BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL
CONTOIS AUDITORIUM, CITY HALL
OR
REMOTE WITH CALL-IN
BURLINGTON, VERMONT
MINUTES OF PUBLIC INFORMATION HEARING
February 12, 2025
DRAFT

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mark Barlow
Evan Litwin (via Zoom)

OTHERS PRESENT: Emma Mulvaney-Stanak
Erin Jacobsen
Joe Magee
Erik Ramakrishnan
Ashley Parker
Megan Moir
Nathan Lavery

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The hearing was called to order by Acting City Council President Barlow at 5:33 PM.

Mayor Mulvaney-Stanak noted that this is an opportunity to provide education to the public on the number of items that will be on the City ballot on Town Meeting Day. She spoke briefly about the three bonds on the ballot and provided context on why they are being brought forward, namely that there has been a significant amount of deferred maintenance in the City and that it is now at a critical point where it needs resources to be able to further invest in its infrastructure. She noted that repairing aged and broken infrastructure is more costly than investing in new infrastructure, in most cases. She noted that the water and wastewater bonds are related to upgrading that infrastructure and expanding the City's capacity to create more development and housing (which are some of the main goals of her Administration).

2. APPROVAL OF SCHOOL BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026

2.1. Approval of School Budget for Fiscal Year 2026
Executive Director Lavery began by noting that the FY26 school budget as proposed would decrease property tax rates by an estimated 4%. He said that the community has been extremely generous in supporting BSD schools and its efforts to rebuild the high school and technical center, and that BSD is proud to be able to offer some tax relief as part of this proposed budget. He noted that the budget includes debt servicing for the bond associated with constructing the new high school, and noted that the budget has benefited from a more fair approach to school funding in Vermont. He spoke about BSD's equitable budgeting model, which includes a staffing model with a baseline that ensures adequate staffing in all school buildings, non-personnel funds allocated on a per-student basis, and flexible funds for schools based on student enrollment and weighted by level of need. He spoke in more detail about BSD's budget recommendation to the School Board, which included continuing efforts to align staffing to enrollment, driving funding toward students who need it most, and reducing central office budgets, as well as balancing these reductions with funds to maintain infrastructure. He spoke briefly about the school budget and tax history from 2023-2026, as well as a breakdown of education spending increases. He said that the proposed budget's tax impact on a $370,000 property and a $500,000 property would be an annual reduction of $238 and $322, respectively.

3. PLEDGING THE CREDIT OF THE CITY TO ISSUE GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS FOR THE CITY'S FIVE-YEAR CAPITAL PLAN

3.1. Pledging The Credit Of The City To Issue General Obligation Bonds For The City's Five-Year Plan

Capital Program Director Parker provided an overview of the $20 million General Obligation Bond to support the City's Five-Year Capital Plan. She said the bond is focused on the City's General Fund capital asset needs, and specifically focusing on the City's General Fund fleet, which includes the City's fire trucks, snow plows, ambulances, streets, sidewalks, bridges, City buildings, parks, and traffic safety projects. She spoke about the City's existing revenue stream of $2 million per year, which isn't enough to make the kinds of comprehensive investments that are needed at this juncture. She said that with a $20 million General Obligation Bond, the City would be able to invest $3.6 million in its fleet in 2026, which would bring the fleet back to its more regular, normal replacement schedule. She said that it would also allow for replacing 3 miles of sidewalks, paving 4 miles of streets, provide the local match for the Winooski Bridge project, allow for 14 temporary/permanent traffic calming projects, provide $9.2 million for critical buildings projects, and provide $6.5 million for critical parks projects. She summarized how the funds are proposed to be allocated, but noted that the capital fund is flexible and can be tailored to meet whatever urgent needs arise. She spoke briefly about the creation of a capital planning map, an interactive map that shows what projects the City has in the pipeline, by location in the City, over the next 5-6 years. She then spoke about the tax implication of the $20 million GO Bond, noting that the City has the debt capacity to take on this bond, and that the maximum tax impact on a $500,000 home would be approximately $139 per year. She spoke about next steps related to the bond, noting that it requires a two-thirds vote to be approved on Town Meeting Day.

4. ISSUANCE OF REVENUE BONDS FOR WASTEWATER AND STORMWATER UTILITY PROJECTS

4.1. Issuance Of Revenue Bonds For Wastewater and Stormwater Utility Projects
Division Director Moir began by thanking the voters for the 2016 water bond authorization, noting that the City has spent down that funding and that it went into replacing high risk water mains. They noted that in some instances they conducted open dig replacement but in others they have used water main relining, and that they have replaced or relined about 9.3 miles of water main to date. They then spoke about the 2018 $30 million initial investment into wastewater and stormwater systems, which enabled the City to conduct sewer main replacement and relining, as well as installing green stormwater infrastructure, as well as conducted some emergent/acute fixes to parts of the system. They said that despite these investments, there are still too many systems in the City that are in dire need of upgrading and replacing. They said that there is also the need to increase the City's capacity for housing, and that that in turn means that water treatment capacity also needs to be increased. They further spoke about how this bond request includes $30 million to install tertiary phosphorous removal to help meet Burlington's total maximum daily load for Lake Champlain. They spoke about upgrades to the City's wastewater treatment plants, noting that the last major upgrade was in 1994, and that they are overdue for the next major upgrade. They spoke about investments in the City's drinking water reservoir and high service pump station. They said that the initial bond total amounts were higher but that after feedback from the City Council, public, and other stakeholders, staff have worked to reduce the initial scope of work into a first stage of infrastructure projects, which focuses on the main wastewater plant, the combined sewer overflow, and focuses on drinking water improvements and establishing emergency water supply interconnects with Champlain Water District. They said that this fine-tuning brought the bond ask down to $152 million for wastewater/stormwater and $20 million for drinking water. They noted that these bonds are funded by ratepayers, and that they will result in increases of up to 89% between 2025 and 2030 over a series of annual increases. They spoke about current ratepayer affordability measures and the affordability program. They spoke about DPW's commitment to continued rigorous oversight for the project, noting required report-outs to the Council at certain key milestones for the project, a comprehensive peer review at 60% final design, and potentially using a construction management at risk methodology for the construction phase of the project.

5. ISSUANCE OF REVENUE BONDS FOR DRINKING WATER UTILITY PROJECTS

5.1 Issuance Of Revenue Bonds For Drinking Water Utility Projects
See item 4.1 above.

6. CHARTER CHANGE RE: BAN ON FIREARMS IN ANY ESTABLISHMEMT WITH A LIQUOR LICENSE

6.1 Charter Change Re: Ban On Firearms In Any Establishment With A Liquor License
Chief of Staff Jacobsen began by speaking about Burlington's charter, which describes the manner in which the City's government shall be organized and the powers the City may exercise. She noted that when the City wants to make changes to its charter, it must submit those to voters for approval and then submit them to the State legislature for their own approval.

Chief of Staff Jacobsen spoke about the proposed charter amendment to ban firearms in any establishment with a first-class liquor license in the City. She noted exemptions within the proposed amendment, such as for law enforcement officers, members of the armed forces, the Vermont National Guard, or other government officials authorized to carry weapons, who are acting within the scope of their duties, as well as owners or operators of such establishments (as long as they are lawfully permitted to possess or carry a firearm). She noted the penalties for violating this proposed section of the charter, including criminal convictions and civil ordinance violations, punishable by fines, forfeiture of weapons, and/or prison. She noted that this same amendment was approved by Burlington voters 11 years ago and that the legislature has not taken it up and acted upon it, and that this new request came from Burlington's legislative delegation.

7. CHARTER CHANGE RE: REDISTRICTING BY CITY COUNCIL

7.1 Charter Change Re: Redistricting By City Council
Chief of Staff Jacobsen said that the charter contains detailed legal descriptions of the boundaries of each of the City's 8 wards and 4 City Council districts, and that periodic changes are required to these boundaries to address population changes. She noted that redistricting changes require approval from City Council, the City's voters, and then from the State legislature. She said this proposed amendment would do away with this lengthy process and would state that the current boundaries last approved by the State legislature would remain in effect until changed, that every five years, the City Council may propose adjustments to ward and district boundaries based on U.S. Census Bureau data, and that these changes will take effect upon approval by voters.

8. CHARTER CHANGE RE: CITY COUNCIL AUTHORITY TO REGULATE RENTAL NOTIFICATIONS AND NOTIFICATION PERIODS

8.1 Charter Change Re: City Council Authority To Regulate Rental Notifications And Notification Periods
Chief of Staff Jacobsen said the City's charter allows the City Council to establish different rental notification periods than those that apply to other municipalities under State law. She said that the charter currently requires landlords to provide between 90 and 120 days notice to terminate residential leases based upon the duration of the tenancy, would require tenants to provide two rental periods' notice to terminate, and that rental increases would require 90 days' notice. She added that the City Council has proposed amendments that would require residential landlords to provide tenants notice prior to termination of residential tenancies, including requirements for the content and timing of such notices, and also including special notice requirements for vulnerable populations. She said that it would also require tenants to provide landlords with notice prior to termination of tenancies, including requirements for the contents and timing of such notices. She said that the amendments would also empower the City Council to prohibit increases in rent or other changes in lease terms for rental housing within the City without advance notice. She said the amendments would eliminate the specific notification periods that are included in the charter currently, and would allow the Council discretion to determine the notification periods that would apply.

Councilor Barlow closed the public hearing at 6:30 PM.

RScty: AACoonradt