentation. Starts with service reduction roadmap (slide 7 from presentation online) and overview of timeline culminating in decisions in October.

CC discusses conversation around whether GMT should continue to be an urban and rural service. Also going to ask for a FY 26 special assessment. CC not optimistic unanimous passage can happen, however, necessary step to take.

GB asks if special assessment negates service reductions. CC answers that some service reductions will happen anyway – i.e., duplication. But FY 26 special assessment would help limit other reductions.

GB asks who the special assessment request goes to – whether TEUC or Council? CC says it goes to municipalities first, and will follow normal approval plan for budget.

CC discusses slide 25, Municipal Assessment Considerations and the need to improve agreements with municipal members.

CC confirms that by end of CY 2024 will look to see if meeting revenue targets and may need to adjust fares.

MB asks if short term service reductions in urban areas is beyond Burlington. Clayton confirms it's Chittenden County. CC describes process for how this may work, based on values: i.e., coverage everywhere vs keep it where it's going well. Prefers latter, "don't mess" with what's working. Let's look at duplicative and high cost ridership first. Suggests looking at College St shuttle given existing lines nearby. MB asks if this will affect outlying areas outside of BTV greater? CC says yes, and downside is that lines like #10 connecting Essex to Williston is not very cost effective.

MB says he'd rather have more frequent, more expensive service. Convenience more important. Can fare increase help? CC answers that GMT would lose ridership and that loss could result in the loss of a federal Small Transit Intensive City (STIC) Factor which brings in additional federal dollars based on ridership numbers..

EL asks if zoned pricing would work, so that someone going short distance isn't paying same rate as a far distance. CC says GMT actively moved away from Zone and adopted universal fare; one reason why is that complexity of system is deterrent to usage; also helps maintain STIC Factor. Also adding complexity to technology is worrisome.

EL asks about safety/security situation and whether this is undercutting GMT (lose rider confidence). CC says GMT averages 4-8 trespasses every two weeks. Since return to fares we had a two week period with no incidents resulting in a no trespass. Hopes trend continues.

GB suggests City Councils come together of member communities. Needs of all communities are important, crossing borders on transit is important. Lay out full range of options, not just a set plan. More iterative & collaborative. CC notes appreciation for GB comments and that he has been working with individual municipalities and agrees municipality outreach is important.

MB suggests getting legislature involved in these discussions so they understand weight of decisions.

Director Chapin Spencer (CS) notes that legislature didn't fully fund operations, and "shot across the bow" for a sustainable transportation system in Chittenden County. From public policy standpoint, need to rebuild base, deliver on basics first. Not the position we want to be in. GMT is high cost operator, transit center, union wages, big busses made of stainless steel – and hard for many communities to afford rates. "Downsize responsibly."

4.3 Bank and Cherry Concept Plan
CS appreciated earlier TEUC convo on RBC project. Pleased to rejoin. A number of prior plans, grant commitments, decisions, CityPlace commitments, has directed us to this point. Flexibility is possible in the future – pedestrianized pilots, one way streets, etc. Hopeful that TEUC considers recommended motion in packet approving conceptual design. Time-limited $55M grant important consideration here.

City Engineer Laura Wheelock (LW) and Transportation Engineer Julia Ursaki (JU) join. JU adds context about applying for grant with 75% construction plans. On a timeline to get construction documentation in place. This includes things like utility coordination, federal gov't approvals, etc. Drastic changes would put funding in jeopardy.

GB was totally focused on Pine and St Paul last time at TEUC, not the rest of plan. Not convinced that Bank and Cherry from St Paul to Winooski should allow vehicular traffic, other than loading/unloading consistent with CSM. Opportunity to create greater ped grid important. Wants to hear why making St Paul bike and bus only is a problem. Wants to hear why Councilor Kane's proposals re: Pine St can't work. Wants to hear why expanding ped area onto Bank and Cherry should not be done. Plans we are relying on are too old to be binding. Why bike lane isn't possible.

LW outlines that funding sources had specific goals – RAISE grant – includes connecting downtown "with all modes" and this would require DOT to re-evaluate grant. Could be problematic with some changes. Sen Leahy directed funding makes it hard to change these plans without due process. Went to CSM Commission – fans of project as laid out, but want more parking and loading spaces. Real challenges with business community in making these changes. Nothing about these plans prevents flexibility. They are adaptable.

GB wants to better understand what flexibility exists within current contracts. Not ready to vote for resolution without seeing and hearing more related to what asked for.

LW says proper downtown transportation plan would take 2 years. We don't have the time under this funding source to do study. The study needs to occur, but we need to move federal funding forward.

GB not asking for full study; asking for creative thinking.

EL relatively happy with design, err on side of listening to transportation experts at DPW and that we are too far down to substantially change design. Safety exists beyond just bike lanes, and involves personal safety as well.

MBr uncomfortable approving something now even with flexibility because taking parking away in the future will be extremely difficult.

MB says there won't be a future for these streets if we don't move forward. We have money to pay, why not move ahead? Asks GB if any change to motion language would help GB approve today, such as asking for more info.

GB not ready to support a motion tonight, however, does not consier it "foul play" if 2-2 resolution moved to Council.

Discussion ensues at the project map over different transportation options for the streets.

MB tables decision and puts on 7/11 special agenda.

EL asks if plan could reflect Howard Center location.

5. Director's Report
NONE
6. Councilor Items – NONE

7. Next Meeting
Next off cycle meeting hold 7/11 @ 5:30 at 645 Pine.

Next regular TEUC: July 22 @ 5:30; Possible options: 311 North Ave (Stone Cottage); Bushor as backup; Spark Space

8. Adjournment
Chair Barlow adjourns at 7:35 PM.