

Parks & Recreation Commission Meeting

August 12th, 2025 at 5:30pm

645 Pine St. Front Conference Room & Zoom

Commissioners in attendance: Nate Lantieri, Kirstin Boehm, Katie Flanagan Mobley, Halle Davis & Ryan Bergmann

Staff in attendance: Deryk Roach, Jon Adams-Kolitz, Meghan O'Daniel & Charles Dillard

Members of the public in attendance: Aaron Keech & Cameron Lauf

1. Agenda

1.1 Motion to amend/adopt agenda

Lantieri opened the meeting at 5:45pm after some technical difficulties by welcoming everyone. Lantieri asked someone to make a motion to adopt the amendment and approve the agenda. Boehm made the motion to adopt the amendment, Davis seconded. All were in favor, none were opposed.

2. Consent Agenda

2.1 – 2.9 attachments

Lantieri asked if anyone had any questions or changes to any items on the consent agenda. Boehm asked about a date clarification for GBGSL and O'Daniel confirmed that October 11th was the correct date. Lantieri asked if anyone had a motion to approve. Mobley made a motion to accept the consent agenda, Davis seconded. All were in favor, none were opposed.

3. New North End Plan

3.1 Review with Charles Dillard (verbal)

Dillard began by introducing himself and explained that he was there to share a comprehensive area plan for the New North End. He shared the screen and offered to focus on some of the development topics for this presentation. He began by sharing that this is about a 13-month project that kicked off in January, which has evolved through envisioning work with community engagement. He continued to say that they have transitioned into the planning process with online engagement available until the end of the month and that there will be more community engagement to pull the plan together by the end of the year. He continued by sharing the 4 main topics of this plan: Identity of the New North End, Transportation and Mobility Options, Balancing Growth and Greenspace, and Identifying Growth Areas. He shared that all of this work is happening within the framework of Plan BTV, which includes the State's

housing target – which for 2050 is 7,000 units. He said to put it in context, Burlington has been creating 77 units per year, and this would mean it would need to be upped to about 280 units per year. He continued that the need for housing is ever-present in this work to hit that number but to also hit the housing affordability challenge that is felt across the State. The guiding principles that have risen to the top are: Foster a strong and inclusive sense of community, expand housing choice and affordability, create a safer, more connected transportation network, strengthen neighborhood centers and walkable mixed-use areas, protect and enhance natural areas, and prioritizing sustainability and green infrastructure. The next slide showed areas that the community identified as potential growth based on parcel sizes and estimated property transfer. Dillard continued that the framework made it clear that there is a desire for walkability and more community spaces in these areas and that housing options need to be diverse. There is a discrepancy between what housing is available and what is needed. He shared that the parks in the New North End have the most park space per capita because it also has the lowest population density. He continued that, alongside the Plan BTV update, BPRW is undergoing a new system plan updated from 2015, and also a new City-wide economic development and transportation plan is being developed. Dillard shared that these plans involve large, cross-departmental efforts, but that this is being done together in the interest of being holistic about the vision. He then shared information about mobility and connectivity, which has identifying other elements, such as safety and public transit, including updates to North Avenue. Dillard continued by touching on placemaking and open space, saying that given the wealth of parkland one can question how those, and other types of land, may be enhanced to meet the needs and wants of the community. The presentation continued. He shared a map of “focus areas” which are walkable and accessible residential and commercial centers throughout the neighborhood that could be redeveloped. The ones Dillard touched on and shared visions for were the North Ave Church, the Ethan Allen Plaza, Public Lands (specifically noted that there is no vision to have the City sell any land, but instead lease it and that this is seen as an opportunity to not only get more housing but also to help fund new programming in park spaces, address maintenance challenges and improve ecological performance), Starr Farm Park and Ethan Allen Parkway. Dillard shared that there is an imbalance of parks throughout the City, so the next step in addressing that will be an assets study of all City-owned land. He then continued going through the details of the Starr Farm Park and Ethan Allen Parkway plans.

Lantieri then opened it up to the Commissioners for questions.

Boehm asked what a viable timeline for this plan to come to fruition would be?

Dillard answered 20 – 25 years, but some property acquisition depends on when a property owner is ready to sell. He continued that most of this will be phased in over time, with some movement along North Avenue potentially happening sooner. He shared that construction costs are so high right now that there most likely will not be a critical mass of new development for a while.

Lantieri asked if there is anywhere in the City that public land is leased to private developers?

Dillard answered that that is the model for the Memorial block right now where that it is happening currently. Echo and the Sailing Center are also examples.

Lantieri noted that he was one of the authors of the housing needs assessment that Dillard mentioned during his presentation and that he would encourage them to explore the whole range of the housing targets.

Dillard wanted to highlight the public procurement model and that if the City can have more control around what gets built, specific housing needs can be addressed in a more intentional way than the private market will.

Mobely noted that she hoped that UVM was a part of the housing conversation since students drive up the need for housing.

Dillard is hoping for feedback in the future regarding the concepts and what the Commission is thinking and feeling about it all.

Lantieri confirmed that they would be open to that.

Dillard reminded everyone that all of the information is online and can be found by googling "Plant BTV North End".

4. Public Forum

4.1 Verbal Comments

Lantieri opened the public forum at 6:43pm.

Aaron Keech introduced himself and started by sharing his background. He touched on 2 things that were on his mind when he exited his role on the Commission in June – empowering the public and empowering the Commission. He felt that it was important to remind the Commissioners that they are not an extension of the Department, but rather two separate entities working together. He continued by sharing that he feels the most powerful tool that they have is the Legacy Fund, which receives a lot of money, and the idea of acquisition, which did not happen in the 3 years that he served on the Commission. He really emphasized that the Commission should watch how much money is coming in and where it is going. He continued that he has more information to add to the off-leash dog discussion and reminded everyone that it began because there were issues with off-leash dogs. Keech feels that the committee was made up of dog advocates who told everyone to lock up their cats. He continued that there were no controls on the survey and has shown that it is bad for the lake, bad for the forest and wildlife. He's shared public letters not in support of off-leash dogs as well as information about people with disabilities and migrant community members who are concerned. He asked the group to please follow the science and the idea that the parks are for everyone, all of the time.

And he wanted to remind everyone that they have already approved a south end fenced in area, which means that there would be north, central and south locations. He noted that the Conservation Commission was just brought into the loop on this, which he feels doesn't make sense. He closed by saying that he hoped they would vote no.

Lantieri closed the public forum at 6:50pm.

5. Deliberative Agenda

5.1 Dog Policy Update

Lantieri began by summarizing the background for Davis, the newest Commissioner, to get caught up. He shared that the recent history is that there have been a lot of open questions about dogs in the community and hearing that this was swirling around City Council created a task force that met regularly. He continued that this group met regularly and ended up conducting a survey for feedback about off-leash dogs from the community. The final report was completed in 2023, with key recommendations that were essentially, action items that could come out of the process. He continued that the Commission was brought into the conversation about the off-leash dog policy in 2024, and has been working through it as a body since. Lantieri continued that the way the conversation has been framed in terms of two functional pieces that would come out of it: the changes that go into Appendix D and then those changes formalize the creation of an off-leash dog policy. He shared that the difference between these is that when something is in the charter, it is harder to change and needs to go through City Council, but policy changes can be done through the Parks Commission. He closed by sharing that up to this point they have worked on a draft of Appendix D, which is what they would be proposing for the charter and also had made considerations about the policy, but that ultimately they decided to take a step back to see if this is something that they want to pursue at all. He feels it is something they can figure out, but will not be voting at this meeting.

Davis asked if the law is currently that dogs need to be leashed in Burlington.

Lantieri answered yes, dogs must be on leash unless the Parks Commission approves areas for unleashed dogs, which up to this point is only fenced in areas. He continued that the draft they were reviewing came from the recommendations of that dog task force.

Boehm shared that eventually what they would vote on as a body are the changes and additions to Appendix D, as well as the off-leash dog policy (which goes hand in hand), after they get them to a place that they feel ready to do so. After that, the Appendix D changes would go to City Council.

Mobely said that there is an assumption that if the group votes for one that the other will also be voted for in the same way.

Lantieri asked if anyone has any specific spot they wanted to start.

Boehm noted that the changes they made last time were fairly minimal and mostly wordsmithing things like “shall” being changed to “may” among others and that once the Commissioners felt like it was in a place everyone felt comfortable with that it could go to the City attorneys for final review.

Sarah asked if everyone received Etter’s e-mail. She summarized that he is not in support of an off-leash dog policy.

Lantieri continued that Etter shared that he would vote no on any off-leash, unfenced areas for any amount of time even if it was an experiment, noting that he had concerns about liability and enforcement – ideal rules versus what would actually happen on the ground.

Mobley shared about the Ranger’s visit to the Commission and that they shared that there is a lack of staffing to enforce this and that she walked away from that feeling that there was not an opportunity for sustained enforcement. She also touched on various public comment not in favor of off-leash dogs in parks.

Boehm asked if the Commission would be tasked with coming up with times in the policy where dogs could be off-leash in parks.

Lantieri pointed out some suggestions already listed but that yes, they ultimately would decide on times to pilot and potentially approve.

Boehm continued that one of the things they heard from the Rangers is that it is much more effective to say “you can’t have your dogs off-leash here but you can have them over there” instead of just saying no, and that people are more likely to be respectful of that.

Boehm continued by asking if there could be a policy that says that dogs are not allowed off-leash, but would that give space for conversations and reassessment in the future?

Lantieri felt like that could be possible. And pointed out that the Rangers noted in their report this month that they are encountering fewer off-leash dogs in parks and noticing improvement with leash compliance.

Roach confirmed that he hasn’t received any off-leash dog complaints in the past two months.

Lantieri asked if anyone had any additional thoughts on this today.

Boehm shared that she feels the group should try and do something on this soon.

Mobley agreed.

Lantieri suggested starting a fresh document for everyone to review and then aim to take action from there and that the group is on a good path to get this wrapped up.

5.2 Universal Design Policy Draft

Lantieri continued by pivoting to the Universal Design Policy. He began by sharing that this is something that has percolated around a few different areas – really coming from the strong community push around the Oakledge for All playground. With that, the Parks Foundation has overseen this interest and recognizing that it is more expensive than other playground equipment that they would like to support 5 playgrounds in the future to bring them up to a universal design level. He continued that they have been working on this campaign for several years and that Sophie Sauve has been working behind the scenes with the City's accessibility committee to start to draft a policy to see if they would be a viable recipient for additional review or oversight for these kinds of things. He continued that the understanding is that these principles of universal design are goals of the Planning team within parks already but it's just not codified in writing anywhere yet. This is something that will require funds, but hopefully persist. He closed by sharing that this is the first time the Commission has seen it and that it will just be a discussion today.

Mobley asked for elaboration on the accessibility committee that Sophie has been working with.

Lantieri shared that it is the Burlington Advisory Committee on Accessibility (BACA) that already existed, but they have started a subcommittee specifically for playgrounds.

Mobley shared that this was exciting but that she would have questions around best practice, which can change, so she was wondering what the review process for that would be.

Lantieri agreed but shared that he feels universal design has been around for long enough that it's malleable but has standards.

Roach shared that policy is how staff go about their work and work plans. He continued that this policy would codify the way that the Department designs playgrounds and allow us to point to and include standards in RFPs and RFQs and say that this is how we want the design to be proposed to us. He said that a lot of elements of these playgrounds are costly and therefore could be cut, but this policy protects them.

Adams-Kolitz shared that a lot of this policy came from the Department internally and community interest. He continued that all of the organizations involved have come together to support universal design and that building these playgrounds results in potentially less maintenance over time and potentially less liability and exposure simply because mulch does not need to be maintained under the structures, so while the initial investment is more but the maintenance cost over time will most likely be less.

Boehm asked what the drawbacks to codifying the policy would be.

Adams-Kolitz responded that he did not feel like there were any and in a way this is already happening but because we don't know who will be here in five or ten years, it is good to codify things for the future.

Roach shared that there are a lot of perspectives where universal design makes sense. Everything will cost more over time and maintaining 15 playgrounds over time is a lot of staff time and maintenance so having potentially less things that are higher quality is better. He finished by saying that all of that aside, this is the right thing to do for inclusivity and accessibility.

Adams-Kolitz shared that while this does all feel and look positive here and now, that there is a part of the community who is not in favor of universal playgrounds for various reasons, so they are working to create spaces with some standard equipment that is still accessible and meets ADA standards.

Lantieri shared that this feels like something positive to look forward to that will have tangible impacts in making it easier for City staff to lean on contractors that are actually installing this equipment to say that we have a policy and it is our responsibility to follow this. He asked the Commissioners to take the next month to read through the draft and think about it for the next meeting.

Roach encouraged the Commissioners to reach out to Sophie or John if anyone has any questions while reviewing it.

6. Standing Items

6.1 Parks Foundation (verbal)

Lantieri shared that he attended their last meeting and that the focus was on continuing the campaign for universal playgrounds and that they want to do a public launch soon.

7. Director's Report

7.1 Monthly Parks Commission Update (verbal)

Lantieri began by sharing his sympathy for BPRW staff and all that they have been going through since the RIFs.

Mobley was struck by thinking about the impact of this all happening during the busy summer months and is hopeful that the staff feels like the Commission is paying attention to what is happening.

Lantieri asked if there is anything the Commission can do to support the work.

Roach shared that the focus and dedication right now is to the staff that are still here and that there are numerous staff coming to him asking how they can help. He continued that there was no preparation for this moment which has put the Department in a position to create a plan as they go. He applauded staff for stepping in to fill the gaps but noted that this is bringing to light that maybe the Department can't continue doing everything that they have been and that they are not in a position to apply resources that they do not have. This means restructuring and all of the pieces that come along with that will need to take place. He shared that this has all been overwhelming for everyone and that morale is low. Roach continued that ultimately showing support for the staff would be great coming from the Commission.

Adams-Kolitz echoed that having Commissioners engage with staff to break the barrier and strengthen their voice would be welcomed.

Davis asked if they were anticipating more staff leaving because of this.

Roach replied that the Department is very vulnerable right now but thinks that the new Director will be important in terms of how things move forward. He said that the type of leader that is needed right now is someone who can put forth a plan, get support for the plan and execute the plan. He feels that we need to refocus in on the idea of commitment to quality over commitment to quantity because what the Department does is so broad. He continued that the staff are extremely committed to the work and the City at large, which plays a huge role in the Department's success.

7.2 Director Hiring Process Update (verbal)

Roach shared that there were 31 applicants and after an initial review by the three interim directors, they forwarded their top 6 applicants to the Mayor's office. He said that he will be on the hiring panel to represent BPRW along with people from other City Departments and bodies identified by the Mayor's office. He continued that the interim directors are currently generating feedback from staff so that he can go into the panel discussions prepared with the staff's perspective. He welcomed the Commissioner who would also be sitting on the panel to join him in those efforts.

Lantieri continued that he and the interim directors reached out to the Mayor's office about the process recently and they said that they wanted to invite someone from the Commission to be present on the panel as well. He then asked if anyone was interested and available to sit on that panel.

The group consensus was that Lantieri would be a great representative. He graciously accepted.

8. Commissioner's Items & Volunteer Hours

Lantieri began by introducing himself to the newest Commissioner, Davis, and said that he had about 5 hours of volunteer time since the last meeting.

The rest of the Commissioners introduced themselves. No one else shared any volunteer hours.

9. Adjournment

9.1 Motion to Adjourn

Lantieri asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Boehm made a motion to adjourn, Davis seconded. All were in favor, none were opposed. The meeting adjourned at 8:45pm.