



Neighborhood Planning Assembly Draft Minutes

NPA:
(choose one)

Wards 1 & 8	Wards 2 & 3	Wards 4 & 7	Ward 5	Ward 6
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Date of Assembly : 09 / 04 / 25

Start Time: (Commence): 6:00pm

Location: Dept of Public Works

Finish Time: (Adjourn): 8:15pm

Note taker: Mills Forni

Steering Committee Members in Attendance: Dale Azaria, Mills Forni, Romeo Hermann, Anita Rapone

Discussion Topics

6:00 | Community Dinner

6:30 | Call to Order

6:45 | City Council Updates

7:15 | State House Updates

7:45 | Burlington School District Updates

8:15 | Adjourn

Agenda Items and Highlights:

6:30 | Call to Order, Announcements, Public Forum

- Branch out Burlington - Request to please water your trees in the green space by the curbs in town due to the lack of rain.

6:45 | City Council Updates, including concerns about homelessness (City Councilor Buddy Singh; Sarah Russell, Special Assistant to End Homelessness, City of Burlington)

- **City Council Updates**
 - **BPD Union** - We were able to ratify the collective bargaining agreement. This should enable us to make more lateral (experienced hires), in addition to recruiting from the academy, helping us get staffing levels up.
 - **City Circle** - Will enable the city, through our own community justice center, to implement restorative justice outside of the criminal justice system. This will fill the gap that isn't being met right now.
 - **City Hall Park** - Resolution passed to enforce ordinances in City Hall park, make it safer for all residents.
 - **Upcoming Resolution: Clean up of needles** - Providing city council funds to clean up needles downtown.
- **State Support for Burlington:** There has been a back-and-forth between the Governor and the Mayor about how the state can support Burlington with law enforcement.
 - **Resident Comment:** We need a local path for local residents (including Champlain College graduates) to take the tests required to become a police officer (vs attending the State police academy).
- **City's Response to Ongoing Homelessness Issue**
 - **Sheltering on Public Lands Policy:** In response to an ACLU settlement a few years ago, the city developed this policy. It includes public parks and city property.
 - **City Parks:** If a tent is spotted, it is promptly cited for removal.
 - **Non-Park City Property:** The City cannot immediately remove a tent, they need to go through a notice process and store belongings for 30 days. In the past administration, there was no camping allowed on any city property, but there were far fewer unhoused people at the time - it was also difficult because the tents would simply move to a different spot around town.

- **Current Policy:** Focus on enforcement in City Parks, but exercise patience and tolerance in non-park city property. This has been very successful in ensuring there are not tents in City Parks (e.g. Oakledge, North Beach).
 - **Urban Reserve:** The city is working on more clearly marking land that is required for conservation. There is work to maintain a 100 ft shoreline buffer free of camping, as well as a 25 ft buffer on either side of the bike path.
 - **Redirection for camping sites:** The City works with local organizations to help direct people to places where they can have basic needs met.
 - **City Working Group:** Meets once a week to discuss major camping sites and what can be done to address and meet the needs there. There is a great deal of cross-agency and public-private collaboration to identify challenges and solutions.
- **Data Reporting for Chittenden County** (Notes from verbal comments are accurate to the best of our ability, but should be verified with official sources)
 - Tracked on a monthly basis: 734 households that were enrolled in coordinated entry. 76 families, 23 veterans, and youth households. We've also seen a spike in older Vermonters that are unhoused - 73 individuals that are 62+.
 - The City/County also tracks the number of households that they house. When more affordable housing becomes available, they see a corresponding decrease in people being unhoused.
 - People that do not have tents are very difficult to track because they move around so much and are so focused on meeting their basic needs. Last month, there were 260 people that self-reported sleeping outside without any shelter at all.
 - There is a myth that people are coming from out of state for Chittenden county social services. This is not true. There are a small percentage of people that move around the state.
 - According to a 2024 report, only about 3% of unhoused individuals are from out of state. Of those, many come to Vermont because they have family here or local ties. Others are fleeing domestic violence. There has also been some migration due to the change in federal administration. As conservative states removed protections for transgender people for example, some parents have moved their families to more liberal states.
 - The main reason for migration between counties in Vermont is because of the limited capacity of the motel program.
 - Over 80% of people who are unsheltered have a chronic health condition. When children experience homelessness, they are 5x more likely to experience homelessness as adults.
- **Comment:** Fared, volunteer with People's Kitchen - they serve free meals to people in need in City Hall Park at night. He has observed that for many people, this issue is generational - they grow up in this situation and are unable to get out of it.
- **City Councilor Buddy Singh:** Burlington has done a lot on this issue and increased capacity significantly over the past five years. We have shouldered a significant burden here in this county. We need more support from partners across the county and around the State.
- **Sarah Russell:** We need more advocacy to request support from our regional and state partners that they're realistically able to provide (to increase the likelihood that they provide it).

7:15 | State House Updates, including issues related to Education Funding (Representatives Bram Kleppner, Mary-Katherine Stone)

- **Motel program:** The Legislature allocated additional funding to the motel program via H91. The Administration signaled approval, but ultimately vetoed it. Both councilors signaled frustration that the Administration did this.
- **Education Bill:** Bram and Mary-Katherine voted against it, for two reasons: It was 156 pages and it came out of committee with little to no time for review. And, it was brought about to address the property tax crisis, but it did nothing to address property taxes. That said, there is still a fair amount of flexibility in the outcome of this bill in the years ahead. This next year will be even more contentious than last year.

- Vermont’s education funding formula is unbelievably complex. The bill does meaningfully simplify the funding formula, but it does not approach this in the right way.
- Vermont has one of the highest teacher-to-student ratios in the country (more teachers for every student), which is good, but very expensive.
- Note: We have 40,000 fewer students today than we did 40 years ago, yet all the schools are still there, so there is a challenge that needs to be addressed.
- Massive constituent push to vote down this bill, yet, it passed the legislature by a significant margin.
- The good news is, there is a lot of focus on the crisis facing education in Vermont right now.
- “A strong conviction that something must be done is the parent of many a bad measure”
- The redistricting process is being led by a working group of state legislators and non-state legislators. They will be drawing up three possible new maps and are aiming to share those in December.
- **Healthcare:** Rising healthcare costs are a significant driver of costs in education as well. Unclear if the Governor/Legislature will tackle that this year.

7:45 | Burlington School District Updates (Commissioner Clare Wool, Chair of the Burlington School Board)

- We are starting up the school year with a tremendous amount of excitement and optimism - schools are fully staffed and with consistent leadership. We are an anomaly in the state - our schools are at capacity and have very strong enrollment.
- Burlington has 3,500 public school students.
- **Facilities Update**
 - **Elementary:** Every school has a pre-K program.
 - Unveiled Integrated Arts Academy \$17M renovation (\$10M from federal government). It was built in 1904 and needed significant upgrades. On budget, on time and school started last Tuesday. An incredibly successful project.
 - **Middle Schools:** Improved upgrades at Edmunds
 - **High School:** This is the last year at Macy’s! BSD has been spending north of \$1M in rent to the owners of Macy’s in recent years. The new school is on time and on budget with a plan to begin occupancy in April of next year and start the Fall school year at the new school. This is a huge achievement.
 - **Eagle Bay Academy:** The Alternative high school will be at the new therapeutic center at Rock Point.
- **Funding Update:** Passed a bill two years ago (Act 127) will now be replaced by the new education bill. It’s upsetting because they have been asking for modeling that shows how this new bill will save money and no one can show any numbers as to how that will happen.
- **Public Transportation:** BSD has a yearly contract with Green Mountain Transit, there will be a bus stop at the new BHS. We need school bus drivers!
- **Public Funding for Private Schools:** If a student does not have a high school in their district, they are able to use their public dollars to attend private schools (including religious schools). A number of residents expressed frustration with this as it diverts public funds from public schools to potentially high cost private schools.

8:15 | Adjourn