

Burlington Conservation Board

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Conservation Board Special Meeting Public Notice

Thursday, July 16, 2026, 5:30 PM

Remote via Zoom

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/95590052709?pwd=MlhQcTVTNmUydW5qeIBLeFUwZk9LZz09>

Webinar ID: 955 9005 2709

Password: 346560

Telephone: 1 929 205 6099

1. Conservation Legacy Fund

1.1.

Consideration of funding request by WVPD.

2. Adjournment

3. Informational and Non-Discrimination Statements

The City of Burlington will not tolerate unlawful harassment or discrimination on the basis of political or religious affiliation, race, color, national origin, place of birth, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, veteran status, disability, HIV positive status, crime victim status or genetic information. The City is also committed to providing proper access to services, facilities and employment opportunities. The programs and services of the City of Burlington are accessible to people with disabilities. Individuals who require special arrangements, auxiliary aid, service for effective communication, or a modification of policies or procedures to participate in a program, service, or activity of the City of Burlington, should contact the office of the Title II Burlington ADA Coordinator at 802-865-7000 as soon as possible but no later than 48 hours before the scheduled event.

MEMO

Date: July 6, 2026

To: Parks & Recreation Commission & Conservation Board

From: Phil Lewis, BPRW Director
Dan Cahill, City Land Steward

RE: Auer Family Boathouse Property and Acquisition: Conservation Legacy Funding Request

OBJECTIVE OF MEMO

- Provide overview of Auer Family Boathouse Parcel
- Provide context to Winooski Valley Park District's (WVPD) Conservation Legacy Fund Request - \$300,000
- Communicate the City's interest in the parcel, and adjoined request of \$40,000.

BACKGROUND

Subject Property: Auer Family Boathouse Parcel, 3181 North Ave.

Property Owner: Estate of Herbert Sr, Kenneth A. (Fay, Karen Power of Attorney)

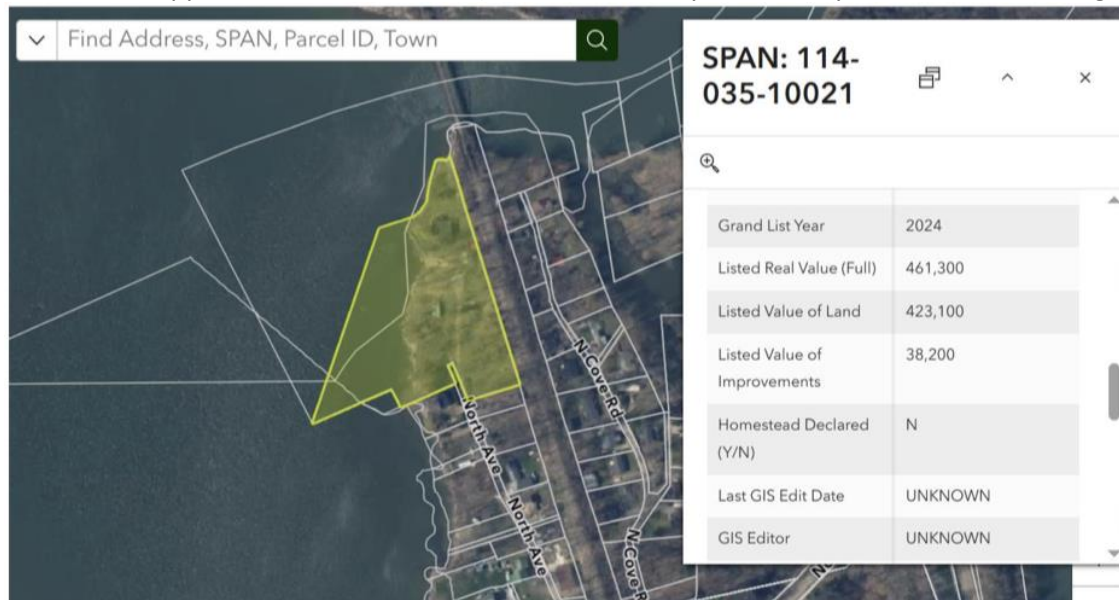
Property ID: 020-3-012-000

SPAN: 114-035-10021

Acreage: 2.7a

Assessed value: \$461,300

Most recent appraised value: \$850,000 (Effective February 13, 2026 by O'Brien & Kaffenberger, Inc.)





The Auer Parcel, affectionately known as “Charlie’s” was placed on the market by the owners on October 2, 2025, for \$2.5 million. The WVPD Board of Trustees has been in negotiations over the past several months with the owner of 3177/3181 North Ave. (“Auer Family Boathouse”) to acquire the parcel, and a purchase offer has been made and accepted at a price of \$960,000. The signing of a purchase and sales agreement occurred on May 13, 2026. The signing triggers a 90-day due diligence period which allows WVPD to conduct a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, complete title search and legal work, complete a financing package, and draft a park development plan. After the due diligence period, if no disqualifying issues are found, closing would occur within 60 days afterwards.

WVPD intends to request Conservation Legacy Fund dollars to help fund the property acquisition and accompanying project costs.





PROJECT OVERVIEW

Background: The Auer Family Boathouse property (AKA “Charlie’s Boathouse”) sits at the southern mouth of the Winooski River on the shores of Lake Champlain just below the Burlington Bikepath and at the very end of North Avenue. The site has been vacant for over two years but previously, was in continuous use for over 100 years as a family-owned, seasonal boating and camping site that welcomed the public. Flooding and heavy siltation have seriously impacted the site's ability to support boating, and the private access road is not designed or intended to support public vehicle traffic. The site currently has two buildings along with several other structures and an accumulation of other items from its various uses over the years. The majority of the site, along with one of the buildings (the boathouse), is in the floodplain and Special Flood Hazard Area (Zone AE).

WVPD’s proposed use of the site is as a conserved public park that welcomes the public for passive recreation, fishing, and lake access with primary access from the Burlington Bikepath and by foot from nearby parking spots along North Avenue. A Management Plan will be crafted that will establish the parameters for access and use of the site and buildings in consultation with the public. Located at the southern tip of the Winooski river mouth, this site is highly unique from a recreational, ecological, and historical perspective. Adjacent to Lake Champlain to the west and the Burlington Bikepath to the east, it would create a contiguous park landscape from the lake across the path to Mayes Landing, Derway Cove, and Derway Island (WVPD owned and managed parks). The site has numerous riparian landscape features including floodplain, wetlands, high priority habitats, and floodplain forest characteristics. The Boathouse and site have over 100 years of history as a public-facing private boating and camping facility and was a fixture of the North End community for generations.

Project Goals: The primary goal of acquisition is to ensure protection and public control of a parcel of land at the mouth of the Winooski River. The site will be conserved through a conservation easement held jointly by the Lake Champlain Land Trust (LCLT) and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) and actively managed for ecological health and public access by the WVPD. Two structures on the site (including the beloved Charlie’s Boathouse, a steel Butler Building and several sheds) have been seriously impacted by flooding and disuse will be documented for historical value/characteristics, evaluated for structural integrity, and discussed in the public domain to establish a plan for their future use.

WVPD acquisition would:

- Protect significant natural communities
- Increase riparian and shoreline plantings and vegetation
- Manage nonnative invasive plants on the parcel
- Improve the river corridor from Lake Champlain up the Winooski River
- Provide clean water benefits
- Provide the potential for education and research opportunities.

The site’s location fulfills numerous recreation goals:

- Excellent location for fishing
- Direct Burlington Greenway Bikepath access
- Scenic views of Lake Champlain



- Birdwatching and wildlife observation/photography/art
- Easy access to other nearby parks (Mayes Landing, Delta Park, Derway Island and Cove)
- Excellent family picnic area
- Potential access from the water for small boats.

Need and Urgency: Urgency is very high for this project. The effort to secure this site for permanent public access spans decades, and for the first time in over 100 years, the site is listed for sale on the open market. This moment represents what could be the only opportunity to acquire this parcel for conservation.

Significant Features: Site is located at the southern confluence of the Winooski River and Lake Champlain, with wetland and floodplain features. It has overlapping species and landscape scale habitat values and is adjacent (and/or across the river from) already conserved properties creating habitat and hydraulic connections.

Rare Species: Rare Mussels have been observed nearby, as well as several rare bulrushes at the mouth of the Winooski River when lake levels are low. Spiny soft-shell turtles have been observed in the area and were historically found at the mouth of the Winooski.

Partnerships: Lake Champlain Land Trust, Burlington Conservation Board, City of Burlington Staff, and several neighbors are part of this effort, as well as consultants that have (or will) provide discounted and pro bono services.

Local/State Priorities: This acquisition would contribute directly to goals laid out in the Vermont Conservation Plan, and the effort to achieve 30% of Vermont's lands conserved by 2030 ("30x30"). Proactive acquisition of high value conservation lands is cited in Burlington's Open Space Plan (2025), and the regional ECOS (Environment, Community, Opportunity and Sustainability, 2018) plan.

Water Quality: While there is no specific metric yet that can describe the positive impacts this acquisition will have on water quality, intuitively it is clear that when conserved, this site's unique location, physical characteristics, and when managed for conservation and ecological restoration, its' shoreline location, floodplain and wetland values will provide water quality benefits well into the future.

Climate Change: This is a highly impacted site, with recent major flooding - a symptom of climate change - adding to siltation issues at the river mouth and carving away over 1/4 acre of shoreline at Mayes Landing and Derway Cove parks (next to the site). As a result of the 2011 Lake Flood, the FEMA floodplain boundaries at 3181 North Ave. were changed, placing the Boathouse structure within the floodplain. Having permanent access to this site will have untold benefits in the future as the river mouth evolves and issues mitigated.

The removal of items, hardscape, and debris from the site and out of the floodplain will mitigate hazards to the lake and surrounding community during future flood events.

Impacts on Local Economy: This acquisition would convert a dormant, shuttered family property into a permanent public recreation asset. As a result, adjacent properties will realize a boost in their value, the public will have full access to the site for fishing, recreation, and lakeside boat access. Long-term, this will benefit the local economy and quality of life.

About Winooski Valley Park District: The Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) is a 501(c)3 non-profit and Vermont Municipality whose mission is to collaborate with member municipalities to conserve and



protect the lands and waters within the Lower Winooski River Valley for stewardship of natural areas and the establishment of parks that connect people to the outdoors. The WVPD is supported by the eight member municipalities of Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Essex Junction, Jericho, South Burlington, Williston, and Winooski.

Created in 1972, today the WVPD manages a network of 18 parks and natural areas in the lower Winooski River Valley with over 1,750+ acres of permanently conserved land, 24+ miles of trails, and 13+ miles of protected shorelines along lakes, ponds, and rivers. Over 780 acres (51%) of WVPD managed lands are within an active floodplain including 550+ acres of wetlands and 200+ acres of floodplain forests. WVPDs network of parks play a key role in flood mitigation, water quality management, and habitat connectivity, while providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, connection to nature, and environmental stewardship. WVPD parks are open to the public year-round with no entry fees and are permanently conserved for the enjoyment of future generations. Learn more about the WVPD and its regional park system at www.wvpd.org.

ALIGNMENT WITH THE OPEN SPACE PROTECTION PLAN

Conservation of the Auer Parcel aligns with the following land inventory attributes found in the 2000 Open Space Protection Plan:

- Shoreline, Wetland, Buffers: opportunities for ecological restoration to enhance soil stability and flood resiliency;
- Important Wildlife Habitat/Wildlife Movement: the river mouth is an important area for aquatic and avian wildlife species as well as many large and small mammal species.
- Floodwater Treatment: opportunities for ecological restoration to enhance soil stability and flood resiliency;
- Public Park/Trails/Passive Recreation Value: proximity to Burlington Bikepath creates opportunity for significant pause place.
- Archaeology Sites/Research-Educational Site/Historic/Cultural Site: human history of land uses including as "Charlie's Boathouse"
- Significant Topography/Significant Geological/Soil Features: geo-morphology of river mouth is dynamic and conservation improves community resilience as natural process unfolds



BPRW'S INTEREST IN THE PARCEL

BPRW fully supports WVPD in the acquisition and management of the Auer Family Boathouse site. BPRW is requesting up to \$40,000 from the Conservation Legacy Fund to support the acquisition process and administrative costs related to adaptations and considerations related to connecting the parcel to the Bikepath.

Conservation Legacy Fund Total Request: \$300,000 (WVPD) \$40,000 (BPRW)

Per resolution, the Legacy Fund can be utilized for 20-40% of the project costs related to an acquisition. This includes purchase price and any identified costs related to bringing the property up to standard.

WVPD and BPRW's joint request of \$340,000 makes up approximately 29% of the total estimated project costs.

Communications about potential disbursement thus far:

The Conservation Board and Parks and Recreation Commission were briefed on the potential of the acquisition during executive session, at their respective May meetings.

REQUESTED ACTION

The Conservation Board moves to authorize the use of \$340,000, (\$300,000 to WVPD and \$40,000 to BPRW) for the project costs related to the acquisition of the Auer Boathouse Family Property.

At the June 9 Parks Commission meeting, the funding request above was unanimously supported.
