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Minutes

Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting

Wednesday, October 8, 2025, 4:00pm

MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON AT 645 PINE ST, FRONT CONFERENCE ROOM, AND VIA ZOOM

Attendance:

Committee Members: Chair Carter Neubieser, Councilor Joe Kane, Councilor Allie Schachter

City Staff: Colin Storrs – Burlington City Arts, Deryk Roach – BPRW, Sophie Sauve, Holli Bushnell – BPRW

Public Present – Troy Hedricks, Denise Watso, David Massell, Dave Hartnet, Nathan Lantieri

Meeting called to order at 4:06 pm by Chair Carter Neubieser

Approval of Agenda

Joe Kane moved to approve the agenda, Allie Schachter seconded, and all were in favor.

Approval of Draft Minutes from 06/26/2025

Kane moved to approve the minutes, Schachter seconded, all were in favor

Public Forum

Public forum was opened at 4:06ppm.

Former city councilor Dave Hartnet shared that when the mayor's office made their budget cuts he wanted to speak out at the next city council meeting, but he held off. That said, he feels that a huge disservice was done to BPRW. Gary Rogers in particular was a huge loss to the department, and it was a very sad day when we lost those key people. There are budget cuts and shortfalls, but the mayor's job is to manage the workforce. Hartnet felt that there was a better way to address the cuts. Time has worn on, and now that PACC is looking into it Hartnet feels the need to speak. BPRW shortages are due to the cuts. BPRW is generally beloved by the community because staff put in so much hard work and take such pride in their work. The fact that there is a concern from management that staffing is such an issue disturbs him. Hartnet wants to continue to have the kind of parks department that sets the standard, not diminishes their work.

Tory Hedrick is the State Representative from Burlington (Chittenden 15) and a resident of ward 1. He is speaking as a legislator, but also as someone who feels strongly about the systems that continue to marginalize indigenous voices. I regards to the removal of the Chief Greylock statue, he feels that work surrounding this has been deliberate. The city needs to be deliberate about replacement, particularly in terms of who is heard and who is honored. The Abenaki who descend from the original keepers of the land (and from Chief Greylock himself) have been left out of so many conversations. It's a violation of internationally recognized indigenous rights (Articles 19, 36, and 33). The state of Vermont has been in violation of those rights since the recognition process began. Hedrick's urges the committee (and the

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council in general) to read declaration of rights because they apply to this process. Prior Burlington city councils have passed a resolution regarding which tribal organizations they recognize, but resolutions passed by a former council are not required to be followed by a current council. He's seen himself that really good policy easily die when not properly shepherded. It was a group of overwhelmingly white legislators that forced the original declaration through. There is no credible evidence to support the current Native groups that are recognized by the state, particularly when the actual descendants of first nation's people have been kept out of the room. This is where the work of anti-racism happens. Hedrick's feels that the councilors are obligated to ask if this project holds the values of this city - equity, justice, and inclusion. This is our chance to lead with integrity.

David Massell, a resident of ward 6 and a professor of history at UVM specializing in Canadian, American, and indigenous history, shared that, with his colleagues, he has organized the 3 public forums on indigenous identity at UVM. These forums brought the issue to the public. For 250 years Americans have played at being native. It was in the 1970 during the red power and civil rights movements that Americans began falsely claiming native status. It is a wide spread phenomenon called race shifting. Native people believe this to be a continuation of colonization. The terrible inconvenient truth is that the entire leadership of the Vermont-state recognized native council has no connection to native Abenaki people. This has been fully researched by David LaRou. Yes, we recognized them as Abenaki with the state, but they were never required to provide proof. The process actively excluded the actual descendants of the original inhabitants of the area. Burlington should work with the actual Abenaki. We do not have to follow the mistake of the legislature. Burlington can and will do better.

Denise Watso is a member of the Abenaki Nation and shared that she was glad to be able to speak. Her father is Freddy Watso. Watso means mountain in the Abenaki language. Watso is making a statement on behalf of grand council. Replacing the decaying statue with a new piece is a move in the right direction, but it needs to be with the official, recognized Abenaki nations. 98% of individuals in the 4 Vermont state recognized groups have no actual Abenaki ancestry. There is a bill in the legislature to repair the harm that was done by recognizing non-native people claiming ancestry. Watso urges the city to reconsider their current partnerships. The Odanak and Wolinak communities are open to discussions and would like to be involved. Many of Chief Greylock's actual descendants are alive today in the Odanak and Wolinak communities. Honoring Greylock's legacy means working with the community that carries his bloodline. Respecting Greylock means respecting his people. This project must be grounded in recognition and truth. Watso wants this project to build bridges, but those bridges must be built on truth.

Public forum was closed at 4:30pm

Update on Public Art –

Colin Storrs provided a brief summary on the current state of the Chief Greylock project. The city assessed the condition of the piece back in October of 2024. At that time, the statue was in a state that posed a threat to public safety. It need to be taken down and deaccessioned. The city reached out to the Missisquoi Abenaki nation because the 2022 city council resolution directs staff to work with them

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as point of contact on Indigenous matters. BCA worked on a path forward with the Missisquoi and requested their direction on how to proceed. The Missisquoi supported the deaccessioning of the statue which was approved by council in the spring of 2025. Work was completed following a discussion with original artist of the piece, and ultimately the piece was returned to original artist. Next, BCA initiated the gift assessment project so that the Missisquoi could provide new piece. This will go before the city council to be accepted as a new asset for the city. BCA took more care with this than with other times the city has undertaken this process. This piece has a political nature which makes it tricky. BCA is currently looking at the foundation of the piece and whether the gift will match up to the current foundation without a lot of additions. The next step will be public feedback and a discussion in front of council. They are still gathering community voices, technical information, and looking to have a more public discussion.

Schachter apologized for not being able to be present in the room for the discussion and shared her gratitude for all who spoke. She asked what the timeline moving forward is and what the trajectory of the project looks like. Colin explained that BCA is looking to the council in regards to how in depth the process needs to be. The process laid out in the public art ordinance just requires that the council to decide what to do. If there is a wider discussion it would be up to the council to direct it.

Neubieser asked for clarity in terms of the 2022 council resolution. He asked if the resolution is specific to this piece or art or if it applies in general. Storrs was not comfortable answering that question for wider city staff, but his interpretation is that it's a path forward for this process. Neubieser added that he doesn't revel in the opportunity to litigate anyone's identity, admitting that there is not a high level of standard regarding the state recognition process which puts the council in a challenging position. He was not sure if PACC or a single department can litigate such a complex situation in a way that feels like they're making complete, informed decisions. He asked what the conversation has been like with the different communities to date. Storrs shared that they had a clear starting point from the 2022 resolution and they started by working with the Missisquoi. When it became a wider conversation they connected with Denise and other Abenaki grand council members. They are looking to draw in other voices to create a more in depth document before going before council with any new plan. This has been the subject of several multi-departmental meetings. They have also been working with REIB to figure out who will be involved in further discussions. As this has become a topic outside of BCA's expertise, they're looking to draw in people that can speak with more expertise aspects that go beyond BCA's purview.

Sophie Sauve added that work regarding community and relationship building has been led by REIB. BCA has focused on the art side, and BPRW is the host location. REIB is leading that part of the project and could better speak to the work being done and policies being implemented.

Neubieser asked for confirmation that the team is looking to responsibly, ethically, and in good faith work with indigenous communities which all city staffers involved in the project confirmed.

Schachter was unsure when the project will be coming before council, but she would be happy to reach out to REIB to get update. She would like to have that be a conversation at the next meeting. Or

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possibly get a full update from REIB at the next meeting. Neubieser asked Holli Bushnell to reach out to REIB to attend the next meeting. He doesn't feel qualified to sift through this as an individual and feels the broader conversation on native inclusion is needed at State level. In the meantime, Burlington needs to make sure this project is done ethically and respectfully. He feels we will need to rely on REIB for guidance, even beyond this project.

Sauve asked if the 2022 resolution could be included in the next packet. Neubieser reiterated that he would like to invite REIB to next meeting. He encouraged folks to share relevant materials with himself or Bushnell. If anyone wants to reach out after this meeting to request time to present outside of public forum that would be possible.

BPRW Ordinance Update –

Before the committee began the discussion, Schachter confirmed that edits to sections 2 and 5 had already come before the council and that edits need to be made before they can be reconsidered. Deryk Roach confirmed that that is also his understanding and sections 2 and 5 should go on the next PACC agenda. Bushnell confirmed she would do so.

Nathan Lantieri, chair of the parks commission, added that the city attorney gave the commission some additional pieces of advice. The parks commission will likely pass the changes and send it right back to PACC. Schachter reconfirmed that the city attorney's office just hadn't seen the latest changes yet and that there may be one or two other minor changes coming next week.

Lantieri continued by explaining the next area, Item 7, relates to off leash dog areas. This is something that the parks commission has been working on for a year after dog task force wrapped up their. Existing ordinances in Appendix D are outdated and the commission has undertaken a full re-write. They have gone through a long back and forth deliberative process and are formally establishing 3 off-leash areas, all of which are fenced in. This is stated both in Section 7 and in off leash dog policy (interdepartmental). The language has been sent to the attorneys, but Lantieri was unsure if they've given approval yet.

Schachter shared that she would find it helpful to understand what's been changed. She asked if the commission could provide a document showing track changes. Mostly she would like to know what's changed. Lantieri reiterated that the text is entirely brand new. Everything in section 7 expired in 2001 or 2002 so the commission had to start from scratch. The commission used what existed as a jumping off point but the language has been expanded on. Schachter reiterated that it would be helpful to understand what is different as she's not sure what she should be looking at.

Neubieser asked if it would it make sense to re-agendize these items and approve them all at once. He asked if it made more sense to approve all of them together instead of doing them piecemeal, section by section. Lantieri agreed that that made sense but thought it might take longer to complete the work that way. Schachter felt it would be helpful if before the next meeting for Lantieri to follow up with the

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city attorney to see that everything has gone through the attorney's office. She would also appreciate it if he could use the expired base and create a track changes version for PACC.

BPRW Staffing challenges memo –

Lantieri shared that the memo came out of work the parks commission has been doing over the course of the last two months. They have been hearing a lot of concerns from staff regarding being able to provide same quality of service while still dealing with ramifications of staffing losses. Generally, staff still love their work, but they are extra stressed trying to meet all the burdens the staffing losses laid on them. The Parks Commission sees that this moral challenge could lead to a decline in the quality of service to the public. Staff feel over worked and under-appreciated, like anyone can lose their job at any time. This is what the commission has been hearing regarding how city staff is feeling. They wanted to make it clear that, while RIF took place earlier this year, staff are still dealing with the fall out every day. BPRW has roughly figured out how to run department with reduced workforce and make the necessary changes, but beyond that, there's still some healing that needs to happen. BPRW staff are still carrying the burden, and the parks commission does not feel like staff has received enough support. City employees aren't always able to advocate their needs and interests in public settings. As a member of the public, Lantieri feels we need help our BPRW staff

Kane shared that he appreciated the information as he wasn't aware of much of that. Schachter felt grateful that this issue is being flagged and for the chance for open dialogue. There has been so much transition. It feels like an appropriate agenda item coming back after the high season. She has heard some concerns from community members around things being cut and things that are still unclear. Schachter felt that there are two aspects to the situation. First, internally there are departmental challenges. She is looking for thoughts on how to transition through this hard time. Second is external in terms of what the impact on community is. What has been reduced? She doesn't have clarity and is hoping to get public clarity as well. BPRW has a real impact on the quality of life for Burlington residents. She genuinely cares that we can actually talk about this. Schachter wants to learn more and wants the council to be able to better support staff.

Lantieri is glad to have the dialogue. In terms of services, things haven't fully shaken out yet, but the two lead rec managers were removed, so the Rec department has had to go through a major shift. That is one place that was a pinch point.

Neubieser shared that he has already talked a bit about staffing challenges. He also felt that it's not easy for staff to advocate for themselves and that the main priorities should be maintaining our rec piece. Until BPRW has a new director it's going to be challenging to really feel like we're on stable footing and get a better idea of what the next three to five years look like. He felt it would be helpful to get a breakdown of services BPRW provides from the new director to make sure we're on track. His main concern is that we're not just shifting work around, reducing staff hours while still trying to maintain the same level of support. BPRW needs to find equilibrium. He asked if there is there a pause until there's a new director or are there more immediate things PACC can work on.

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Lantieri shared that the way that a lot of parks programming and services and work timelines are thought about are longer range. The inventory of services is already happening. It will change when there's a new director, but a lot of things are already on rails, so it doesn't necessarily need to wait for the new director. Staff is still executing and directing programs. Neubieser understood the situation that Lantieri was describing. He shared that he will reach out to mayor's team to get a timeline update on the new director hiring process. He wondered if it would make sense to have the service inventory conversation as the next step. He also added that he likes the increased communication between the parks commission and PACC. He doesn't want to add more meetings for folks, but it was great having Lantieri present to explain the commission's perspective.

Deryk Roach shared that the service inventory is already happening. He also reiterated that the city let go of the two long term employees who knew everything about recreation. There are no other employees to do what they did. Because of this, BPRW doesn't know what the plan was, what the plan can be, or what we do now. BPRW has provided programs for 30 to 40 years, and now a parks comprehensive planner overseeing the department, but there is no one who can answer some of these questions. We don't have a direction; what was the vision of letting go of 8 rec employees and who can we find or empower to lead division. We need to be able to answer that question and right now we can't.

Neubieser appreciated Roach's explanation and added that his comments will inform the next conversation we have at PACC. Schachter asked if we know the hiring time and Lantieri confirmed that the commission has not gotten an update.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20pm. The next meeting to be held on 10/23/2025 at 4:30pm at 645 Pine St and via Zoom.