

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant  
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## **Minutes**

### **Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting**

Wednesday, October 23, 2025, 4:30pm

**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: Shawn Burke – BPD, Mary Danko – FFL, Doreen Kraft – Burlington City Arts, Deryk Roach – BPRW, Holli Bushnell – BPRW

Meeting called to order at 4:33 pm by Chair Carter Neubieser

#### **Approval of Agenda**

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

#### **Approval of Draft Minutes from 10/08/2025**

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

#### **Public Forum**

Public forum was opened at 4:34pm, as no one was present or wished to speak, public forum was also closed at 4:34pm

#### **Violent Crime and Quality of Life Update –**

Police Chief Shawn Burke shared that he has limited prepared data on parks around the city because his team has been so focused on City Hall Park (CHP). That said, he is aware that a lot of other park properties are seeing these negative behaviors start to escalate. To give the committee some background, Burke served with BPD from 1997 to 2018. BPD currently has 60 sworn officers as well as a few vacancies in the CSL CSO and dispatch positions. Since he came on board, CHP and Church Street Marketplace (CSM) have been the department's biggest challenges. Other areas that the department has focused on are encampments on Buell Street, in the parking garage, and at the library with a goal of making those safer spaces. There has been strong community support for these efforts. Over the summer some community members felt that there was not enough activity coming from BPD. After the city council resolution in September BPD has really doubled down to make CHP and CSM safer spaces. As BPD put more pressure on CHP (nightly closures and issuing trespasses for folks violating ordinances) it displaces people committing these negative behavior within two blocks of CHP. It has also pushed some individuals over to Battery Park (there is a group living in band shell). BPD is try to leverage a host of response options. For those rough sleeping in public spaces, the first touch always comes from a CSL or from the Howard Center's Street Outreach team, then the city response team comes in. The administration has worked really hard over the summer to reinstate criminal penalties for ordinance violations. Now people who violate ordinances get ticket and are required to pay a fine, go to city circle

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for restorative justice, or, if they choose to do neither, they go to court. There has been some concern about there being docket space in the courts, but Governor Scott has recently opened a new court room to take on this work. Ordinance violations will be eligible to be heard in this new court.

In truth it is primarily low level conduct that is causing the most issues for residents and visitors. To reduce these lower level offenses, the Howard Center has stopped providing safe smoking materials which is a step in the positive direction to reduce public crack smoking. The Governor's new 14 step program will also focus on getting syringes off the street. Staff currently spends so much time cleaning up needles, this will reduce that. Enforcement of criminal activity has been strong over the summer. Through data analysis, BPD has discovered that 20 or so folks are the most frequent users of services, and 18 of these folks are unhoused and treatment service resistant. They become trespassers from multiple places and trespass is BPD's top arrest count. Arrest warrants and violations of conditions of release are the next highest category for arrests. Mostly of these folks are non-violent, but the current system just spins people back out on the street following arrest.

BPD has seen some violent crime in the downtown core, including one homicide which took place during daytime hours. This is very upsetting, despite the fact that the folks involved in the murder knew each other and it was a drug related offense. BPD worked hard to provide evidence and the prosecutor's office has taken the appropriate actions. It's up to BPD to both solve these issues and try to stop them before they happen. Our governmental response for folks who are having mental health or substance use issues is inadequate, and there are systemic problems that are evident in every community in Vermont. BPD's work has been in finding where the biggest cracks in the system are, and figuring out how to fill them in. They are holding weekly meetings regarding elevated risks in the community and have had good short-term results with that project, but there is no silver bullet or easy solution. It's a long battle, but having a slate of options in place will continue to help BPD identify gaps and provide a much more accurate response.

Chief Burke shared data from Battery Park showing calls from public to PD. Once pressure was put on CHP BPD saw a rise in negative behavior in Battery. It's tapering off now, but that may be weather related. A feeding station was set up in Battery Park yesterday, and BPD will probably need to drill down on that with help of the park rangers and CSLs.

Kane felt the information provided by the chief was very helpful. He shared that, as the Ward 3 councilor, he has received a number of complaints, even more since resolution was passed. Many of his constituents are wondering about camping. Burke shared that one of the big challenges is that if BPD enforces the camping provisions in Battery there is no other place for these folks to go. There are people in Urban Reserve and a few other places, and when BPD closes CHP it pushes people into vestibules of nearby buildings. Even if the city had more shelter capacity, this is a population that is already prohibited from existing shelter options. From a humanitarian standpoint, there just aren't a lot of options right now. There may be no condoned areas for camping, but the question is how obligated the city is to provide support for people spending long periods of time in these places.

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Kane reiterated that it's clear that camping is against city rules, but it not being enforced based on a judgement call. Burke shared that officers are going face to face with people who are carrying all their belongings with them or who have mobility issues. Should BPD really be throwing these folks out of the park? Kane shared that he feels there are more and less costly areas for unhoused folks to be. The urban reserve is less impactful in terms of proximity to community. He feels that removing folks from high priority areas to be prioritized, especially in areas like Battery Park. Unhoused folks deter families and tourists from spending time in these spaces due. Our reputation as a city gets dragged specifically for this issue. Kane shared that, with backing of Ward 3 residents, he would like to see as strict enforcement as possible.

Burke commented that right now BPD is focused on the demands from the resolution. Unfortunately, BPD cannot make folks go to any particular area. Kane reiterated that areas like Battery and CHP are high value areas. He is aware that when an encampment up Depot Street and received a ton of complaints, it was prioritized. Kane feels it's now time to prioritize Battery and CHP. Kane would like to see city policy reflect that encampments within a certain distance of residence will be treated differently than encampments that are more isolated.

Burke added that policy also pertains to encampment on public lands. The administration could take a difference stance, but in terms of enforcement, BPD has limited bandwidth. Urban Rangers and CSLs work with folks to see if they can find a better alternative, but people end up getting displaced. Many residents seem to have a "not in my backyard" attitude, but they city has a number of unhoused people and they don't have a lot of options as to where they can be.

Schachter asked if there is prior year data for Battery similar to what Burke showed for CHP and if activity in Battery compares to what we expected to see or if it an anomalous year for some reason. Burke shared that BPD just started looking at 5 year data and he can certainly share that information in a future presentation.

Burke showed statistics for the calendar year to date for CHP. This includes data from two blocks around the park, 1 block from the park, and in the park itself. There was a spike in activity later in the summer as well as a drop following council resolution. This drop is the result of a lot of investment with sworn officers, CSLs, and CSOs. There are plenty of resources for folks but not housing, and there are no services for those who are treatment and service resistant. Many of the top 20 service users are treatment and support resistant. That said, the new docket may force people into treatment through punitive means. This hasn't been part of BPDs response over the last few years, but the Governor's new plan calls for it.

Schachter asked about North Beach. She was appreciated of BPD and BPRW for their response to the situation there and asked how things have changed, how the chief feels the effort went, and what should we think about for next season. Burke shared that BPRW did lion's share of the work, but BPD responded when there was a real crisis. They received lots of communication from public regarding negative activity, and in every story started with people drinking. Prohibiting drinking from North Beach would go a long way to eliminating a lot of issues. Schachter had heard something similar. One thing

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that escalated the need to prohibit drinking at North Beach for her was thinking about so many people on that dark, windy road. It's a major safety issue and she's glad it's on everyone's radar. She would like to continue discussions going into next season to try to preempt things from getting worse.

Kane would like to hear more about parks further from downtown, including urban reserve and 127 bike path, with concentration of camping issues. He would like to get a better sense of resource allocation assessment regarding those areas. Is it efficient or sustainable? How do they feel in terms of resource allocation?

Deryk Roach shared that this season saw greatly reduced revenue at North Beach. They received very bad reviews over the summer. Consequently, BPRW is already looking at the need to cut resources for next spring (reduced hiring abilities). There was once a time when we knew all 68 of the unhoused folks in the community. Now there are somewhere between 2 and 3 hundred. When we talk about interfacing with this population humanely, we're talking about individuals who feel unsafe in certain parts of the city. Some folks find solace in the lit canopy of the Battery Park band shell, so they can feel safe enough to make it to the next day. It's super complicated. When staff interacts with these folks, we try to get to know them. When they don't have anywhere to go and they do have their belongings, the compromise might be bad for BPRW but right for the individuals. We're obligating more issues at that site by allowing folks to stay or asking BPD to come out and enforce. If staff go down the removal track, sometimes it's only a couple of days before unhoused folks return to an encampment. Staff tries to choose places for removals that will have the most impact. We don't have enough resources as a city to deal with this. Often staff will need to choose between clean up at Urban Reserve or picking up needles downtown. We are seeing problems resulting from putting pressure on CHP, as is rest of neighborhood. Just today BPRW received 4 requests this morning from the public from parks ranging from Oakledge to Leddy. Now staff needs to ascertain if these are new issues, moved removals, or encampments we know about. Staff meets weekly. The impending weather will push people even more. The good news is, beds will be opening in a shelter in early November (12 beds).

Schachter asked how much revenues are down. Roach couldn't say for certain as BPRW needs a second to catch up with finances, but it's similar to the losses local businesses saw. Our Canadian traffic was way down...somewhere between 15 to 30%

#### **Library Strategic Directions –**

Mary Danko shared that the library has been working on the strategic directions for a while (pre-covid), and it has been a long process. They did not hire a consultant which ended up requiring a huge amount of work from both staff and commission. They gathered info through surveys in conjunction with CEDO who also surveyed folks on community priorities which supported FFL data. The biggest concerns are housing, climate, and community. They've found that it is important to be agile and flexible with a primary focus on safety. Mayor Mulvaney-Stanak came in with new initiatives and plans including holding one of her monthly community meetings there. At the top of their list is the focus on the public space. The preservation project to repaint brick and stonework for \$2.8 million as begun. All the work has been done thoughtfully because it's a historic building. As the caretaker, Danko feels she's put the

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space in a good place for the next generation. In terms of the actual collection, FFL has been really focusing on diversity. Many of our populations are feeling “othered” by the current federal admin – FFL is trying to make sure everyone feels welcome to come through the doors. One way their showing this is through both their collections and their programing. FFL can’t help solve the housing crisis, but they’ve put a lot of thought into what their role is in the community. FFL wants to be a touchpoint for community members too. Having a representative from Howard Street Outreach at Library has been hugely helpful. A year ago many of the things that the Howard Street rep handles would have been Danko’s responsibility, but now she can focus on doing the business of running a library. They’re already starting to be able to check things off the strategic directions list

Both Schachter and Neubieser thanked Danko for her work. Neubieser share that he appreciates all the FFL staff do. One question he had was about the Howard Center position; he hadn’t hear how it was working out and is glad to hear it’s going well. Danko shared that she is working on getting data regarding the Howard Center position. She is also working with UVM social work school and have a student working on her masters working FFL. The last time Danko came before PACC they gave the OK for FFL to start their big renovation project. Danko shared that she just went through BOF and will be going to council soon, continuing the approval process for the renovation.

Schachter Had question about percentage of funds raised required for things to move forward. She asked if there had been addition conversations about percentage/trajectory of campaign goal. Danko confirmed that they landed on 4%, but there was no commitment to that. The best case scenario is breaking ground in mid-late 2027 (that’s where the pricing was built to). There is an ideal timeline is in place, but the city is not committed to it. Essentially, FFL put their best plan forward knowing that value engineering will likely have to happen.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:27pm. The next meeting to be held in November at 4:30pm at 645 Pine St and via Zoom.