



Ward 3 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

Wednesday, March 5, 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:**
 - Mark Barlow, City Councilor, North District
 - Melo Grant, City Councilor, Central District
 - Evan Litwin, City Councilor, Ward 7
 - Nora Aronds, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
 - Michelle Borbas, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
 - Chris Haessly, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
 - Charlie Messing, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- **Staff/Presenters:**
 - Shawny Corey, CEDO
 - Ian Senesac, Owner, Cosmic Grind Coffee
- **Community Members/Public (who spoke):**
 - Brooks Cummings, Cherry Street
 - Ben Smith, Cherry Street
 - John Reinker, Cherry Street (via remote attendance)
 - Charlie Giannoni, CCTV

3. Public Forum

- **Brooks Cummings (Cherry Street):** Reported that his condo's garage was vandalized and broken into over two consecutive days. He praised the police for their attentive response and for identifying a suspect using photos from eyewitnesses. He also noted the community's frustration with what is perceived as a "catch and release" judicial system.
- **Charlie Messing (College Street):** Described ongoing security issues at his BHA (Burlington Housing Authority) building, where he stated residents are letting unhoused individuals into the building, leading to theft and a sense of danger. He expressed frustration with BHA's management, feeling they are not adequately addressing the security problems.
- **John Reinker (Cherry Street):** Echoed concerns about safety, particularly for single women

and widowers in his building. He noted that walking downtown at night is getting "scarier" and hopes for continued investment in the police force to address repeat offenders and improve the atmosphere for residents, businesses, and visitors.

- **Charlie Giannoni (Ward 2):** Spoke about the urgent need for Ward 3 residents to fill vacant election staff positions, including a Ward Clerk and two Inspectors. He noted that due to redistricting, the ward has lost many experienced poll workers to Ward 2 and that he, a Ward 2 resident, has been filling in. He offered to train any interested and responsible Ward 3 residents for these roles.

4. Downtown Farmer's Market Discussion

Presented by: Ian Senesac, Owner of Cosmic Grind Coffee

- **Goal:** To initiate a dialogue between the Burlington Farmer's Market and the City of Burlington to explore bringing the market back to City Hall Park.
- **Economic Impact:** Mr. Senesac argued that bringing the market back downtown is crucial for the economic vitality of surrounding businesses. He cited his own business's significant drop in Saturday sales (20-30%) since the market moved. He pointed to the success of the 2024 eclipse as an example of how large-scale events can bring vibrancy and revenue to the city.
- **Community Hub:** Chris Haessly and others described the former downtown market as a vital "social scene" and the "heart of our neighborhood," the loss of which was deeply felt by residents.
- **Barriers & History:** The discussion touched on the breakdown in the relationship between the market and the previous city administration, which included financial disagreements, security concerns, and the city's renovation of the park. The current situation, with two competing markets (the Farmer's Market on Pine St. and the Artist's Market in the park), was described as "not ideal" and "un-Vermont."
- **Path Forward:** Councilor Grant offered to initiate conversations with the city's Workforce Development department to revisit the issue. The idea of having multiple market days (Saturday and Sunday, or Wednesday) was suggested as a way to alleviate a potential waiting list for vendors and increase opportunity.

5. Downtown Public Safety Kiosk/Hub Discussion

Presented by: Councilor Evan Litwin (Ward 7) & Councilor Milo Grant (Central District)

- **Concept:** Councilor Litwin introduced the concept of a "Public Safety Hub" downtown, an idea he has been working on since joining the council. He clarified it is not a proposal for a satellite police station but a visible, multi-disciplinary space that could be used by various public safety partners, including the BFD Community Response Team, BPD's CAPE team (CSOs and CSLs), Howard Center Street Outreach, and the Ambassador program.
- **Purpose:** The goal is to provide a more visible public safety presence to deter crime and offer a "touchstone" for the public to report issues directly, rather than navigating the 911 system for non-emergencies. The idea was inspired by similar hubs in Boston and the former "blue light" system at UVM.

- **Process & Status:** The resolution was referred to the Public Safety Committee, chaired by Councilor Grant. The committee's charge is to conduct outreach and gather stakeholder feedback on the concept.
- **Councilor Grant's Perspective:** Councilor Grant stated that while she is not against the idea, her priority is addressing more immediate needs, such as restoring public access to the police station and developing a strategic recruitment and retention plan for the BPD. She expressed concern about creating public expectations that cannot be met with current staffing levels.
- **Debate & Division:** The discussion became a point of contention between the councilors, highlighting differing views on priorities and process. Councilor Grant expressed frustration over what she perceives as a lack of support from other councilors for the Central District's needs and a failure to address the BPD's internal morale and leadership issues. The exchange underscored the complex and often divisive nature of public safety discussions within the city.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:45 PM.