

## Ward 5 and 6 Joint NPA Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 6, 2025

Location: Department of Public Works, 645 Pine Street

6:30 Community Dinner, Hooray for People's Kitchen!

7:00 Call to Order, Announcements, Public Forum

- Nancy Harkins, Parks and Rec is working on an Open Space Plan, looking for input through survey or public meetings
- Alan Matson, Ward 6, Inspector of Elections
  - Ward 6 is still voting at Edmunds, but in a different location – at the Elementary School Gym. Entrance either from the front door (park in the loop if accessibility is needed), or from the alleyway.
  - All ballots are being mailed, so feel free to vote early
  - Since there are two entrances, candidates will have to choose where they stand to canvas. No canvassing zone will be marked at both sides.
- FaRied, People's Kitchen. Food distribution to families in South Meadow every Friday. New project: feeding folks downtown Sun, Tues, Fri evenings. Seeking donations of tents, sleeping bags, warm blankets, warm winter clothes (or \$\$). 802-272-8339.
- Andy Simon, supports Jen Monroe Zakaras. Check out her website!
- Gregg Simanski, Group looking at improvements to Calahan Parks. Got funding for benches/picnic tables. Looking for help preparing them and an event to install them and consider what's next
- Ben Traverse, supporting Buddy Singh.

7:16 City Council Updates

- Joan Shannon
  - Resolution to remove police cap passed. City Council did that to send a signal to the police force that we support them. The size of the force is still capped by our budget, and by how many police we can actually hire in a given year.
    - Hoping to remove barriers to hiring experienced officers (e.g. eliminating requirement of attending police academy for experienced officers); using vacancy savings to offer signing bonuses. Working with AALV for recruitment.
- Ben Traverse
  - Water Bond (\$20 million for upgrades to drinking water system). Lake Bond (\$152 million). City Council pushed back on original cost, and they've reduced it, although the additional work will still have to happen. The planning and design for these upgrades is still underway, so costs may change. Once we do, the City will bring in a third party to review.
  - Capital Bond (\$20 million). Used for infrastructure: streets, sidewalks, fleet. This must be approved by 2/3 of voters.
  - Ben and Joan are keeping a close eye on City's bonding capacity. They have looked into debt capacity, ensuring that this doesn't impact credit rating.

- Joan: Charter change proposed to facilitate re-districting. Wards all need to be close in size to each other, which can be impacted by major developments. Right now, we need to go to the State for that, when the state really doesn't have the information. It's very local and we would like to make that decision solely at the local level. It would still go to Burlington voters. No other municipality in Vermont has to go to the Legislature.
- Ben: proposed charter change to modify "rental notification period." Rest of state requires 30 days; Burlington requires 60 days. For Tenant to leave, for Landlord not to renew. The proposal would be to allow Burlington to set this date without needing to put it on a ballot and take it to the State for approval.
- Ben: proposed charter change to ban guns in bars. This passed a few years back but the state legislature didn't approve it. We want to try again and believe the state will okay it this time. This should not be controversial – it's the law in many states, including many conservative states.
- Question about the impediments to hiring experienced police officers:
  - Ben: Has to do with salary adjustments. Lateral hires are capped at 7 years experience. This is in the collective bargaining agreement but we'd like to work on it. Also, pension plan impacts of transferring from another force.
  - Melo Grant, Council member for Central District. We aren't getting applications for lateral transfers because we haven't had a strategic recruitment and retention plan. Need to promote on social media and digital advertising.
- Ben: another issue (not on ballot, but for folks to know). Proposed zoning change being introduced to allow for larger performing arts centers along Pine Street.

7:45 School Board Update, Clare Wool, Jeff Wick, Lucia Campriello (online)

- Clare Wool:
- Last year we had a big increase in our taxes, were very grateful that voters passed the budget. A significant part of that increase was actually the impact of the high school bond, which had passed 3 years ago.
- No other community has had to bear the cost of dealing with PCBs.
- We are not seeing the reductions in enrollment that other school districts in the state are seeing. We expect enrollment to remain steady.
- Staff wages and health benefits are the largest part of the budget.
- Estimated 4% decrease in property taxes based on current budget.
- This is in part due to change in state law regarding how the state allocates money per student based on student needs (Act 127). High needs districts like Burlington, Winooski, and rural districts are now weighted more fairly.
- The ballot language is confusing. It notes that the per pupil spending will be higher, and doesn't note that the tax rate is lower. But this language is required by the state.
- Also, work at the High School is on time and on budget, as are improvements at Integrated Arts Academy.
- Public comments:
  - Appreciation for Act 127.
  - Appreciation for how the school district handled the ESSER funds, more responsibly than some other districts.

- Question: Does the budget include funding for future maintenance needs?
  - Yes. The State used to help with this, but they aren't. We have earmarked \$600k for ongoing investment (water lines, boilers, etc.)
  - We know that we can't come back for another bond.

8:00 City Council Candidate Forum,

- Each candidate will have 4-5 minutes to introduce themselves
- Floor will be open for questions with brief (1-2 minutes) answers
- Jennifer Monroe Zakaras
- Buddy Singh
- (Forum can be viewed online – too hard to summarize!)

8:30 DPW Presentation and Q&A on bond initiatives,

- Megan Moir, Division Director for Burlington Water Resources
- Our plants are 30 years old, typically plants like these have a 20-25 year life span
- We want to be able to support housing growth. If we get 5000 new units, with 3500, we will be limited by sewer treatment plant. We don't want to hold back growth.
- Climate change and increased extreme weather events are a challenge
- Need a safer work environment for our staff.
- Need to comply with the Lake Champlain Phosphorus limits
- Need to continue reducing combined sewer overflows
  - Huge improvements since the 1990s, but still more to do.
- 3 wastewater treatment plants. Last major upgrade was in 1990s.
- Also trying to address odors on the bike path
- Drinking water: reservoir on Main Street, pump house built in 1867. These are critical for supplying water to ward 6 and UVM Medical Center. There would be no water for the hospital and surrounding area if these systems fail.
- Certain work is being pushed back to 2027, and has the potential for being funded by grants.
- If developments come on line, and there are more water/wastewater customers, the cost per user will decrease.