



Ward 3 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

Wednesday, November 6, 2024

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)
- Michelle Borbas, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Darrell Fields, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Chris Haessly, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee
- Amy Prenowitz, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee

- **Staff/Presenters:**

- Ana-Maria Robu, CEDO
- Jonathan Farrell, Executive Director, Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS)
- Michael Monty, CEO, Champlain Housing Trust (CHT)
- Mike LaChance, Chief, Burlington Fire Department (BFD)
- Jon Murad, Chief, Burlington Police Department (BPD)
- Tammy Buddha, Team Lead, Howard Center Street Outreach
- Sarah Hernandez-Timm, PIO & Community Engagement, BPD

- **Community Members/Public:**

- Sarah Garride
- Steven Offenhartz, Battery Street
- Sue Offenhartz, Battery Street
- Antonio Golan, North Union Street
- Susan Dow, South Champlain Street
- Maureen Linsenmeir, Pleasant Ave (W4)
- Dennis McCarthy, Pearl Street
- AZ Larsen, Burlington Tenants United
- Alan Rubin, College Street

- Suki Rubin, College Street
- Kate Vetter, King Street Youth Center
- Trudy Richmond, Elmwood Avenue
- Gail Welch, Elmwood Avenue
- Nora Aronds, North Union Street
- Zachary Cummings, Clarke Street
- Emanuel Thomas
- Charlie Giannoni, CCTV

3. Public Forum

- **Sarah Hernandez-Timm (BPD):** Announced the annual BPD Community Academy, a six-week program running on Wednesdays from January 8th to February 12th, 2025. She invited residents to apply and to suggest other community events for BPD to participate in.
- **AZ Larsen (Burlington Tenants United):** Announced the presence of the Burlington Tenants United, an organization working to ensure safe, equitable, and fair housing for all tenants in the city.
- **Councilor Melo Grant:** Reminded attendees of the Mayor's Public Safety Forum scheduled for the following day, December 5th, from 5:30 to 7:30 PM at the Fletcher Free Library.

4. Community Public Safety Panel

a. Jonathan Farrell, Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS)

- **Proposed Shelter at 58 Pearl Street:** COTS is in the process of acquiring the former Social Security building to operate a 30-bed, low-barrier winter warming shelter, funded by the state.
- **Operations:** The shelter will run from 5:00 PM to 8:00 AM, seven days a week, through the end of April. It will be staffed overnight, have medical staff on-site periodically, and private security present during opening hours (5-7 PM) and at random times overnight.
- **Intake & Logistics:** Intakes will primarily occur at the COTS Daystation on North Avenue to prevent lines from forming at the shelter. Secure outdoor storage will be provided for belongings.
- **Long-Term Plan:** After the winter, COTS plans to renovate the building to create a new, non-congregate, dignified shelter space with small rooms for 2-4 people, replacing their current facility on Church Street.

b. Michael Monty, Champlain Housing Trust (CHT)

- **Elmwood Avenue Shelter Pods:** CHT manages the shelter pods on city-owned land. Over the past year, they have housed approximately 100 unique individuals, with the average stay being about 270 days.
- **Services & Partnerships:** The facility is low-barrier. CVOEO provides on-site services, Community Health Centers provide medical services, and food is delivered daily. The site has two staff members present during the day and overnight security.

- **Housing Placement:** CHT works through the Coordinated Entry system to move residents into permanent housing. In the past year, 15-20 individuals have moved from the pods into permanent housing. CHT has housed about 177 formerly homeless households in its regular rental portfolio over the past year.

c. Chief Mike LaChance, Burlington Fire Department

- **Community Response Team (CRT):** A year-old program where two firefighter-EMTs in a pickup truck respond to non-acute overdose and unresponsiveness calls. This frees up primary units for more severe emergencies.
- **Services:** The CRT provides on-scene medical intervention, outreach, Narcan kits (with fentanyl/xylazine test strips), and wound care supplies. They have made over 2,000 contacts and referred 54 individuals to outreach partners.
- **Data & Trends:** Overdose calls have trended up, partly due to better documentation. A significant trend is the increase in individuals who overdose, are revived with Narcan, but refuse transport to the hospital.
- **New Initiative:** The BFD is launching a program to offer buprenorphine on-site to overdose patients who refuse transport, connecting them directly with the Turning Point Center for follow-up care.

d. Chief Jon Murad, Burlington Police Department

- **Data & Reporting:** The Chief directed the public to his monthly reports to the Police Commission (available online) for detailed data on staffing, incident volume, and crime trends.
- **Overdose Statistics:** BPD data shows a dramatic spike in non-fatal overdose calls. Year-to-date for 2024 is 226% higher than the five-year average. However, fatal overdoses in Burlington are in line with the statewide trend of decreasing from the historic highs of 2022/2023.
- **BPD Response:** The police no longer respond to overdose calls unless there is associated criminality (weapon present). The calls are treated as medical emergencies, handled by the BFD.
- **Staffing:** The department is authorized for 87 officers but is currently staffed at 65, with that number expected to drop slightly by year's end. This has tripled the call load per officer. While 2023 was a record recruiting year, attrition in 2024 has erased those gains.

e. Tammy Buddha, Howard Center Street Outreach

- **Team Role:** The six-person team serves as a non-emergency response for individuals in social service or mental health distress. They work 7 days a week, from 8 AM to 6 PM.
- **Daily Process:** The team starts each day by coordinating with BPD and First Call to identify any overnight issues or individuals needing follow-up. They then conduct proactive outreach on foot in the greater downtown area to build relationships and connect people with services.
- **Collaboration:** The team responds to calls from merchants, community members, and other providers. They work closely with BPD and BFD to provide support on scenes and

ensure the right response is deployed, emphasizing that medical emergencies should go to 911.

5. Questions & Answers Session

- **Q: How do you spot and deal with staff burnout?**
 - **A:** All panelists emphasized the importance of peer support, strong team cohesion, and encouraging staff to use time off. BPD and BFD have formal peer support groups and wellness programs. Howard Center and COTS mentioned processing difficult calls as a team and focusing on small, achievable "wins" to maintain morale.
- **Q: What is the site selection criteria for shelters like the one proposed for Pearl Street?**
 - **A (Jonathan Farrell):** The primary factors were availability and proximity to other downtown services. Many clients have mobility issues, and the location is a short walk from the COTS Daystation, the police department, and other resources.
- **Q: How many more police officers do we need?**
 - **A (Chief Murad):** The department is authorized for 87 and staffed at 65, meaning a minimum of twenty-two (22) more officers are needed.
- **Q: What are your thoughts on a neighborhood watch?**
 - **A (Chief Murad):** The department supports "watchful neighbors" who observe and report but has serious concerns about any group that goes beyond that role, citing the potential for tragic outcomes.
- **Q: What is being done about out-of-state drug dealers?**
 - **A (Tammy Buddha):** Noted that while BPD is doing a great job with the resources they have, the issue is like a river; when one situation is handled, another pops up.
- **Q: How do your agencies coordinate and share information?**
 - **A:** Panelists described a robust system of inter-agency collaboration. The Howard Center team is embedded with BPD and attends roll call. COTS and CHT use the Coordinated Entry system. All agencies participate in multi-disciplinary workgroups to coordinate services for high-need individuals, sharing information to the extent allowed by privacy laws (often with client consent).
- **Q: What is the plan for "service-resistant" individuals who are causing harm in the community?**
 - **A:** This is a major challenge. The panelists described a multi-agency group that meets to discuss the most high-need individuals and coordinate strategies to remove barriers to care. However, they acknowledged that for some individuals who are not ready or able to engage, the current system has limited options, and there is a significant lack of inpatient treatment capacity for those who do want help.

6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30 PM.