

Ward 6 NPA Meeting Minutes

Thursday, October 16, 2024

Location: 391 Maple Street, Room 217, in the SD Ireland Family Center at Champlain College

We had approx. 28 people attending in person and approx. 14 people online.

6:35 Call to Order, Announcements, Public Forum

- Introductions of Steering Committee members, guests, and invitees
 - Romeo Von Herman, Mills Forni, Dale Azaria
 - Nancy Harkins, Anita Rapone, online;
- Call for any public comments or announcements
 - Bruce Wilson, Arts So Wonderful
 - Thank you for materials donated by Ward 6 NPA
 - New murals around town, they're continuing to use our materials (anti-graffiti coating)
 - Let him know if you see graffiti, or if you want to help clean up graffiti
 - Nancy Harkins:
 - Water Resources Dept is offering tours of the Wastewater Treatment Plan, one tomorrow and one next month
 - Highly recommended, we learned a lot

6:47 Connect with Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak

- Holds weekly meet-ups throughout the city, details on the City's website
 - 3d Wednesday is at Zero Gravity, 8-9 am
 - Opportunity to talk about anything, ask questions
- Two ballot items, we'll cover those later in this meeting
- Working on what issues Burlington should focus on in the state legislature
 - Oct 28, work session to see initial draft (at City Council meeting, but City Council won't vote)
 - City Council will then vote in November
- Also working on Modern Gov, a new initiative
 - Looking at improving efficiency,
 - Prior Mayor had a study done, but it's not sufficient
 - Only looked at 7 of 18 departments
 - There are too many departments
 - And, what we work on first needs to reflect the city's priorities. This is community safety, including public health, park rangers, CSOs, social worker in the library – need to integrate all of these services.
- Pike Porter, question about climate strategy. Can you discuss what's going on with climate and especially the move towards buying out McNeil.
 - 3 key strategies: housing, public safety, climate
 - This is part of climate, we're trying to take a broad approach in all departments (like parks, for example).

- Want to use public advisors, have people who are engaged in climate policy help us.
 - Also, learning about where city staff are on climate issues.
 - Will be looking for and naming advisors in the coming months
 - With BED and McNeil, I really want to work towards a just transition. Learning more about the co-ownership and other technical issues. As a first step, buying out the other owners will make us more nimble, better able to use the entire asset for the benefit of the city, including the land the plant sits on. I'm committed to moving away from the wood chips, but don't want to switch to fossil fuels.
- Bruce Wilson. Sits on climate council, including Just Transitions Subcommittee. Hopes that the Mayor will reach out to them.

7:03 Police Oversight Ballot Issue

- Mayor:
 - This is an outgrowth of conversations about how the City oversees the Police Dept. It's an attempt to codify the expectations.
 - Codifies the powers of the current Police Commission, review of police chief, investigations of use of force and other issues. Ensures that we as a city are committed to providing resources so that the Commission can do its work.
 - The Police Commission would be able to create an independent panel to be able to make final decisions on issues related to officers, in the rare instance where there's a difference between the police chief and the police Commission. This doesn't take away any union rights – could still file a grievance, etc. Doesn't specify who sits on the panel. That will be worked out in the Charter Change Process. (After a vote, after Legislative approval, when it comes back to City Council.)
 - This is a bi-partisan effort supported by City Council and Mayor. We think it's the right compromise.
- BPOA: Eric Delamere, Treasurer of BPOA
 - They oppose this measure. Don't think it's necessary.
 - Since this issue started, there have been changes to the disciplinary process, both within the city and also at the state level. We think that this adds unneeded complications and uncertainty. It extends a process that already takes a very long time. Also concerned about the fact that the form of the panel isn't set. We think it will weaken the disciplinary process.
 - Police Dept website describes the complaint process and we think it works as is.
 - Will impact our ability to recruit and retain officers,
 - They're not opposed to civilian oversight, but not in this form. They'd like to continue to work with the Police Commission to come up with something better.
- Police Chief Murad, wants to describe what we already have
 - We want our policing to be fair and impartial. Important to have a process that allows complaints about police conduct. Has to support re-training, discipline, and due process rights. Has to be transparent, by involving the public, through the Police Commission.

- We put together a policy that does all this. In a public process. In June, DD-40. It went into effect July 1, 2024. Codifies 4 years of work. Provides clear rules and collaboration.
- Professional misconduct, criminal misconduct – each is investigated and treated appropriately.
- Asked the Policing Project at NYU to review our policy. They said it's thorough, fair, etc. And provided some ideas for improvement. We want to work on those. They didn't recommend that a political person or a citizen body have the final determination of investigations.
- City Councillor Shannon:
 - She voted to put this on the ballot. When the last initiative was voted down, we agreed to continue working on this. She put this on the ballot, to allow the public to vote, although she disagrees with it. Her vote to put it on the ballot was to give the public the ability to vote.
 - The goal was to codify what we're already doing. We don't need a charter change for that, although we can have one to ensure the current process continues. The part that is new, and doesn't reflect what we do today, is the independent panel. This is an unwarranted addition to the existing process.
 - We've identified as a priority hiring more officers. This isn't fixing an existing problem and will make it harder to hire.
 - Refers to video on Vermont Criminal Justice Council and their process. On YouTube.
- City Councillor McKnight:
 - Wants to talk about the context: on paper this looks good, but when we look at where we are with the police department she worries that this will interfere with them doing their jobs. We need to continue rebuilding. It would be easier to support this if our Police Department were fully staffed and in good health.
- Mary Cox, member of Police Commission
 - Agrees with Chief Murad and BPOA. This isn't needed.
 - She's speaking for herself; not for the Police Commission, which didn't come to a unified position on this.
 - We're already working hard as a Commission, working towards a more collaborative relationship between BPD and the community as a whole. Current system is working well, from her perspective as a Commission member. Commission is supposed to be a bridge between BPD and the community. In her view, we should focus on that, rather than making these changes.
- Melo Grant, former Police Commission member, current City Council Member, chair of public safety committee
 - On a commission to review policing policies, looking at morale, community concerns, and equity
 - We've had issues here. We've had protests and lawsuits.
 - DD-40 being updated is very important.
 - Even with that, we need this ballot item to pass. She is concerned about the idea that more oversight and accountability will cause uncertainty and undermines morale.

- She believes that accountability and oversight will draw the police department and the community closer, improving trust.
 - She also thinks that our HR is not doing a good job of advertising vacancies, better outreach would bring more officers.
- Pike Porter (question): Does current process allow the victim of police violence to know the resolution
 - Murad: We let them know that there's been a decision, and the general result, although not the details (like how many days suspension). We often can't find the complainant, or the issue comes from body cams and not from complaints. We could probably do more to reach out to complainants.
 - Follow up: would the proposed resolution allow for more transparency for a victim of police violence? Answer: it doesn't speak to that
- Steve Boucher (question for Mayor): ultimately, does the decision on police discipline rest with mayor or police chief?
 - Not with the Mayor. It rests with the Police Chief, unless there's disagreement between chief and commission. Then it would go to the independent panel.
 - Opinion: I'm opposed to this. The real issue we have is with the size of the police department. Don't want to do anything that makes it harder to recruit.
 - Also opinion: the impression out there is that all Dems on CC support this. If that's not so (as indicated tonight) , you should let people know.
- Romeo Von Herman
 - Opinion: we already have a system. The additional resources this system will need will take away from doing police work.
- Bram Kleppner: what happens now when there's a disagreement between the Police Chief and the Commission?
 - Murad: The Chief has to explain the difference, can reconsider. If it continues, it goes to the Mayor. The Mayor can't require police chief to take action, but ultimately mayor has appointment power over the police chief and can be removed if they disagree on an important issue.
- Mary Kehoe: Why is DD-40 not adequate, and what problem is this ballot measure designed to solve? And, does this address the racial equity problems described by the Seguino Report
 - Mayor: DD-40 is good, but it's only a policy and therefore easy to change. By making a Charter Change we're ensuring that the policy won't change. Particularly when we think about the disparate impact on people with different identities, these protections should live beyond any mayor, any police chief, any city council.
 - Benefits: clarity about operational oversight. And, it will institutionalize the police commission with adequate resources.
 - About recruiting, there are many reasons we have trouble recruiting. The biggest one is the work load. The police building also needs a lot of improvement – this would help to draw staff.
- Bruce Wilson, Vermont Human Rights Commission:
 - The word "equity" gets used a lot. What do we mean by that?

- Councilor McKnight: what she meant is that all people, regardless of color, should be able to trust the police department and feel that they can call on the police department
- Also, he sits on the state's Fair and Impartial Policing Commission.
 - Nothing has changed. People who look like me still get stopped more than white people.
- Mills Forni. Why is the proposal to make a separate panel instead of empowering the existing Police Commission to do this?
 - Joan Shannon: The Police Commission has already been given additional authority. This latest iteration is just for dealing with differences between the Police Chief and the Police Commission.
- Melo Grant: agrees that codifying this is important, and that it won't change with changing views. As for equity. When I say that I'm talking especially about income issues, people with mental health issues, While many of us can't imagine the need to file a complaint against the police, that is the reality for certain portions of our population. Also, in the roles she's held, she's heard things that are very troubling, but they can't be made public. These concerns don't come from nowhere. There is reason for them.
- Mary Cox: Agrees with Melo Grant that it would be better to have more information about what's happening with the Police Department – there is good news about hiring. Likewise, I'm really impressed by the good policing that they do (based on reviewing body cam footage).
- Chief Murad: Just to clarify, the Directive can't be changed by the Department – can only be done by the Police Commission. And, much of our body cam footage involving use of force is public and can be seen.
- Mayor: would like to return to the question of Fair and Impartial Policing
- Carolyn Hanson: Is a former police commission member. The commission functions very well. She doesn't think this will improve transparency, racial equity. All it seems to do is create the panel.

8:20 Burlington Electric Department Ballot Issue – Net Zero Energy and Grid Reliability Revenue Bond

- Darren Springer, General Manager of BED 8:30 Adjourn
- Emily Stebbins Wheelock
- Bed/NZEgridbond25
- Asking for approval to issue up to \$20 million in bonds, payable from the revenue of BED.
- Will not affect the City's borrowing capacity
- Prior Net Zero Energy bond, approved in 2021
 - Increasing the capacity of the grid, to support electrification as we get off of fossil fuels
 - We're increasing from 77 megawatts to 80, currently we peak at 65
 - Also upgrading technology, to facilitate special rates, eg for EV charging
 - Investing in fast charging infrastructure for EVs
 - We've spent \$12 million of this \$20 million revenue bond. Expect to spend the balance in the next year, so seeking additional authority
- New Bond, intended to fund our capital needs through 2030

- Increase capacity of grid to 90 megawatts
- Invest in Winooski One, wood chip dryer efficiency measure for McNeil
- Additional EV fleet conversion
- Up to 200 public EV charging – got a federal grant so increased plan from 88 to 200 of these
- Impact of bond
 - Without a bond, we'd need to increase rates by 13% in FY2026; with the bond it will only be around 2% (these numbers will change, but this is the idea)
 - They'll time when the issue the bond
- Questions
 - How will bonds impact rates over time?
 - They are trying to keep rates as flat as possible. The idea is to substitute new debt service as old debt retires so that rates are impacted.
 - Reading the news today about McNeil, does the bond have anything to do with that?
 - No, it's a separate thing. We do not anticipate needing a bond for that.

Next Meeting: Thursday Nov 7, 6:30 pm