



Ward 3 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

Wednesday, September 17, 2025

Lorraine B. Good Room, Burlington City Arts

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome & Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:34 PM by Zachary Cummings, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee member. A motion to adopt the agenda was made, seconded, and approved by a voice vote.

2. Attendee Introductions

- **NPA Steering Committee Members:**
 - ✓ Michelle Borbas, College Street
 - ✓ Brooks Cummings, Cherry Street
 - ✓ Zachary Cummings, South Champlain Street
 - ✓ Darrell Fields, Church Street
 - ✓ Christopher Haessly, College Street
 - ✓ Charlie Messing, College Street
- **City Officials/Staff:**
 - ✓ Melo Grant, City Councilor, Central District
 - ✓ Sarah Montgomery, Dept of Finance and Administration
 - ✓ Barbara Turnbull, Dept of Finance and Administration
- **Presenters:**
 - ✓ Romeo Von Hermann, Ward 6 NPA
 - ✓ Mary Danko, Fletcher Free Library
 - ✓ Clayton Clark, Green Mountain Transit (GMT)
- **Community Members/Public:**
 - ✓ Alan Rubin, College Street
 - ✓ Suki Rubin, College Street
 - ✓ Trudy Richmond, Elmwood Avenue
 - ✓ Gail Welch, Elmwood Avenue
 - ✓ Cynthia Ziskie, Cherry Street
 - ✓ David Ziskie, Cherry Street
 - ✓ George Russell, Cherry Street
 - ✓ Ellen Cohen, Cherry Street

- ✓ Kate Sullivan, Cherry Street
- ✓ Emily Dreibelbis, Cherry Street
- ✓ Susan Forester, College Street
- ✓ George Logan, College Street
- ✓ Christopher-Aaron Felker, Park Street
- ✓ Jeffrey Peterson

3. Steering Committee Elections

The annual election for the Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee was facilitated by Romeo Von Hermann of the Ward 6 NPA.

Process: Mr. Von Hermann explained that to be elected, candidates must receive a majority (more than 50%) of votes from members present and voting. Members could vote for a minimum of three and a maximum of seven candidates.

Nominations: The following seven individuals were nominated from the floor and accepted their nominations to run for the Steering Committee:

- Michelle Borbas
- Brooks Cummings
- Zachary Cummings
- Christopher-Aaron Felker
- Darrell Fields
- Christopher Haessly
- Charlie Messing

Candidate Presentations: Each nominee was given one minute to speak. Common themes included the desire to give downtown residents a voice, address public safety and quality-of-life issues, foster a diversity of opinions, and create a more useful and meaningful NPA.

Results: A total of 18 ballots were cast, with 10 votes required for a majority. All seven nominated candidates surpassed the required threshold and were elected to the Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee for the upcoming term.

4. City Council Updates

Presented by: Councilor Melo Grant (Central District)

- **Public Safety Data:** Councilor Grant encouraged residents to review the monthly reports from the Police and Fire Chiefs, which are attached to the Public Safety Committee agendas (held the fourth Thursday of each month). These reports include heat maps showing that the Central District continues to bear the burden of the most incidents.
- **Crime Statistics:** Citing year-to-date data through August 15, 2025, she highlighted significant increases in police activity compared to the 2021-24 average, including an 84% increase in foot patrols, a 2,268% increase in directed patrols, a 75% increase in trespass incidents, and a 42% increase in arrests for violations of conditions of release.

- **Policing Strategy:** Chief Burke is working to have Community Service Officers (CSOs) and Liaisons (CSLs) respond to non-emergency calls (welfare checks, mental health issues) to keep sworn officers available for higher-priority incidents.
- **UVM MOU:** The city is beginning conversations with UVM regarding a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which will focus on zoning for student housing, housing code enforcement, and ensuring the city receives adequate benefits.
- **Community Q&A:** Discussion topics included the increase in illegal bicycle and motorbike use on Church Street, the effectiveness of the judicial system in providing consequences, and the process for tracking individuals who are high utilizers of emergency services through the multi-agency "Situation Table."

5. Library News & Events

Presented by: Mary Denko, Director, Fletcher Free Library

- **Library Card Signup Month:** September is National Library Card Signup Month, and Director Denko encouraged all residents to get a card to access the library's two "worlds": the physical building and the extensive online library.
- **Digital Resources:** A library card provides free access to e-books and audiobooks (Libby app), movie streaming (Kanopy app), the New York Times, Consumer Reports, historical archives, and grant-seeking databases.
- **Home Card System:** The Fletcher Free Library is now part of the Home Card system, allowing Burlington library cardholders to borrow materials from other participating libraries in Chittenden County.
- **Building Preservation:** The library is undergoing a major, \$2 million+ preservation project on the original 1904 Carnegie building. Work includes repointing brick, terracotta repair, and a full refurbishment of the historic windows. The project is expected to be complete in mid-December.

6. Green Mountain Transit (GMT) - Recent Route Changes

Presented by: Clayton Clark, General Manager, GMT

- **Financial Situation:** Mr. Clark explained that GMT, like transit agencies nationwide, is facing a fiscal crisis where costs are rising much faster than revenues. This has forced GMT to make approximately \$2 million in service cuts over the past year to operate within its budget.
- **Service Changes:** The most recent changes, effective August 25, have significantly impacted Ward 3.
- **The #11 Bus (formerly the College Street Shuttle):** This route is no longer fare-free. Its path has been moved from College Street to Main Street. It no longer provides direct service to the UVM Medical Center or the Burlington International Airport.
- **Impact and Alternatives:** Mr. Clark acknowledged the hardship these changes create, particularly for elderly residents and those with mobility challenges. He strongly recommended that affected individuals apply for SSTA Paratransit service, a door-to-

door, on-demand service available for those who cannot use the fixed-route system. The SSTA fare is \$4 per ride.

- **Discussion:** A lengthy and passionate discussion followed, with residents expressing frustration over the loss of the essential College Street route. They described the new route as inaccessible for those carrying groceries or unable to walk the nearly quarter-mile distance to the hospital. There was a strong sentiment that the changes have disproportionately harmed Burlington's most vulnerable residents while resources have been reallocated to other communities.

7. Public Forum

Several members of the community came forward to speak on various topics.

- **Charlie Messing (College Street):** Pointed out that the city's expenditure of \$12 million on the renovation of City Hall Park has had no effect on the general atmosphere of the park and the same people who had driven away families, residents and tourists have returned.
- **Alan Rubin (College Street):** Suggested the NPA focus on quality-of-life issues like loud motorcycles and speeding. He expressed a feeling that the city has "forgotten what public service means."
- **Trudy Richmond (Elmwood Avenue):** Shared positive feedback, expressing her excitement and gratitude for the new sidewalks being installed in her neighborhood.
- **Melo Grant (City Councilor):** Advised residents that now is the time to contact their city councilors about streets that need repaving so they can be graded and considered for the next construction season.

8. Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 PM.