

Parks Commission Meeting

February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026 @ 5:30pm

645 Pine St., Front Conference Room & Zoom

Commissioners in Attendance: Lantieri, Boehm, Mobley, Etter, Johnson, Davis & Bergmann

Staff in Attendance: Lewis, Sauve, Cahill, Madalinski, O'Daniel

Public in Attendance: Tim Larned, Delia Horn

**1. Agenda**

**1.1 Motion to amend/adopt agenda**

Lantieri opened the meeting at 5:30pm and asked for a motion to amend or adopt the agenda.

Boehm made a motion to adopt the agenda, Mobley seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.

**2. Consent Agenda**

**2.1 January Meeting Minutes**

**2.2 Roosevelt Park Special Use Permit Request**

**2.3 Calahan Park Special Use Permit Request**

Mobley made a motion to approve all items on the consent agenda, Boehm seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.

**3. Public Forum, Time Certain 6pm**

**3.1 Verbal Comments**

The public forum was opened at 6pm.

Delia Horn was in attendance to encourage commissioners to approve a Penny for Parks request for new soccer goals and nets at Appletree Park. She noted that their original request was just for new nets, but that the existing frames were deemed unusable by Parks staff. She continued that there are many children in the neighborhood who use the park consistently and new goals and nets would get a lot of wonderful use there.

The public forum was closed at 6:04pm.

**4. Deliberative Agenda**

**4.1 Comprehensive Plan Update**

Chris DiStasi, from Interface Studio, introduced himself and then began sharing screen. He explained that he and his team were brought on to support the Plan BTV 2050 process and gave an overview of the various pieces of the larger municipal plan and 3 sub-plans that fit within it – BPRW, Economic Development and Transportation. He shared that built into each of these plans will be a scenario planning exercise, which will show how Burlington could develop over time depending on different variables. DiStasi continued that the municipal plan has a one year timeline so it needs to be done by December of this year, but the BPRW and 2 other smaller plans are a little more flexible. He then introduced his firm and colleagues and gave an overview of who they are and

shared that a big piece of their work in other communities has been looking at park system investments over time with hard data on where spending is going to, which has led to equitable, data-driven decision making processes to systematize how park systems are making investment decisions to make sure they are living up to the goals and values at their core. He continued that they also focus on telling the story of the impact of parks and rec systems on the cities that they are located in, such as fun and recreation, education and enrichment, health and wellness, community building, ecological and climate functions, economic development, tourism and employment, property values and more – demonstrating that parks and rec have broad and tremendous impacts on their cities and are an essential public service in many ways, worthy of adequate investment. DiStasi continued by sharing that public engagement is at the core of their work and will be a big part of their process. He noted that they would be using past and existing documents that have already been created to do this work, so they won't be starting from scratch, but their role will be to take what information has already been gathered and continue to work with City staff to get to a visioning point where residents are being engaged to talk about the vision for the future of the Department and the City, and then building the strategies to help achieve those goals. DiStasi then touched on key topics of focus, including the types and amount of parkland, amenities and recreational facilities, recreational programming, activities and events, maintenance, design and place making, accessibility, climate resilience, revenue generation, the Waterfront and supporting staff and community stewards. He continued by sharing a preliminary schedule, noting that this week is full of on-site meetings which the team will be building on for a first round of public engagement most likely in late April. He noted that there will be a statistically valid city-wide survey that will ensure a sample representative of residents as well as a public survey. He continued that there will be second and third rounds of public engagement throughout the rest of 2026. DiStasi then opened it up for questions and discussion, reiterating that he and the team are there to listen and learn right now, wanting to hear from people what is special and important as well as what are some elements that need attention and what are priorities for people and decision making bodies.

Mobley noted that personally, she spends a lot of time at the Leddy Arena, sharing her hope that it gets included and considered in this process.

DiStasi answered that they will be visiting that site tomorrow and that rec facilities are going to be an important part of this to receive attention.

Etter asked if the Department knows what facilities and programs are running at capacity currently.

Lewis answered that the internal system the Department uses has the capabilities to track that and that there have already been some discussions with the consultants about focusing in on an overview of recreation in particular, specifically what has happened in the last year after the cuts with the hopes of re-setting the stage and looking towards how to move forward. He noted that the 2015 plan had a goal of opening more recreation facilities and unfortunately through the budget process in 2025, one was closed. He continued by sharing that right-sizing community expectations

and resources to make sure we're providing opportunities for recreation as much as is feasible, will be a goal throughout this process.

DiStasi noted that while growing and expanding resources is great when possible, but they're looking through the lens of long-term planning and prioritization across projects and weighing the trade-offs of different kinds of investment by looking at user and programming data to help step back and ask where things fall on the long-term list of priorities and how far down the list can we get.

Etter noted the importance of Lake Champlain.

Mobley asked them to keep the data for underserved communities that they might not be capturing in mind.

DiStasi answered that the hope is that the survey will help mitigate this concern.

Lantieri suggested that the consultants visit the Sea Caves at Arthur Park, noting that there is support from staff as well as community engagement. He continued by suggesting that they visit the Leddy Park Bike Park as well, which has heavily involved a community group. He wanted to highlight these two locations because there is community engagement that is valuable, but not monetary, so may not show up in a budget, but having these resources creates additional value. Lantieri feels that there is a strong culture for that in Burlington, but also more opportunity for growth in this area.

#### **4.2 Conservation Legacy Fund Nature Based Solutions Grant Recommended Awardee Slate**

Cahill opened by sharing that this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> year that this program has been active and that it has been a fun and collaborative process. He continued that this is one of the key ways that the community and organizations who are doing great work for the environment and climate adaptation are engaged and their work is empowered. Cahill continued by thanking Davis and Mobley for being such a fun, engaging and thorough members of the review group. He then shared screen to show the scoring and opened it up for questions.

Lantieri asked about Vermont Garden Network being awarded their full requested amount even though their score was slightly lower than VYCC, who was not awarded any funding.

Cahill answered that VYCC did not identify a specific project in their application, but all of the other applicants did, which was the biggest deterrent.

Mobley chimed in that it was also written as an all or nothing option.

Cahill noted that he has been in touch with VYCC since they received the news, which included a discussion and plan for how to build a better competitive ask in the future as well as how we can continue to collaborate this season despite this.

There were no other questions or comments.

Davis made a motion to move the slate forward. Etter seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.

#### **4.3 Wetland Walk Legacy Request**

Cahill opened by sharing that there are 3 pockets of the Conservation Legacy Fund – one has historically been understood as the acquisition part of the fund (40%), the Nature Based Climate Solutions Grand part of the fund (30%) and the Stewardship part of the fund (30%). Cahill continued that there have been a variety of requests that have come

through for infrastructure projects related to the long-term protection of Burlington's natural areas, but there hasn't been a clear way to support these requests or if it's an appropriate use of the fund. He shared that recently, the City Attorney identified that conservation infrastructure relates to the long-term protection of our City's natural areas and that it is an acceptable use of the fund. The Conservation Board received this request before this new determination, and still supported it as an exception, based on the fund balance and that they felt it was a vital resource for the community.

Tim Larned, from the Winooski Valley Park District, introduced himself and shared that he's excited at the prospect of this project fitting into the Legacy Fund. He continued that the original boardwalk was installed in 1992 and was heavily used, noting that the park is free for anyone to visit and use. Larned shared that frost heaves have made a big impact on the old boardwalk, noting that a new design would use helical piers instead of the original galvanized posts, which would cut down on the annual labor that has been required. He shared that the current design is 4ft wide, but they're hoping to expand it to 5ft to make it more accessible and comfortable for users. Larned continued by sharing that they have applied for grants to address this project over the years and would score relatively well but not be awarded the funding. He feels though that this would be a big asset for the community. Larned noted that while the amount that they're requesting is on the higher side, it would allow for them to complete the entire project at once, instead of piecemeal, which would be less expensive and more efficient in the long run.

Davis asked what "helical piers" are and what naturally rot-resistant materials would be. Larned answered that they are posts that get twisted into the ground until you hit a certain pressure in the wetland, which creates less disturbance in the wetland overall and reduces the impact of frost heaves. He continued that they would use rot resistant wood, like black locust or white oak and ideally locally sourced.

Etter asked if any projects were turned down in order to fund this.

Lantieri followed up asking if this would have any long-term impacts on the fund.

Cahill answered that there aren't any other applications currently, but there is a prospective property list that is kept in regard to potential acquisitions, so there is always the potential for a land deal to pop up that could impact the overall health of the fund. He continued that to fully answer the question, it might be helpful to look at the overall balance of the fund, which they could come back to the Commission with next month if they want to put a hold on this as an action item for now.

Etter asked, given the amount and fund management, would this impede awarding other requests? And for what length of time?

Cahill answered that this is a great questions and gets at the heart of the dialogue of how to be good stewards of the Legacy Fund, especially with the new finding that this can be used for infrastructure. He continued that this request shows the importance of the flexibility of the fund to come to the aid of moments like these and shared that the spirit of the Conservation Board's discussion about this has been to keep this as an ad hoc process, application by application, and that it will require a discussion around balance and keeping track of prospective properties and then making real-time decisions about whether it feels like a viable thing to do at that time.

Etter asked if he could share what percent of the fund this request would be.

Cahill answered that this would be roughly 10%.

Boehm asked for Cahill to reiterate how the fund is split up.

Cahill answered that the fund accrues \$230,000 a year and 30% goes into stewardship, which pays part of his and the Conservation Field Coordinator's salary which supports the administrative aspects of the fund, 30% goes to grant awardees, and 40% goes towards acquisition and infrastructure.

Etter noted that means that it would take about 3 years to recover the cost of this project. He then asked if they get this type of request on that general timeline.

Cahill answered that this was the first of its kind, which precipitated the discussion and debate and review by the City Attorney, but that the amount is on par with larger disbursements that have occurred, such as Rock Point, the Rivers End Marina project and the conservation of Kieslich Park.

Mobley asked if partial funding of this would be possible.

Cahill answered that awardees are paid out over time as the work is completed and acknowledged that he appreciated this kind of creative thinking, but that as Larned noted, it would be beneficial to complete the project all at once.

Etter asked when they would need to know the decision by.

Larned answered that it would most likely be a winter project. He then touched on phases and how that would impede efficiency of the work and therefore the funds, but that there might a potential for other grants/organizations to kick in money if they know that a large chunk of the funding would be covered by this.

Davis asked why this work would be better to do in the winter.

Larned answered that access would be easier for the contractor and there would be less of an impact on the wetland.

The general consensus was for the Commission to take this month to consider this request and come back next month to make a decision.

Etter asked for a history of the use of the fund and trends over time of incremental funding and disbursements for them to consider.

#### **4.4 Penny for Parks – Community Requests**

Madalinski opened by introducing himself and explained that the Penny for Parks fund is a dedicated tax fund that funds capital projects in parks, which is \$40,000 annually, and is a way for the community to provide project suggestions to the Department. He shared that requests can be as simple as new soccer goals in a park to complex requests that can't necessarily be completed, like a water park partially in the lake, and that the fund is set up so the smaller requests can be funded almost immediately, while still seeing some of those bigger requests through, like the universally accessible playground at Oakledge or the bike park at Leddy. He continued by sharing that there was a very low submission rate this year, with a total of 5 requests, and he's not sure why.

Madalinski began by sharing the submissions, starting with the one request that wasn't awarded – more trash receptacles at the north end of Waterfront Park, the reason being that Roach had already been in touch with this individual and was working to make this happen from other funding sources. Madalinski continued by reviewing the 3 requests that were awarded, beginning with the Burlington American Little League Scorer's Booth

at Calahan Park. He shared that this was an outstanding project from last season and that the Little League has a design from a local contractor to build. This project initially began by the little league asking for help with getting permits, but their funding has fallen short and they estimated needing another \$7,000 to complete the project, so the Department is recommending allocating up to \$8,000 in support of the project. He noted that they have an ample amount of people who are willing to provide volunteer labor, including the contractor. Next, Madalinski touched on soccer goals at Appletree Park request, and thanked Delia Horn for attending in support of this. He continued that Parks staff deemed the existing goals there to be too damaged to put new nets on, but they identified another set of goal frames out and are recommending allocating \$350 to purchase new nets for those. Madalinski continued by reviewing the last request – lighting the tennis courts at Calahan Park as well as generally increasing the lighting at that park. He shared that the Department is currently in design with an engineer looking at the park's comprehensive plan to replace the basketball courts, tennis courts and build a storm water feature, but they weren't awarded the Land Water Conservation Fund grant money they had applied for to complete the work, so they have been looking to peel it back and potentially just re-do the tennis courts at this time. The estimate for the lighting piece of this is roughly \$100,000, so they are thinking that they could reallocate remaining Penny for Parks funds that have come from this request towards this project, as well as looking at how they can reduce the cost by doing some of the work internally instead of by an external contractor. He shared that going about the lighting installation this way, the cost would be closer to \$22,500, mostly for the materials, so the recommendation is to allocate \$31,650 towards this project. He noted that this is assuming they can get all of the capital dollars they need to move the overall reconstruction of the tennis courts forward.

Boehm was glad to hear that the soccer goals at Appletree Park had made the list. She continued by asking if there has been any cross promotion with schools to get the word out for Penny for Parks, suggesting that might be a new avenue to consider.

Davis suggested going to NPAs with Penny for Parks information.

Sauve shared that they have done NPA tours in the past, but it would be a good thing to do again, and it could go hand-in-hand with the comprehensive plan outreach that will be happening soon.

Mobley shared that she has applied in the past, and a sign in a park is what got her attention to apply. She continued by suggesting that when the new nets are up, to get pictures of them being used to promote Penny for Parks.

Madalinski shared that he's been talking with the Department's Marketing and Communications Manager about doing videos to plug Penny for Parks.

Lantieri asked if they had considered looking back at past applications from more competitive years that could be potentially viable now.

Madalinski shared that most that haven't been awarded were because they were too expensive, which all go into the broader capital planning list.

With no other questions, Boehm made a motion to approve the slate of Penny for Parks requests. Mobley seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.

#### **4.5 Appendix D, Sections 5 & 7**

Lewis opened by briefly reviewing the last meeting's discussion on section 7, specifically noting that there were some additional questions around parking in Calahan Park and parks in general. He shared that after those conversations began within the Department, they connected with the City Attorneys and in further conversations amongst them, it was discovered that there is also currently a parking ordinance going through the Ordinance Committee, which will need to have language inserted into section 5 the park ordinances. He continued that in order to bring all of that together, they need more time and are hopeful to bring this back to the Commission in March, but will keep everyone posted.

Mobley asked who has prioritization in cases like this – the Department and the Department's external body or the Ordinance Committee.

Lewis answered that he was not positive, but that the Ordinance Committee is a sub-committee of City Council, who would ultimately need to approve any changes. He continued that if there are concerns from this body after reviewing the language though, that it should be voiced and that there would most likely be an opportunity to redirect if there are contradictions to how they want to see vehicles react in our Parks. Boehm noted that while moving this forward would be great, there isn't necessarily a rush from the Commission's end.

Lewis responded thanking her, but also that he wants to strike while the iron is still hot, so to speak.

#### **4.6 Budget FY27 Process Update**

Lewis shared that BPRW is still working closely with DFA and the Mayor's office around how to appropriately make adjustments to the budget and work with the directives that have been given. He noted that City Council approved going to the voters for the police and fire tax on Town Meeting Day and that the Mayor and CAO have been attending NPA meetings to inform the community on what it would mean if it passed or not and the importance of maintaining public safety as the City is going through obvious budget challenges. He shared that knowing the outcome of the vote will inform how we continue to move the budget conversations forward, and that the next definite update will most likely be in April.

Lantieri was curious if it was possible to capture the value that is created by volunteers for the Department amidst all of these budgeting conversations and scenarios.

Lewis was not sure but said he would look into whether or not this is something that is currently being tracked.

### **5. Standing Items**

#### **5.1 Parks Foundation Update**

Lantieri did not have any updates to share on this item.

#### **5.2 Director's Report**

Lewis referenced the monthly report that Commissioners received, specifically noting all of the moving parts with the cold weather emergency shelter operations and that has been stretching staff. He shared that 24 Parks staff have been directly impacted by this, and there have been ongoing conversations about how to best support the needs of all community members, both in safety and health related aspects, but also the

recreational needs, noting that it is a balance. He also gave kudos to Parks staff who have been out in the weather making sure that we have a safe and accessible City and assets across the system. Lewis also noted that Recreation's summer camp programs have gone live, garden registrations have opened and shelter reservations will be opening soon.

### **5.3 Commissioner's Items & Volunteer Hours**

Lantieri shared that he visited the Sea Caves and recommended others check it out. He had 1 volunteer hour to report.

Boehm had 1 volunteer hour to report and that she and her family have been spending a lot of time skating at Lakeview Park.

Davis had 1 volunteer hour to report and recently took a walk down to the Urban Reserve.

Johnson didn't have any hours to report. He noted that he will not be available for the next meeting.

Mobley has also visited both the Sea Caves and Lakeview for outdoor skating. She also shared that she spends a lot of time at Leddy and wanted to shout out the staff there.

She didn't have any volunteer hours to report.

Etter and Bergmann left before this portion of the meeting.

## **6. Adjournment**

### **6.1 Motion to Adjourn**

Boehm made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Johnson seconded. All were in favor, none opposed. The meeting was adjourned at 7:24pm.