



Ward 3 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

Wednesday, May 7, 2025

Sharon Bushor Room, Burlington City Hall

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome & Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:30 PM by Chris Haessly, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee member.

2. Attendee Introductions

- **Officials/Steering Committee Members:**

- Melo Grant, City Councilor, Central District (via remote attendance)
- Nora Aronds, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Michelle Borbas, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Zachary Cummings, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Darrell Fields, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Chris Haessly, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Charlie Messing, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee

- **Staff/Presenters:**

- Shawny Corey, CEDO
- Sean Burke, Chief, Burlington Police Department
- Teresa Vezina, Mayor's Special Assistant for OPC Implementation

- **Community Members/Public:**

- Susan Dow, South Champlain Street
- Tyler Nettleton, General Manager, Nectar's
- Susan Forrester, College Street
- Nikhil Goyal, Main Street
- Gail Welch, Elmwood Ave
- Trudy Richmond, Elmwood Ave
- Suki Rubin, College Street
- Nancy Kirby, Owner, Champlain Leather
- Susan Shull, Robinson Parkway (W6)
- Brendan Sullivan, Woodlawn Road (W4)
- Jill Lesh, College Street

- Amy Kimmel, Clarke Street
- Robert Perry, Clarke Street
- Brooks Cummings, Cherry Street
- Ben Smith, Cherry Street
- Lee Murrigan, George Street
- Frank Von Turkovich, Clarke Street
- Christopher-Aaron Felker, Park Street
- Sam Powers, Main Street
- Charlie Giannoni, CCTV

3. Public Forum

A motion was made and passed to extend the public forum to allow more residents to speak.

- **Jill Lesh (College Street):** Expressed concern about graffiti downtown and a desire to work with others on cleanup efforts and establishing penalties.
- **Brooks Cummings (Cherry Street):** Described a recent break-in and vandalism at his condo's garage. He praised the police response but noted a lack of follow-up on whether the perpetrator was convicted. He also shared insights from a video about the local judicial process, suggesting the system's challenges are more complex than often portrayed.
- **Tyler Nettleton (GM, Nectar's):** Spoke on behalf of downtown businesses, including Nectar's, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary. He highlighted the severe impact of construction and lack of foot traffic, citing recent "SOS" calls from other local businesses like Muddy Waters and Honey Road.
- **Robert Perry (Clarke Street):** Described the Howard Center's Safe Recovery program as a "de facto injection site" and a "drug magnet" that has brought dealers, loitering, and frequent overdoses to the residential neighborhood. He argued that downtown cannot absorb another such magnet and the proposed OPC should be located elsewhere.
- **Christopher-Aaron Felker (Park Street):** Stated that the proposed OPC would have a limited radius of efficacy and would attract more drug dealers and associated crime downtown. He encouraged residents to document issues and send them to the U.S. Attorney's office.
- **Lee Murrigan (George Street):** Spoke in support of an OPC, arguing that the problems of drug use and dealing are already present downtown and current strategies are not working. He differentiated the proposed OPC, which would allow use inside, from existing services that do not, suggesting this would lead to different, better outcomes.
- **Frank Von Turkovich (Clarke Street):** Described the situation around the Howard Center facility as "24-hour chaos" and a "scourge" on the neighborhood, with open drug deals and use on private property. He argued that if the facility is acceptable on Clark Street, it should be acceptable in every neighborhood, including at City Hall.

- **Councilor Melo Grant (Central District):** Noted the lack of Central District representation on the Police Commission. She stated that the crisis has moved beyond the Old North End to the rest of the city and that new police leadership is showing a more effective response. She announced she is initiating conversations with the Mayor's office and the Howard Center regarding the situation on Clark Street.
- **Nancy Kirby (Ward 1, Downtown Business Owner):** Expressed nervousness about a downtown OPC, feeling the marketplace already functions as an injection site. She noted her customers now call ahead to ask about the "atmosphere" downtown and urged enforcement of smaller "broken window" offenses like skateboarding and open containers on Church Street.

4. Public Safety Discussion: Q&A with Police Chief Sean Burke

- **On BPOA Survey, Burnout & Staffing:** The Chief confirmed he has read the BPOA survey. He is working to provide clearer role direction and operational stability. He noted the department has only sixty-three (63) sworn officers, which is not enough, and that recruiting is a national challenge.
- **On Use of Force Videos:** The delay in posting new videos is due to the retirement of the Deputy Chief of Operations who was responsible for them; the position is currently vacant.
- **On Crime Clearance & Recruiting:** The Chief stated the department is very successful at solving violent crime, with no unsolved homicides since 1990. He explained the challenges of the "catch and release" dynamic within the state's criminal legal system, which is backlogged and limited by 2018 legislative changes. For recruiting, the department is exploring pipelines like its beach and parks program to engage local college students.
- **On Downtown Presence:** The department is strategically deploying its limited resources to hotspots like City Hall Park and the Church Street Marketplace to set a tone and influence behavior. A permanent storefront is not feasible due to staffing, but officers are directed to be present downtown when not responding to calls.
- **On Out-of-State Dealers:** While it is his desire that they be held, the decision rests with the courts. Federal prosecution has higher thresholds and is used for mid-to-upper-level traffickers, but state-level releases are common.
- **On OPC Location & Social Services:** The Chief stated that while he is not an expert on locating social services, the concentration in Burlington creates friction points. He noted the success of the Chittenden Clinic in providing treatment but also the ancillary issues that arise. He believes the key is setting expectations for accountability for those receiving services.
- **On the "Situation Table":** This is a new, multi-agency initiative (similar to ComStat) focused on high-utilizer individuals rather than just locations. The goal is to synchronize services and create accountability among providers to solve the root causes of problems.
- **On Forced Treatment:** The Chief explained that the legal trigger for involuntary commitment is a high bar (imminent harm to self or others) and does not guarantee services will be delivered. He acknowledged that while some individuals have thanked him years after being arrested and forced into treatment, the efficacy of such programs is outside his expertise, and it is a larger policy question for the state.

5. Overdose Prevention Center (OPC) Resolution Discussion

A resolution was introduced opposing the location of an OPC within the downtown core and calling on the state legislature to establish a compulsory program for compassionate custodial care. The meeting involved a lengthy and complex debate over the resolution's language, with multiple amendments proposed.

- **Amendment 1 (Failed):** To replace the clause recommending the OPC be located at the UVM Medical Center with language supporting a citing process that "centers expert recommendations and includes meaningful input from impacted community members." (Vote: 6 in favor, 7 opposed)
- **Amendment 2 (Failed):** To replace the clause opposing a downtown location with language recognizing that site selection must "balance community concerns and public health needs" and support a process "without preemptively excluding downtown." (Vote: 5 in favor, 7 opposed)
- **Amendment 3 (Tied, Failed):** To strike the final clause calling for a compulsory care program, based on public health concerns that involuntary abstinence increases the risk of fatal overdose upon release. (Vote: 6 in favor, 6 opposed)

After all proposed amendments failed, the original resolution was put to a vote.

- **Final Vote:** The resolution, as originally written, was passed. (Vote: 8 in favor, 3 opposed)

6. Closing Remarks

The facilitator thanked everyone for a robust and mostly civil discussion, noting that the meeting was a good example of what the NPA process is for.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:00 PM.