



Ward 3 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

Wednesday, May 20, 2026

Contois Auditorium, Burlington City Hall

Meeting Minutes

1. Welcome & Call to Order

The special meeting was called to order by Chris Haessly, Ward 3 NPA Steering Committee member. A brief welcome and introduction were provided. The primary focus of the special meeting was a presentation and Q&A session with Vermont Lieutenant Governor John Rodgers.

2. Attendee Introductions

- **NPA Steering Committee Members:**
 - ✓ Christopher Haessly, College Street
 - ✓ Charlie Messing, College Street
- **City Officials/Staff:**
 - ✓ Melo Grant, City Councilor, Central District
 - ✓ Barbara Turnbull, Dept of Finance and Administration
 - ✓ Charlie Giannoni, Town Meeting TV
- **Presenters:**
 - ✓ Lt. Governor John Rodgers, State of Vermont
- **Community Members/Public:**
 - ✓ Robert Bristow-Johnson, North Cove Road (Ward 7)
 - ✓ Romeo von Herman, University Terrace (Ward 6)
 - ✓ Bobby Sand, Lake Street
 - ✓ Sean Selby, Saint Paul Street (Ward 5)
 - ✓ Allegra Williams, North Avenue
 - ✓ Patrick Murphy, North Avenue
 - ✓ Jill Lesh, College Street
 - ✓ Evan Flynn, Church Street
 - ✓ Stephen Le (South Burlington)
 - ✓ Arya Sapre, College Street
 - ✓ Michelle Borbas, College Street

3. Report from Montpelier & Q&A with Lt. Gov. John Rodgers

Lt. Gov. John Rodgers provided an overview of his background in dairy farming and the trades, followed by an open discussion on legislative priorities and state issues.

Agricultural Resilience & Deep Soil: Lt. Gov. Rodgers advocated for building deep organic soil as a primary method for flood resilience and climate change mitigation. He expressed opposition to placing solar panels on prime agricultural land, preferring built infrastructure. He also emphasized the economic importance of growing more food locally to meet the region's "30 by 30" agricultural goals and keep capital within the state.

Trades & Workforce Development: Rodgers highlighted the critical shortage of tradespeople. He stressed the need to promote apprenticeships and vocational training over a default push toward four-year college degrees, arguing that rebuilding the trades workforce is essential for constructing entry-level, affordable homes and addressing the state's aging demographics.

Affordability, Taxes, & Education: In response to attendee concerns regarding the viability of retiring or raising a family in Vermont, Rodgers acknowledged the state's high property taxes, healthcare premiums, and electricity rates. He expressed deep frustration with the legislature's failure to bend the property tax curve, noting a 40% increase over the past five years. He argued that rising education and healthcare costs are draining funds from transportation and affordable housing initiatives.

Housing & Homeownership: Chris Haessly raised the issue of Burlington's housing market, noting that 60-70% of the city are renters and that true generational wealth requires affordable homeownership (starter homes) rather than just affordable rental units.

- Rodgers agreed, noting the negative impact of out-of-state buyers and the high rate (25%) of second homes in Vermont. He also expressed concern over family neighborhoods being converted into college rentals.
- Councilor Melo Grant emphasized the need for tenant protections, such as Just Cause Eviction, noting that homeownership is out of reach for many and stable rental environments are essential for community building.
- A community member discussed the harsh realities of living on a fixed income, spending high percentages of social security on rent, and the rapid gentrification and vacancy of luxury apartments in the downtown area.

Cannabis Market: Responding to a question on the federal reclassification of cannabis, Rodgers expressed hope that it would bring relief to local cannabis businesses, which currently suffer from severe tax burdens (due to a lack of deductions), high banking fees, and insurance hurdles.

UVM & Student Housing: Attendees discussed the pressure the University of Vermont places on the local housing market. Councilor Grant highlighted the lack of transparency in UVM's enrollment numbers and issues with deferred maintenance in dormitories. Rodgers advocated for using state pressure to encourage UVM to take responsibility for housing its students to prevent the takeover of family neighborhoods.

State Relationship with Burlington: Councilor Grant raised concerns about Governor Phil Scott's perceived disdain for Burlington, despite the city being the economic driver of the state. Rodgers reaffirmed his belief that "Burlington is Vermont's city" and committed to spending

time in the city, supporting local businesses, and focusing on the positive turnaround regarding public safety.

4. Public Forum (Immigration & ICE Discussion)

The public forum segment was dominated by a discussion regarding recent federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) activity in the Burlington area and the subsequent community protests.

Personal Responsibility & Employment: Romeo von Herman shared his perspective as a first-generation immigrant who navigated the legal citizenship process. He argued that adult individuals bear personal responsibility for maintaining their legal status, and that employers must be accountable for ensuring their workers have the proper paperwork to avoid putting both the business and the individual in vulnerable positions.

Impact on Agriculture & Tactics: Lt. Gov. Rodgers condemned the tactics used by the federal administration, noting that targeting individuals based on race or country of origin is unacceptable. He highlighted that Vermont's agricultural and construction sectors would collapse without migrant workers. He recounted his recent efforts working with Migrant Justice to support farm workers who were detained in Richford.

Fair and Impartial Policing (FIP): Councilor Grant expressed deep concern over ICE's lawlessness and the failure of local and state law enforcement to adhere to FIP policies, specifically failing to review warrants before assisting federal agents. She noted that the fear in the community is legitimate, as individuals are being detained at routine court hearings.

Community Fear: Several attendees noted that the current climate has caused immense fear among legal immigrants and professionals of color, many of whom now carry their passports daily and avoid traveling.

5. Adjournment

Chris Haessly thanked **Lt. Gov. Rodgers** for his attendance and engagement with the community, and thanked the residents for their participation.

Next Meeting Announcement: The next Ward 3 NPA meeting is scheduled for June 3rd.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:30 PM.