



Ward 3 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

Wednesday, October 1, 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 Christopher Haessly, 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
 - ✓ Christopher-Aaron Felker, Park Street
 - ✓ Darrell Fields, Church Street
 - ✓ Christopher Haessly, College Street
 - ✓ Charlie Messing, College Street
- **City Officials/Staff:**
 - ✓ Becca Brown-McKnight, City Councilor, Ward 6
 - ✓ Melo Grant, City Councilor, Central District
 - ✓ Barbara Turnbull, Dept of Finance and Administration
 - ✓ Charlie Giannoni, Town Meeting TV
- **Presenters:**
 - ✓ Charles Dillard, Office of City Planning
 - ✓ Gail Shamnois, UVM Office of Student and Community Relations
 - ✓ Omar Talhouk, UVM Student Government Association
 - ✓ Sherriff Dan Gamelin, Chittenden County Sherriff's Office
 - ✓ Sgt. Thom Oliver, Chittenden County Sherriff's Office
- **Community Members/Public:**
 - ✓ Trudy Richmond, Elmwood Avenue
 - ✓ Gail Welch, Elmwood Avenue
 - ✓ Susan Forester, College Street
 - ✓ Jill Lesh, College Street

- ✓ Sam Powers, Main Street
- ✓ Linda Oats, Main Street (via remote attendance)
- ✓ Alan Rubin, College Street (via remote attendance)
- ✓ Suki Rubin, College Street (via remote attendance)

3. City Council Updates

Presented by: Councilor Becca Brown McKnight (Ward 6)

Councilor Brown McKnight provided an update on two major city council initiatives from the summer and early fall:

- **Downtown Economy Resolution:** A resolution aimed at supporting a thriving downtown economy led to the reopening of Main Street to traffic on nights and weekends and created opportunities for free parking.
- **City Hall Park Safety Resolution:** A resolution focused on improving safety in City Hall Park has resulted in positive shifts, according to a recent report from Police Chief Burke. Data shows an increase in the interruption of drug-related behavior and a dispersal of antisocial behavior from the park.

A number of participants responded to Council Brown McKnight's update and shared their perspective on the current state of affairs in downtown Burlington.

- **Brooks Cummings:** Noted a significant positive change in the park's atmosphere, especially following a recent drug dealer arrest. They acknowledged that the behavior may be displaced to other areas but felt that prioritizing the safety of the park—a central space for families and children—was appropriate.
- **Charlie Messing:** Compared the displacement of issues to a game of "whack-a-mole," arguing that simply clearing the park isn't a long-term solution and that more focus should be on creating better alternative places for people to go.
- **Christopher Haessly:** Asked about how the city should deal with "service-resistant" individuals who are known to law enforcement, refuse offers of treatment, and continue to cause harm in the community. Councilor Brown McKnight acknowledged that current laws limit the city's ability to compel people into treatment and suggested looking to other states for potential models and legal changes.

4. Ward 3 Polling Place Resolution

Presented by: Christopher Haessly, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee

The NPA considered a resolution to move the Ward 3 polling location from the Sustainability Academy on North Street to Burlington City Hall.

Background:

The current location is at the northernmost boundary of the ward, creating a walk of nearly a mile for residents in the southern portions of the ward, including the King/Maple neighborhood. The move to the more centrally located City Hall is intended to reduce transportation barriers and improve ballot access for all residents.

Discussion and Debate:

A number of participants shared their perspective on the proposed resolution.

- A former ward clerk spoke in opposition, arguing that the move would fracture community ties with Ward 2, that City Hall can be an alienating location for some, and that they had not personally heard complaints about the current location.
- Supporters of the resolution countered that for too long, the needs of downtown and King/Maple residents (including many New Americans) have been marginalized. They emphasized that the move is a matter of equity and accessibility, particularly for seniors and those with mobility challenges who find the current walk difficult and feel safer downtown.
- While there was general agreement that expanding mail-in voting is important, supporters of the resolution argued that improving the accessibility of the physical polling place was also a necessary step.

Final Vote on Resolution:

- A motion to adopt the resolution was made and seconded.
- The motion passed by a vote of 11 in favor and 1 opposed.

5. City of Burlington Comprehensive Plan

Presented by: Charles Dillard, Office of Planning

Mr. Dillard presented PlanBTV 2050, a major initiative to create a new, holistic comprehensive plan for the city. This effort combines four major planning elements: the Municipal Plan, a citywide Mobility Plan, a Parks, Recreation & Waterfront Plan, and the city's first-ever Economic Development Strategy.

Key Goals: The plan aims to address significant changes since the last update in 2019, including housing costs, climate change, and post-pandemic economic shifts. A primary goal is to plan for 7,000 new housing units by 2050 in a sustainable and equitable way.

Public Engagement: The process will be heavily reliant on community feedback, using a scenario-planning model to explore different growth strategies. A series of public visioning workshops will be held for different areas of the city.

- **Old North End Workshop:** October 23 at the O.N.E. Community Center.
- **Downtown & Waterfront Workshop:** October 27 at the Community Sailing Center.

Community Q&A: In response to questions, Mr. Dillard confirmed that accessibility for residents with mobility challenges is a significant concern that will be addressed. He also acknowledged that challenges with public transit (GMT) and sidewalk conditions are critical components of the mobility plan and that different funding scenarios will be considered.

6. UVM Student and Community Relations

Presented by: Gail Champnois and Omar Talhouk

The presentation highlighted the successful, restorative community-building work being done to foster positive relationships between UVM students and Burlington residents.

The Isham Street "Is Good" neighborhood organization, founded in 2010, has used grassroots initiatives like community gardening to transform the neighborhood. This work has led to significant, data-supported decreases in crime (burglary, noise, vandalism) and has fostered a stronger sense of community, with students signing longer leases and families moving back to the street.

Omar Taluk announced two upcoming student-led projects:

- **Community Cleanup:** A neighborhood trash pickup event scheduled for the Saturday after Halloween weekend.
- **Graffiti Cleanup:** A project focused on downtown Burlington.

7. Marketplace Garage Update

Presented by: Sherriff Dan Gamelin and Sgt. Thom Oliver

The Sheriff's Department has been contracted by the city to provide a security detail in the downtown Marketplace Garage from 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM daily since June 2024.

Directives & Observations:

The department was instructed to use a "soft approach," focusing on ensuring visitor safety and moving along individuals who are loitering, sleeping, or engaging in antisocial behavior, rather than making arrests unless a situation is particularly dangerous.

Deputies visually observed a fifty (50) to seventy-five (75) percent decrease in the presence of unhoused individuals in the garage immediately after the "Food Not Cops" program moved to City Hall Park in July. However, they have recently seen an uptick in activity since the recent police focus on clearing City Hall Park.

Deputies frequently observe drug use and find paraphernalia, but no arrests have been made for these offenses due to the directive to prioritize presence in the garage.

Data & Reporting:

The city has not requested formal data collection. Because interactions typically do not result in a custodial arrest or a formal incident, no quantitative data is entered into the Valcour police reporting system. The only record of these interactions would be on body camera footage.

The contract costs the city \$80 per hour. Deputies reported receiving frequent positive feedback from shoppers and visitors who feel safer using the garage.

8. Public Forum

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

- **Brooks Cummings (Cherry Street):** Spoke about a recent horrific traffic incident on Buell Street where a pedestrian was severely injured. He noted that he recognized the suspect's vehicle from suspicious activity in City Hall Park just prior to the incident, tying the event to the broader issues of public safety downtown.
- **Trudy Richmond (Elmwood Avenue):** Expressed frustration over the lack of activity from the city's Council on Aging, stating that she has been unable to get information about its status. She noted the council's absence on key issues affecting seniors, such as the elimination of the #11 bus route and the closure of a senior meal site.

- **Charlie Messing (College Street):** Clarified that he is a member of the Council on Aging and that it is still active, but acknowledged it is an advisory body and that getting action on major issues like sidewalk repair is a slow and difficult process.
- **Charlie Giannoni (Town Meeting TV):** Raised a procedural concern about the NPA's voting process. He advocated for returning to a past practice where a resolution is presented at one meeting, with the vote taking place at the following month's meeting. He argued this allows for more time for public education and input, ensuring that major decisions are not made by the small number of people present on a single night.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:32 PM.