

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
Lakeview Cemetery
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Minutes

Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting

Thursday, June 26, 2025, 4:30pm

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

Attendance:

Committee Members: Councilor Allie Schachter, Councilor Joe Kane (Chair Carter Neubieser not present)

City Staff: Scott Gustin – P&Z, Zoe Richards – Conservation team, Cindi Wight – BPRW, Holli Bushnell – BPRW

Meeting called to order at 4:33 pm by Allie Schachter

Approval of Agenda

Joe Kane moved to approve the agenda, Schachter seconded, and all were in favor.

Approval of Draft Minutes from 5/22/2025

Kane moved to approve the minutes, Schachter seconded, all were in favor

Public Forum

Public forum was opened at 4:34pm. As no one present wished to speak public forum was closed at 4:34pm.

Open Space Plan Preview –

Scott Gustin informed the commission that conservation team member Zoe Richards may be joining the meeting as well, but could get things started. Gustin has been working on this project for about a year and is hoping that this meeting helps get the plan on the council's radar. He informed the council at the start of the process and now, as they are coming to the end of the community outreach phase, they are looking to get comments from PACC before it goes back to the City Council.

So far they have done a needs and values assessment to update the 2001 plan, reviewed prior related city plans, and worked with the UVM spatial analysis lab on a tree canopy assessment (this is something they city tries to do every 5-10 years). They have held public outreach and stakeholder meetings, working with multiple groups and trying to cast a wide net. The idea was to source community desires and needs and try to incorporate them into the plan. Now they are looking at visions, themes, and updated goals. They are wrapping up second round of public outreach and drafting recommendations and strategies.

In terms of the Urban Tree Canopy Analysis – 40% of city (2600 acres) has canopy. There has been a 4% relative canopy loss with some areas of gain in addition to losses. The net loss is 4% distributed throughout the city. Gustin provided a map indicating that the most removal has been taking place where development is happening (like Cambrian Rise), and the most growth has been in the Intervale.

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Four themes emerged from the first wave of community outreach – conservation, sustainable food systems, connecting landscape together through sustainable development and stewardship, and outdoor experiences (public access to green spaces).

In terms of conservation. The legacy fund has been in existence since the early 2000s. The team has worked to adapt the fund to be flexible to changing needs. The City Council added an addendum to support nature based climate solutions, for example. Additional goals include sustained support for conservation within community. For example, replacing the wetlands boardwalk at the Ethan Allen homestead, expanding restoration and management projects citywide, supporting wildlife movement and ecological health, and collaborating for open space acquisitions.

In terms of connecting landscape together through sustainable development and stewardship, they plan to improve nature based climate solutions throughout city, essentially stitching the landscape together. They are encouraging new development to incorporate green design standards. And they're working to enhance and protect Burlington's urban forests. The old tree ordinance needs to be updated as part of this work.

They are working on improving public access to open spaces as well as trying to increase awareness about open spaces. Gustin provided a map that shows proximity and access to nature for populations throughout Burlington.

And finally, they are working to more increase network, expand access, support cultivation of alternative food sources in the realm of community gardens. Gustin notes that there is much higher demand than there is supply for community gardens.

For their next steps Gustin reports that they are hoping to have draft next month before presenting to public and council again. There is a survey on website that is available through next week.

Kane had no questions. Schachter was very excited for the new plan. She felt that one of the things that makes Burlington special is that we have the amenities of a city with close proximity to nature. She asked where the open space plan fits in terms of the city's housing goals for the next couple of decades and wondered how we square the need for more housing with the desire to preserve open space.

Gustin explained that they have been working together with the housing folks. Green design standards need to continue to be figured out so that new developments can have diverse environments. The goal is to enhance the connectivity of the green threads throughout Burlington neighborhoods.

Zoe Richards shared that they have been working on the plan with several basic ideas in mind - what does it mean to keep all these areas functional, how do we continue to grow trees without planting new ones while development grows, how can we keep trees healthy and what do they need, and what is the capacity of the city to become more livable through good ecological design. If the city puts a housing development in a certain area, they are looking at what that development needs to be like outside so that our environment continues to be naturally interconnected.

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Schachter asked if they had identified things the city has we done well and what the big risks are going forward. Gustin explained that BTV has done a lot of things well. The BTV conservation board introduced the standard that low mow zones must be added to redevelopment. They have conserved 10 properties through legacy fund. Richard's explained that it is a good time to update the plan after 25 years because the city is in a really different place now. They are looking at what they haven't invested in. For example, they are looking at how they can make sure that the Burlington streetscape investment goes beyond the minimum. We have the pieces in place to be a sustainable city, we just have to figure out how to sustain them. Obtaining funding is not as easy as it was a year ago. That said, nature based climate solutions are the most effective, impactful, and manageable; they just have to be planned for. Nobody plans for canopy loss or wants it, but it happens. The city just needs to plan carefully to avoid it. The original open space plan had great standards for protecting our natural spaces, but now we need to go a step further. They are looking at what's happening other places as well to develop a policy for saving the "most important" trees. Ultimately, they need to know what the goals are before making a plan, and spatial analysis will help with that.

Schachter asked if they will need investment from the city to deliver on plan or if it is this already funded. Gustin confirmed that plan is paid for. In terms of funding, making revisions to legacy fund is one of the key priorities of their future plans.

Schachter thanked Gustin and Richards for the update and shared that she's looking forward to next steps.

Ordinance Changes, Appendix D Sections 2 and 5 – Cindi Wight reminded the committee that the Parks Commission has been working on updating Appendix D – the rules and regulations of city parks. So far they have gone through sections 1 and 4 and has sent those changes to the City Council. Now they have been working on 2 and 5. Section 3 is about harbor and is more complicated so they won't be taking on that section until winter, and Section 6 is when our courts close which there is no need to change as the standards are still valid.

A lot of what they've done in Section 2 is just clarifying language, but they are also updating to reflect new habits/trends in boating and behavior expectations. Some spelling mistakes have been corrected. They also clarified the difference between transient and seasonal boating regulations. They included a new requirement for informing harbor team when boats will be gone for more than 48 hours so the team can resell slip during that time. They also have updated insurance requirements and other similar items.

Section 5 concerns park closures. Overall they have updated process for parking, clarified North Beach access in off season, and updated some language. Examples include updating the name of South Park to Callahan Park and adding Shmanska Park to the list of possible closures. They are trying to standardize when parking lots close (you can be at Leddy at 2am, you just can't bring your car). They have also clarified when North Beach is open, and improved dusk to dawn language. North Beach and Perkins no longer have booths, so stopping information is no longer needed. Only City Hall Park has closed hours, closed from midnight until 6am.

**CITY OF BURLINGTON
PARKS, ARTS & CULTURE COMMITTEE**

**Councilor Carter Neubieser, Chair, Ward 1
Councilor Joe Kane, Ward 3
Councilor Allie Schachter, East District**

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Schachter asked if the City Hall Park closure is enforced. Holli Bushnell shared that it doesn't seem to be the case as she lives only a block away from the park. Schachter asked who should handle enforcement. Wight explained that it is under BPD's purview...and randomly the City Arborist as well. There were no significant changes to section 5.

Schachter asked what was thinking in only closing City Hall Park. Wight was unable to provide an answer, explained that it's unclear if there was ever an ordinance closing all parks. A lot of communities decide to close their parks.

Kane had no questions.

Schachter asked if the closure policy for City Hall Park should that be changed. Wight was unsure but felt it might be good to have a clear policy if they decide to ultimately enforce. Schachter asked if the closure constituted an equity issue and Wight suggest that the policy chief could provide an answer.

Schachter moved to approve the recommended changes and include on the 7/14 consent agenda. Kane seconded, all were in favor.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:17pm. The next meeting will be held on a date to be determined.