



Ward 3 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

Wednesday, November 5, 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:**
 - ✓ Brooks Cummings, Cherry Street
 - ✓ Zachary Cummings, South Champlain Street
 - ✓ Darrell Fields, Church Street
 - ✓ Christopher Haessly, College Street
 - ✓ Charlie Messing, College Street (via remote attendance)
- **City Officials/Staff:**
 - ✓ Melo Grant, City Councilor, Central District
 - ✓ Barbara Turnbull, Dept of Finance and Administration
 - ✓ Charlie Giannoni, Town Meeting TV
- **Presenters:**
 - ✓ Tammy Boudah, Howard Center Street Outreach Team
 - ✓ Andre Clark, Street Cats Burlington
 - ✓ Michael Curtin, Burlington Fire Department
 - ✓ Jess Kirby, Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform
 - ✓ Sebastian Ryder, former North Champlain Street resident
 - ✓ Theresa Vezina, Office of Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak
- **Community Members/Public:**
 - ✓ Susan Dow, South Champlain Street
 - ✓ Nora Aronds, North Union Street (W2)
 - ✓ Ben Smith, Cherry Street
 - ✓ Rena Koopman, Saint Paul Street
 - ✓ Ed Baker, Staniford Farms Road (W4)
 - ✓ Bella Fearn, South Champlain Street

- ✓ Jill Lesh, College Street
- ✓ Omar Talhouk, UVM Student Government Association
- ✓ Cameron Laychak, UVM Student Government Association
- ✓ Trudy Richmond, Elmwood Avenue (via remote attendance)

3. City Council Updates

Presented by: Councilor Melo Grant (Central District)

Councilor Grant provided an overview of recent city developments and how residents can access information:

- **Mayor's Updates:** Demonstrated how to access the mayor's updates and budget memos via the city's "Civic Clerk" online portal.
- **FY25 Budget:** Highlighted the Mayor's memo detailing decisions made to address the \$14.2 million budget gap.
- **Police Chief Search:** Final surveys for community input are available now (accessible via barcodes on city flyers). Consultants have begun face-to-face meetings.
- **City News:** Phil Lewis has been appointed as the new Director of Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront. Moody's upgraded the city's credit rating from Aa3 to Aa2.
- **Tax Fairness:** A working group is discussing potential recommendations, including a universal exemption for the first \$30k - \$50k of homestead property value and cleaning up various "splinter taxes."
- **Downtown Safety:** Vermont State Police have begun volunteer shifts (Noon to 8:00 PM) to assist with downtown visibility through the holiday season.

A resident asked about safety after 8:00 PM. Councilor Grant noted that the Burlington Police Department (BPD) continues patrols and urged residents to use the online drug tip line, especially to report idling cars (often an indicator of drug activity). She is meeting with the Department of Public Works (DPW) regarding better enforcement of anti-idling ordinances.

4. CDBG Advisory Board Election

Brooks Cummings was nominated and elected as the Ward 3 representative to the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Advisory Board, which helps to determine the allocation of federal anti-poverty grants in Burlington.

5. Panel Discussion: Homelessness and Community Health

A panel of social service providers and community members was convened to discuss the current state of homelessness, substance use, and community health strategies.

Panelists:

- Chief Mike Curtain, Burlington Fire Department (BFD)
- Teresa Vezina, Office of Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak
- Jess Kirby, Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform (VCJR)
- Sebastian Ryder, Community Member

- Tammy Boudah, Howard Center Street Outreach
- Andre Clark, Street Cats Burlington

Key Discussion Points:

- **Current Landscape:** Chief Curtain and Tammy Boudah noted a significant increase in call volume and a shift from primarily alcohol-related issues years ago to complex opioid and polysubstance use today. The drug supply is highly polluted, complicating overdose responses.
- **Lived Experience (Resident Impact):** Sebastian Ryder shared her experience living next to a "drug house" on North Champlain Street for seven years. She described the trauma of constant disturbances, property damage, and lack of effective city response at the time, which eventually forced her to move.
- **Overdose Prevention Center (OPC):** Teresa Vezina and Jess Kirby outlined plans for the voter-approved OPC.
 - **Purpose:** To provide a safe, medically supervised space for use, reducing public overdoses and syringe litter while connecting people to wraparound services (housing, medical care, treatment).
 - **Community Concerns:** Residents raised concerns about the OPC attracting drug dealers. Panelists responded that dealers are already present and that bringing use inside, monitored by trained staff and cameras, is safer than the current status quo of uncontrolled public use.
- **Barriers to Treatment:** Multiple panelists emphasized that many individuals are deemed "service resistant" when they actually face insurmountable barriers such as the lack of transportation, impossibly long waitlists for the few available treatment beds, or being discharged for minor infractions.
- **Consensus on Needs:** There was broad agreement among all panelists on the urgent need for more inpatient treatment beds, recovery housing, and low-barrier shelter options in Vermont.
- **Human Connection:** Andre Clark stressed the importance of basic human connection, sharing how Street Cats provides food, clothing, and non-judgmental social support to reduce despair.
- **Charlie Messing (College Street):** Expressed support for the OPC as a necessary start to get people off the street and emphasized treating all individuals compassionately.

6. Public Forum

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

- **Ed Baker (Staniford Farms Road):** Thanked the presenters and read a statement of support for the proposed Overdose Prevention Center (OPC) from the First Unitarian Universalist Society.
- **Bella Fearn (South Champlain Street):** Described her weekly volunteer work picking up trash and syringe litter. She shared harrowing accounts of finding bloody overdose sites and urged support for the OPC to reduce hazardous waste in public spaces.

- **Melo Grant (City Councilor):** Added that a new "accountability court" pilot is being established with a special prosecutor to fast-track cases for individuals with multiple offenses, aiming to connect them more quickly to treatment or required services.
- **Theresa Vezina (Mayor's Office):** Announced that the City of Burlington and Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform are hosting an educational webinar for community members to learn more about overdose prevention centers.
- **Brooks Cummings (Cherry Street):** Expressed frustration that the behavior of a few hundred individuals is negatively impacting the quality of life for the city's 44,000 residents.
- **Tammy Boudah (Howard Center):** Spoke about the benefits of the new accountability court and the need for accountability for repeat offenders.

7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:45 PM.