



All Wards NPA Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

5:30pm-7:30pm

Join in person: Contois Auditorium, 2nd floor City Hall, 149 Church St

Join virtually: <https://zoom.us/j/91083047703>

Facilitator: Jonathan **Note Taker:** Barbara

Steering Committee members present:

Ward 1: Jonathan Chapple-Sokol, Carol Livingston, Rob Gutman

Ward 2: Charlie Giannoni, Nora Aronds

Ward 3: Charlie Messing

Ward 4: Amy Bielawski-Branch

Ward 8: Tom Carroll

Others present:

Emmett Wood, Assistant City Attorney

Tenzin Chokden, Assistant City Clerk

Barbara Turnbull, NPA Public Engagement Specialist

5:30 Introductions | 5 min

- Steering Committee members and staff in attendance introduced themselves with names and wards.

5:35 VT Open Meeting Law Review | 25 min

- Assistant City Attorney Emmett Wood gave an overview of Vermont Open Meeting Law and its implications for the NPAs. *[See slides & recording attached on Civic Clerk]*
- Carol: what about agenda setting meetings with the Steering Committee? Emmett: these do not count as open meetings as long as the meetings are purely logistical/informational, and not discussing business of the NPA.
- Amy: what becomes NPA business – can we talk about issues that came up in the last meeting in terms of facilitation? Emmett: there is a lot of grey area, trust your gut feeling about what is business vs. logistics.

- Charlie G: where are the physical agenda posting locations? Emmett: any public signs/posts count; Barbara: there is a city process for posting in municipal locations (library, e.g.) so all the Steering Committees need to do is send Barbara the agenda at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting.
- Emmett emphasized that the Burlington City Attorney's office recommends adding last-minute agenda items only in an emergency situation, because the spirit of the law is to inform people ahead of time what will be discussed.
- Tom: instead of adding an item last minute, can we table it to the next meeting? Emmett: yes, particularly if it is a voting item. Jonathan: do all voting items need to be specified on the agenda? Emmett: yes they do.
- Tom: does OML restrict an NPA member/Steering Committee member's ability to speak as a private citizen? Emmett: no, it has no bearing on your speech as an individual.
- Emmett clarified that advisory bodies (like the NPAs) CAN hold entirely remote meetings, although it would not be in the spirit of NPA meetings. If there were a request for a physical location, then the NPA would be required to provide that location.
- Nora: is it best practice to have our meeting location in the ward, or can it be anywhere in the municipality? Emmett: it can be anywhere, though your bylaws may specify it needs to be in the ward.
- Amy: can we ever ask someone to leave our meeting, if they are being aggressive? Emmett: the City Council handles this by simply shutting down the meeting. We can't restrict public forum so instead they shut it down. You can put reasons why someone would be asked to leave in your bylaws, but otherwise it is an open public forum and that could be discriminatory. Emmett is happy to work with SCs on bylaws.
- Barbara: if the 48 hour deadline to post the agenda is missed, can you call it a special meeting? Emmett: it depends, but if you know it's "special" just because you missed the deadline, that's not good, probably should cancel the meeting.
- Rob: what happens if there is an OML violation? Emmett: City Attorney's office reviews the complaint and will ask if you think you violated OML. There is a 14 day period to respond. If no, then they say no. If yes, then you have to "cure" the violation, and if not you may be sued 😊

6:00 Discussion: NPA Resolution Implementation | 30 min

- Jonathan read clauses from the new NPA resolution [**see attachment on Civic Clerk**] and opened up discussion about creating a standardized process for the NPAs to communicate their annual priorities. He suggested that as a group, the NPA would define top 3 priorities towards the beginning of the City Council session.
- Tom: should we have a collective process between wards, if there is overlap of topics? Issues will come up ward by ward, with a lot in common. How effective is it to flood the CC with 8 different wards' priorities? Scattered approach or more coordinated?

- Jonathan: Ward 1&8 have UVM/Hospital in common. We could compile issues among wards in a digital “list” or in a meeting.
- Amy: is this a written report for City Council, or a meeting? How are the priorities delivered?
- Rob: is it between the NPA and the full council, or the ward’s councilors specifically?
- Carol: What “counts” as the process for giving input? Where in the process do we have meaningful input? It’s up to our councilors to pay attention.
- Jonathan: there are things that only one ward cares about. If it’s not documented, we can’t say you should have known. Want the city councilors to act in good faith based on the NPA’s documented priorities.
- Barbara: question about what the timeline would look like for identifying and communicating the priorities if they are annual. Suggestion that NPAs make sure the priorities they’re sending are specific, actionable, with an “ask” for the council/specific members. Who is going to be accountable?
- Amy: we need to be backtracking. If we present the priorities in April, then we need to discuss at the NPA ahead of time to determine the list.
- Carol: let’s start with our city councilors. In the future it can evolve.
- Rob: our councilors are accountable to us.
- Nora: agree, it doesn’t need to be the full council.
- Jonathan: this communication should come shortly after new councilors are seated.
- Nora: we can give them a roadmap.
- Tom: our councilors basically know our priorities, then they go to the council and just have 1 voice. That is the current system between councilors and the NPAs. What if we had a more collective voice?
- Rob: councilors have their perception of the issues. This would be the NPA’s perception.
- Carol: Expectation that councilors will pause on items that impact their ward. Councilors know this is something we’re working on – they passed the resolution. They are expecting a process they need to participate in.
- Nora: in another ward, there was a significant disagreement b/t Steering Committee and city councilor – councilor stopped showing up. This could help resolve.
- Jonathan: there could be one list of all NPA priorities on the consent agenda for Council – everyone sees it, everyone knows this is a Ward 8 priority.
- Tom: that is a key point.
- Barbara: “priorities” doesn’t have to be policy issues, they could be budget priorities too
- Charlie M: the NPAs are going to present to the council on the issues their ward identifies? Are they separate presentations?
- Jonathan: each NPA sets their priorities. Maybe there is a discussion with their councilors. Then a piece of paper goes to the council – formally logged/consent agenda.
- Barbara: could have a group come and amplify

- Jonathan: we should bring this back to the NPAs and discuss. Then we compare notes at an All Wards in late March/early April. Then we create a document for the council.
- Charlie: there are some issues that disappear for a long time – Memorial Auditorium.
- Jonathan: I think it's on the Monday agenda.
- Carol: Summarizes the process of bringing this conversation back to the NPAs
- Amy: Do you have councilors speak every time at the NPA meetings?
- Ward 1, Ward 8: yes we do
- Tom: do you limit the time for public comment?
- Nora: we don't have a separate agenda item for councilors, but they can discuss for 2 min during public forum. Everyone gets 2 mins in public forum.
- Carol: we don't limit public forum at Ward 1. City Council/School board has limitation – red light. There is no conversation, that's their protocol. The NPA is where that happens. It's concerning that city councilors don't feel welcome or that they don't have a slot because that's a key part of the NPAs is back and forth between elected officials and residents. This is the civic piece that is missing from other meetings.
- Barbara: Other parts of the resolution – updating NPA documents. The Steering Committee handbook was last updated in 2018, working on a new draft and need volunteers to help review it.
- Carol: Another clause is about NPA representation on the hiring process for staff liaison. We've spoken up about the hiring process, it's a key issue for Charlie G. How does that get implemented?
- Barbara: could be volunteer role or elected
- Jonathan: we asked for a volunteer from each ward. Then it can be drawing names out of a hat.
- Rob: is this eight people or one?
- Jonathan: one person
- Rob: what's the mechanics of picking someone
- Jonathan: when we did the resolution, we got 4 people volunteering for 3 positions and picked randomly.
- Rob: each NPA puts one candidate forward, then the rep is chosen randomly.
- Jonathan: that could be the process. that's what we did but it wasn't documented. We can talk through the process in the next meeting – whether we want to vet people or just pick someone out of the steering committee members. Or it could be anybody.

6:30 Discussion: Resolutions to present across all NPAs | 25 min

- Jonathan: Ward 1 has written a letter that would go to education leaders across the state that endorses the redistricting task force report. **[See attachment on Civic Clerk]** It would go to local and state officials and governor's office. The point is to amplify individuals' voices on this issue, it's not just a Ward 1 issue but would go out from the Ward 1 NPA. There are other city-wide issues that we care about that the NPAs could

weigh in on. What could a procedure be? Should they be stored some place, then other wards can sign on? There is a shelf life, so we would need a real-time process to share things. Eg: GMT bus issues. We can build our voices and make a difference.

- Amy: yes yes yes. New to the Steering Committee, can you explain how you came up with this open letter and presented to the NPA?
- Jonathan: at the last meeting we talked with Sen. Gulick about the redistricting work.
- Carol: and our school board commissioners!
- Jonathan: we wanted to write a letter, I got together with the commissioners and wrote a letter. Then put it in the agenda and on FPF. Had we warned it as a vote, we would hand out copies and ask the NPA to endorse. We could modify it. We don't have 2 readings in bylaws, as long as it was warned we could bring it to the meeting and vote.
- Carol: warning requirement is due to OML, not our bylaws
- Nora: do we need something more formal than an email to All Wards that we are doing an open letter?
- Carol: we've done that before
- Jonathan: ward 5 has brought things to All Wards meeting before. It could also be an email. Or a folder/google drive.
- Amy: some issues could be really powerful coming from the NPA or multiple NPAs. Ward 4/7 hasn't done a resolution. We could make a huge difference, I support the idea.
- Tom: is this a way of influencing political process? Or enhancing the voice of the NPAs?
- Jonathan: yes, also amplifying our individual voices, it's both. The resolution is saying city, take the NPAs more seriously, we can help make this a better place. This helps to build up the NPAs and their efficacy.
- Barbara: Ward 3 sent their resolution to the media and got some coverage. Send NPA resolutions to elected officials and also the media.
- Charlie: previous mayor disregarded our input. Our suggestions went nowhere.
- Jonathan: with the redistricting committee, both recommendations were ignored. As NPAs, none of us came to Council to say, read this report. If we had organized as a group things may have gone differently. This is about more formal, active advocacy.
- Barbara: will look into civic clerk, google drive options for sharing letters/resolutions across wards and tracking who wants to sign on. Form submission on NPA page.
- Jonathan: we should have an open system for all NPA participants to have access
- Carol: the NPA resolution was passed unanimously, it has enabled us to take an active role in neighborhood advocacy. We don't make decisions, but we have people who come to meetings and want to be part of changing Burlington.
- Charlie M: many people feel like nothing they say or do will matter. Young people feel like everything is on the line. We need more perspective. The internet separates people, community has to bring people together.
- Tom: we should put the letter on our next agenda. Our school board rep could facilitate a discussion.

- Carol: Governor makes assumptions on how Vermonters think, this would be a way to give feedback about what we think.

6:55 ~~Building Civic Culture: What role can NPAs play? | 25 min~~

- ~~Jason Van Driesche (Ward 5)~~

7:20 Next Steps | 10 min

- Jonathan: we should rotate which ward is planning and facilitating for All Wards meetings. Carol organized these for quite a while and it was challenging. What if we all took on the responsibility?
- Rob: do we need to warn these meetings?
- Barbara: it is a bunch of SC members in one place talking NPA business. Will ask Emmett because this is not an official body.
- Jonathan: is there another ward who would like to work with Barbara to organize the next meeting?
- Amy: Wards 4/7 can do the meeting after next but we aren't ready yet
- Nora: not sure how the rest of the committee will feel but nominates ward 2!
- Carol: April?
- Nora: What do I need to bring to fellow Ward 2 SC members?
- Jonathan: how we are collecting priorities/implementing the new NPA resolution. Making sure everyone reads up on OML. Shared resolutions across NPAs. Building civic culture would be great for the next agenda (Jason's item).
- Charlie: question about the great streets project and if Pine is going to be connected
- Jonathan: that's part of the plan and it's funded
- Carol: city councilors should know the answer
- Charlie G: 2010-2020 is when NPAs were most influential. Then covid and everything collapsed. There were regular All Wards meetings every 3-4 months and city staff would come to some of the SCs. NPAs were more cooperative. They would sponsor big events – discussion about Burlington Telecom, what to do about parks, public works. When the NPAs banded together, Council would take it more seriously than 5-10 people in a room. Idea that every Sept or Oct we have an automatic all wards meeting to talk priorities and then set dates to follow up. The NPA coordinator was very active with the SCs and organizing events.

7:30 Adjourn