



## **Racial, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

**Thursday, September 10, 2026, 12:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)**

**Held in the Sharon Bushor Conference Room, Ground Floor City Hall  
OR**

**via Zoom Meeting**

**<https://zoom.us/j/96324562039>**

**Meeting ID: 963 2456 2039**

**Or Use Phone number: 305-224-1968**

**Meeting ID: 963 2456 2039**

### **1. Call to Order**

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### **2. Approve Agenda & Minutes**

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|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject</b>     | <b>2.1. September 1st 2026</b>                                                                                                                          |
| Meeting            | September 10, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Thursday, September 10, 2026, 12:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category           | 2. Approve Agenda & Minutes                                                                                                                             |
| Department         | Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                            |
| Type               |                                                                                                                                                         |
| Recommended Action |                                                                                                                                                         |

### **3. Public Forum**

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### **4. Equity Impact Assessment Memo: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces And A Stronger Community**

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|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject</b> | <b>4.1. Draft REIB Impact Assessment Memo for the Burlington Forward Resolution</b>                                                                     |
| Meeting        | September 10, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Thursday, September 10, 2026, 12:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |

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|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Category       | 4. Equity Impact Assessment Memo: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces And A Stronger Community                         |
| Department     | Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                            |
| Type           |                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Subject</b> | <b>4.2. VRJA Burlington Forward Resolution Amendments</b>                                                                                               |
| Meeting        | September 10, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Thursday, September 10, 2026, 12:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category       | 4. Equity Impact Assessment Memo: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces And A Stronger Community                         |
| Department     | Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                            |
| Type           |                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Subject</b> | <b>4.3. DRAFT REIB Impact Assessment Memo_Comments</b>                                                                                                  |
| Meeting        | September 10, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Thursday, September 10, 2026, 12:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category       | 4. Equity Impact Assessment Memo: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces And A Stronger Community                         |
| Department     | Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                            |
| Type           |                                                                                                                                                         |

## **5. Recommended Action: Motion for the Committee to approve the memo and its recommendations and forward it to the City Council for consideration**

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## **6. Adjournment**

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|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject</b>     | <b>6.1. Motion to adjourn</b>                                                                                                                           |
| Meeting            | September 10, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Thursday, September 10, 2026, 12:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category           | 6. Adjournment                                                                                                                                          |
| Department         | Council and Board                                                                                                                                       |
| Type               |                                                                                                                                                         |
| Recommended Action |                                                                                                                                                         |

## **7. Informational and Non-Discrimination Statements**

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|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject</b> | <b>7.1. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. For more information on access, call Lori Olberg, Licensing, Voting and Records Coordinator (802-865-7136)(TTY 802-865-7142). Persons with disabilities who require assistance or special arrangements to participate are encouraged to contact 802-865-7000 (voice) or 802-865-7142 (TTY) at least 72 hours in advance so that proper arrangements can be made. This meeting will also air on Town Meeting TV the Wednesday after the meeting, starting at 8:00 pm and repeating at 1:00 am and 7:00 am the following day. 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.</b> |
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| Meeting    | September 10, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Thursday, September 10, 2026, 12:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category   | 7. Informational and Non-Discrimination Statements                                                                                                      |
| Department | Council and Board                                                                                                                                       |
| Type       |                                                                                                                                                         |



## **Racial, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

**Tuesday, September 1, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)**

**Held in the Sharon Bushor Conference Room, Ground Floor City Hall**

**OR**

**via Zoom Meeting**

**<https://zoom.us/j/96324562039>**

**Meeting ID: 963 2456 2039**

**Or Use Phone number: 305-224-1968**

**Meeting ID: 963 2456 2039**

### **1. Call to Order**

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### **2. Adopt Agenda & Minutes**

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|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject</b> | <b>2.1. August 25 2026</b>                                                                                                                              |
| Meeting        | September 1, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Sub Committee Meeting - Tuesday, September 1, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category       | 2. Adopt Agenda & Minutes                                                                                                                               |
| Department     | Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                            |

Type

Recommended Action

### 3. Public Forum

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#### 4. Community Health: Alcohol & Substance Use - Learning from Lived Experiences

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#### 5. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces And A Stronger Community

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|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subject    | 5.1. Burlington Forward_REVISED                                                                                                                         |
| Meeting    | September 1, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Sub Committee Meeting - Tuesday, September 1, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category   | 5. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces And A Stronger Community                              |
| Department | Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                            |
| Type       |                                                                                                                                                         |

|            |                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subject    | 5.2. REIB Impact Assessment Memo_Burlington Forward                                                                                                     |
| Meeting    | September 1, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Sub Committee Meeting - Tuesday, September 1, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category   | 5. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces And A Stronger Community                              |
| Department | Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                            |
| Type       |                                                                                                                                                         |

### 6. Adjournment

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|                    |                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject</b>     | <b>6.1. Motion to adjourn</b>                                                                                                                           |
| Meeting            | September 1, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Sub Committee Meeting - Tuesday, September 1, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB) |
| Category           | 6. Adjournment                                                                                                                                          |
| Department         | Council and Board                                                                                                                                       |
| Type               |                                                                                                                                                         |
| Recommended Action |                                                                                                                                                         |

## 7. Informational and Non-Discrimination Statements

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|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Subject</b> | <b>7.1. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. For more information on access, call Lori Olberg, Licensing, Voting and Records Coordinator (802-865-7136)(TTY 802-865-7142). Persons with disabilities who require assistance or special arrangements to participate are encouraged to contact 802-865-7000 (voice) or 802-865-7142 (TTY) at least 72 hours in advance so that proper arrangements can be made. This meeting will also air on Town Meeting TV the Wednesday after the meeting, starting at 8:00 pm and repeating at 1:00 am and 7:00 am the following day. 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.</b> |
| Meeting        | September 1, 2026 - Special REIB City Council Sub Committee Meeting - Tuesday, September 1, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Category       | 7. Informational and Non-Discrimination Statements                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Department     | Council and Board                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Type           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

**Attendees:**

Councilor Laura Sanchez-Parkinson (in person)

Councilor Sarah Carpenter (in person)

Councilor Melo Grant (in person)

Kelli Perkins (in person)

Christian Berry (in person)

Vicky Luciano (in person)

Mona Tolba (in person)

Chris McGrath (in person)

Rachel Jolly (in person)

Kate O'Neil (in person)

Mark Hughes (in person)

Maryan Maalin (online)

Loan Nguyen (online)

Tiffanie Katsuva (online)

Hemant Ghising (online)

André Clark (online)

Alicia Van Dyk (online)

iPhone (online)

Bill Lowell (online)

Bella Fearn (online)

Suki Rubin (online)

1. Call to Order
  - a. Call the meeting to order 5:33 pm
2. Adopt Agenda & Minutes
  - a. Councilor Carpenter moved to approve the agenda and minutes. Councilor Grant seconded. The agenda and minutes passed unanimously.
3. Public Forum
  - a. Chris McGrath thanked the REIB Office for its extensive feedback on the Burlington Forward Resolution. He encouraged community members to review the comments, noting that he had learned a great deal from them.
    - i. Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson acknowledged that she had received similar positive feedback from other community members regarding REIB's work and analysis
4. Community Health: Alcohol & Substance Use – Learning from Lived Experiences

- a. Rachel Jolly, Director of the Chittenden County Community Justice Center, provided an overview of the organization's work and its role in community health and safety.
  - i. Rachel Jolly highlighted two programs funded by the Vermont Attorney General's Office:
    1. Tamarack: A diversion program connecting people whose offenses are related to mental health or substance use to services and, when appropriate, restorative processes.
      - a. During FY2026 Tamarack served approximately 120 people
    2. Pretrial Services: Connects people whose offenses are related to substance use or mental health to services while they are proceeding through the court system.
      - a. During FY2026 Pretrial Services served approximately 361 people.
    3. The programs have relatively low completion rates, between 30%-60%, reflecting the high needs and risks of the people being served.
    4. Rachel Jolly identified two major gaps:
      - a. Long-term treatment: Ideally treatment lasting at least one month, and preferably three months or more.
      - b. Supportive housing: Stable housing is essential for people attempting to participate successfully in treatment, diversion, and other programs.
  - ii. Councilor Grant asked Rachel Jolly if more information could be shared to help educate the public better
  - iii. Councilor Carpenter asked how to get people into the system.
    1. Rachel Jolly explained that pre-charge diversion represents one of the most upstream opportunities for intervention. She emphasized that preventing people from entering the criminal legal system in the first place is preferable because deeper involvement can increase risk. She also discussed the possibility of expanding opportunities for self-referral. Refer to the video
    2. The committee discussed the challenge of balancing accountability for harmful behavior with approaches that do not unnecessarily deepen a person's involvement in the criminal legal system.
    3. Rachel Jolly shared examples such as investing in youth around leadership opportunities and internship instead of putting them in the system. Building rapport to find ways for betterment outside of the criminal legal system.
  - iv. Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson shared that these upstream and downstream resources are limited. She posed the question of what the committee can do. She expressed interest in talking about where the committee can talk about ways to help and asked about capacity.
- b. Rachel Jolly clarified recent confusion surrounding the City Circle program and its funding.
  - i. The Community Justice Center is not ending its broader community referral work. Community members can continue referring civil tickets, including noise complaints and other lower-level matters, as well as pre-charge and post-charge cases. Six community volunteers who participated in City Circle remain interested in continuing to support community-based responses. Refer to the video.
- c. Councilor Sanchez Parkinson emphasized the importance of upstream and downstream interventions. She noted that resources are limited at both ends of the continuum. She asked Rachel Jolly to share about the capacity each program has.
  - i. Rachel Jolly emphasized that the primary limitation for Tamarack and pretrial services is currently not staff capacity, but the lack of available treatment, housing, transportation, child care, and other wraparound services.



- d. Mark Hughes asked Rachel Jolly about data and data collecting systems county wide and what data she would be collecting to measure disparities within system. He shared that he knew of some people who could help.
    - i. Rachel Jolly explained that the Community Justice Center collects referral, case closure, racial demographic, and age data, but there is no unified countywide system showing:
      - 1. Total law enforcement contacts.
      - 2. Which cases are referred to diversion
      - 3. Which cases move into other parts of the criminal legal system.
      - 4. How people move through the system by race and other demographics.
    - ii. Different law enforcement agencies and courts use different systems and collect demographic information inconsistently.
  - e. Mona Tolba asked the Tamarack program is only for first time offenders and what organizations are they referring to. She asked what kinds of supports are given after they are done with the services offered to them. Refer to the video.
    - i. Rachel Jolly shared that they don't have wraparound services.
  - f. Councilor Grant recommended inviting Rachel Joy from the Crime Research Group. Refer to the video.
5. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework for Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community
- a. Kate O'Neill, a Ward 5 resident and longtime Burlington community member, shared the story of her sister, who died while incarcerated in 2018 after struggling with substance use disorder for more than a decade. Kate O'Neill described her sister's repeated efforts to access treatment and periods when she was able to achieve stability, followed by relapse. Refer to the video.
    - i. She emphasized the need to examine:
      - 1. The family policing system and DCF's interactions with families affected by substance use.
      - 2. The distinction between drug testing and parenting ability.
      - 3. Evidence-based treatment for stimulant use disorder.
      - 4. Incarceration and correctional health care.
      - 5. Harm reduction.
      - 6. The ways criminal records can create long-term barriers to employment and stability.
  - b. Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson thanked O'Neill for sharing her experience and emphasized the importance of connecting individual lived experiences to the broader data and policy discussions.
  - c. Councilor Carpenter emphasized the resolution was not intended to call for incarceration but to address threatening or disruptive behavior in downtown public spaces and parks.
    - i. Councilor Grant discussed the difference between policy intent and impact, particularly for people who are unhoused, BIPOC or otherwise marginalized. Refer to the video.
  - d. Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson shared a draft memo summarizing the committee's analysis of Burlington Forward.
  - e. The memo incorporates community feedback and the State of Vermont's racial equity impact assessment framework.
  - f. Key areas of focus include:
    - i. Meaningful engagement with affected communities.
    - ii. Examining both the resolution and the process used to develop it.
    - iii. Identifying unintended and disproportionate impacts.
    - iv. Developing practical alternatives to enforcement-focused responses.
  - g. Mark Hughes asked if there was still an opportunity to submit a draft

- i. Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson clarified community members are still encouraged to submit written analyses and recommendations for consideration.
  - h. Andre Clark shared that the system in Burlington Forward does lead to jail and urged everyone to talk to organization to see how to collaborate. He expressed his appreciation for the edits made to the Burlington Forward Resolution. Refer to the video.
  - i. The committee plans to provide its response to City Council on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2026.
  - j. Members emphasized that work on community health, housing public safety, substance use, and racial equity should continue beyond the Burlington Forward process.
6. Adjournment
- a. Meeting adjourned at 7:35



# BURLINGTON VERMONT

**To:** City Council

**From:** Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) City Council Committee (Laura Sánchez-Parkinson, Melo Grant, Sarah Carpenter)

**Date:** September X, 2026

**Subject:** Impact Assessment for the Burlington Forward Resolution

**Cc:** Mayor's Office, REIB Office

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## Background

On August 3, 2026, the City Council introduced *Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework for Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community* and referred the resolution to four committees, including the Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) City Council Committee. The City Council's motion stated:

*"Refer the resolution to the Committees on Public Safety, REIB, CDNR, and PAC and request a report back to the full Council on any recommended amendments on items within each committee's jurisdiction by September 14, 2026..."*

## Our Approach to Review the Resolution

Because the resolution did not identify specific provisions for review by the REIB Committee, the Committee determined that a broader review of the resolution was appropriate.

To conduct this review in a thoughtful and systematic way, Committee members discussed using the State of Vermont Impact Assessment Tool as a guiding framework. Developed by the Vermont Office of Racial Equity, the tool is designed to help assess the potential impacts of proposed policies, including identifying unintended consequences, considering who may be disproportionately affected, and ensuring that proposed solutions respond to the needs of diverse communities.

Using principles from this framework, the REIB Committee, in collaboration with REIB Office staff, reviewed both the process used to develop the resolution and its content.

## Expert & Community Engagement

The REIB Committee held three meetings to engage the community and hear from experts including those with lived experience and local and national professionals (including city staff) in the fields of substance use, community safety, and mental health. Below are the meeting dates and links to the agenda, minutes, and recordings:

- Tuesday, August 18, 2026  
[burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10132/files/agenda/20799](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10132/files/agenda/20799)
- Tuesday, August 25, 2026  
[burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10148/files/agenda/20859](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10148/files/agenda/20859)
- Tuesday, September 1, 2026  
[burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10153/files/agenda/20921](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10153/files/agenda/20921)

Two members of the REIB Committee (Melo Grant and Laura Sánchez-Parkinson) are also members of the Public Safety Committee and Laura Sánchez-Parkinson serves on the Community Development and Neighborhood Revitalization (CDNR) committee where the resolution was also taken up by the committee and community. For meeting agendas, minutes, and recordings, please visit: [burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/)

We want to thank the 100+ community members who engaged throughout this process. Your time and perspectives are critical to the future of this resolution and will shape the direction of how our city moves towards a more healthy and safe community for everyone in our city. We welcome sponsors of the resolution to watch all recordings including public forums and discussions.

## Areas for Consideration

The REIB committee has identified four high-level considerations for the resolution and for future development of resolutions. These considerations were informed by committee discussions and insights from experts and community members:

- 1. Reconsider the resolution's structure and framing to reflect a systems-level understanding of the challenges and clearly distinguish homelessness, substance use, mental illness, and poverty from criminal conduct.**

The resolution would be strengthened by grounding its analysis in relevant historical context and existing strategic frameworks. Although these issues may intersect, treating them as interchangeable risks reinforcing harmful

assumptions and advancing short- and long-term responses that fail to address their distinct causes and conditions.

**2. Engage a diverse range of stakeholders early and meaningfully.**

Effective policy development requires early input from people directly affected by a proposal, city staff responsible for implementation, community partners, and subject-matter experts. Introducing this resolution without sufficient stakeholder engagement contributed to confusion, frustration, and limited buy-in. Future proposals should incorporate engagement from the outset to identify potential impacts and unintended consequences, strengthen proposed solutions, and build shared understanding and support before reaching the City Council.

**3. Seek guidance early when considering proposals with potential legal and budgetary implications.**

Consultation with the mayor and department heads, particularly the Chief Administrative Officer Attorney can help determine whether proposed actions are legally permissible and practically achievable. Proposals do not need to be fully developed before they are introduced; however, the Council should be cautious about advancing ideas that may create expectations among the public if significant legal or budgetary limitations could ultimately prevent implementation.

The committee wants to thank city staff and community members who took the time to offer detailed feedback on the resolution (see attachments), this includes:

- The Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, Dr. Kelli Perkins and Christian Berry
- Vermont Racial Justice Alliance (VRJA)

We hope the City Council will consider the REIB Committee and community's feedback for the Burlington Forward resolution and the development of future resolutions.



## Demands to Amend the Burlington Forward Resolution

*A racial justice, civil rights, economic justice, and equitable public safety brief to the City Council Racial Equity, Inclusion & Belonging Committee*

**THE CORE DEMAND:** Burlington Forward must be rewritten as an implementation vehicle for Burlington's unfinished racial-justice transformation—not allowed to become a replacement for it. The City already identified the problem, adopted the framework, and made commitments. The work now is to finish it, strengthen it, enforce it, and measure the results.

### The legacy of slavery made civil rights necessary. Civil rights made democracy possible.

Burlington's present public-safety debate did not begin in 2026. It grew out of a longer history of racial economic inequality, racially disparate policing, mental-health crisis response, community organizing, litigation, and repeated City findings that fragmented reform was not enough. The central question is not whether Burlington needs safe public spaces. It is whether the City will define safety narrowly around order, commerce, property, and enforcement—or systemically around equal protection, civil rights, health, housing, economic security, cultural power, and freedom from discriminatory government action.

### The connecting history

- 2016–2019 exposed a public-safety system in crisis. The fatal police shooting of Ralph “Phil” Grenon during a mental-health crisis, the 2018 use-of-force incidents involving Jérémie Meli and Mabior Jok, and the 2019 altercation preceding Douglas Kilburn’s death triggered scrutiny, lawsuits, protests, and demands for civilian oversight and de-escalation. The City Council created the Special Committee to Review Community Policing Practices in June 2019 after several highly publicized use-of-force cases.
- 2019 institutionalized a systemic equity response. Burlington had already built an equity foundation through the 2012 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and the 2014 Diversity & Equity Strategic Plan. Racial-justice organizing then helped drive the 2019 standing equity committee and senior City equity position that developed into REIB—a centralized structure intended to address systemic inequities across government, not merely administer diversity programming.
- 2020 made the systemic diagnosis explicit. The Racial Justice Through Economic and Criminal Justice Resolution declared racism a citywide health crisis, required systemic racism to be prioritized in the municipal budget, reduced the authorized officer cap by 30% through attrition, and directed freed General Fund dollars toward social services, racial and economic justice, cultural empowerment, minority-owned procurement, capital access, REIB capacity, and a baseline assessment. It also required a transition toward a public-safety apparatus aligned with community values, recurring systemic-oppression training, demographic data, reparations work, and stronger police oversight.
- The 2020 framework understood that economic injustice and public safety are connected. The City itself found that policing in the United States has historically protected middle- and upper-income white communities and property while over-policing BIPOC communities, producing physical, social, emotional, and economic harm. That is why “divest and reinvest” was not simply a staffing debate—it was a structural public-safety strategy.
- The work remains unfinished. Burlington has implemented important pieces, but procurement, capital access, Black home and land ownership, recurring training, race-data infrastructure, public-health-equity capacity, reparations, divest-reinvest accounting, independent civil-rights enforcement, and durable community reinvestment remain incomplete or insufficiently institutionalized.

# DRAFT

## Why the present moment is urgent

The same City that began this transformation now faces record racial disparity in police force. In 2025, Black people accounted for 28% of Burlington use-of-force incidents while comprising about 4.7% of the population; relative to police interactions, Black people appeared in use-of-force incidents at nearly three times the rate of White people. Since 2019, five City use-of-force settlements have totaled nearly \$1.5 million, with another roughly \$747,500 in legal fees. This is not evidence that the 2020 work was unnecessary. It is evidence that the transformation was not finished.

## Burlington Forward must be judged by the problem Burlington already named

Burlington Forward is substantially more operational about downstream control than upstream repair. Its original architecture prioritizes visible public-safety presence, contracted police, Public Space Response Teams, citations and trespass authority, cameras, encampment removal, enforcement partnerships, and private-property tools. Committee revisions added important language on equity, due process, disability, de-escalation, demographic data, civil rights, and disparate impacts. Those changes matter—but language cannot substitute for power, budgets, institutions, and corrective action.

### Business influence is relevant—but cannot define public safety

The resolution expressly identifies harm to businesses, investment, tourism, visitor experience, economic vitality, and private property as reasons for urgent action. In August 2026, the Lake Champlain Chamber also launched a Downtown Business Alliance specifically to provide “business driven advocacy” and a dedicated voice in municipal and state policy discussions over downtown vitality and public safety. Business owners are legitimate stakeholders. The racial-justice concern is the asymmetry of governmental urgency: commercial disruption activates deadlines, enforcement capacity, personnel, surveillance, and intergovernmental assistance, while longstanding racial harms in policing, wealth, housing, health, and ownership have repeatedly been met with studies, temporary staffing, pilots, one-time funds, or unfinished implementation.

### Racism is an economic and public-safety problem

National evidence reinforces the City’s own 2020 diagnosis. Citi estimated that closing key Black–White gaps in wages, education, housing, and investment two decades earlier could have added roughly \$16 trillion to the U.S. economy; its 2024 update estimated that racial gaps in income, business ownership, and homeownership represented up to \$3.9 trillion in unrealized economic activity from 2020–2024. Research by economist Lisa Cook has shown that racial violence and segregation measurably suppressed Black patenting and innovation. Crime research likewise links concentrated resource deprivation to elevated violence. Racial justice is therefore not a competing priority to economic vitality or safety. It is part of the infrastructure required to produce both.

## VRJA AMENDMENT DEMANDS

1

**Rewrite the findings and purpose** — Name the unfinished 2020 racial-justice work as part of Burlington Forward’s factual foundation. Incorporate the 2020 Racial Justice Resolution, Racism as a Public Health Emergency, Operation Phoenix R.I.S.E., REIB, the Racial Equity Strategic Roadmap, reparations, the CNA process, and current use-of-force disparities. Burlington Forward must expressly continue—not supersede—those commitments.

2

**Define equitable public safety** — Replace narrow public-order framing with a definition that includes freedom from violence and disorder, freedom from discriminatory policing and excessive force, equal protection, civil rights, housing and health stability, economic opportunity, cultural belonging, and accountable government.

3

**Remove enforcement authority from Public Space Response Teams** — Public Space Response Teams may perform stewardship, outreach, de-escalation, maintenance, navigation, and service connection. They must not be given citation, trespass, detention, coercive-intervention, or quasi-police authority.

# DRAFT

4

**Remove the standing invitation for outside enforcement** — Delete or fundamentally rewrite Section 3.07. No open-ended invitation to State Police, DMV enforcement, or third-party police. Any outside deployment must be governed by a public MOU establishing civil-rights standards, use-of-force rules, body-camera requirements, demographic data, complaint pathways, records preservation, cost, scope, duration, and independent review.

5

**No enforcement expansion before racial-disparity correction** — Before expanding the enforcement footprint, require an independent qualitative review of the 2025 Black use-of-force disparity and a time-bound corrective-action plan. Worsening disparities must trigger mandatory review, public hearing, operational correction, and budget/policy response.

6

**Data must trigger action** — Section 2.09 must do more than disaggregate data. Establish baselines, disparity-reduction targets, quarterly dashboards, independent audit authority, and mandatory corrective triggers for arrests, force, citations, trespass, encampment actions, camera use, complaints, and service access.

7

**Put REIB back at the center of whole-of-government transformation** — REIB must lead a permanent programmatic system across Policy, Training, Data, Human Resources, Economic Justice, and Prevention/Health/Wellness. Require racial-impact review of ordinances, budgets, contracts, procurement, capital projects, land use, public-health actions, and Burlington Forward implementation.

8

**Create a City Office of Civil Rights** — Equity is not civil-rights enforcement. REIB is an integrated City function and cannot independently investigate and compel the City itself. Burlington must establish a structurally protected municipal civil-rights office for complaint intake, compliance review, pattern analysis, investigations/referrals, corrective agreements, public reporting, and enforcement to the maximum extent authorized by law. Seek charter or State authority where necessary.

9

**Restore the divest-and-reinvest commitment** — Require a public ledger reconciling the 2020 officer-cap reduction, overtime, contracted policing, State Police assistance, and all claimed reinvestments. Then create a recurring upstream public-safety investment plan for Black-led community infrastructure, social services, prevention, public health, housing stability, youth, cultural empowerment, minority-owned procurement, capital access, and home/land ownership.

10

**Make economic justice an operative article** — Burlington Forward must contain deadlines, responsible officials, funding and measurable outcomes for supplier diversity, minority-owned procurement, access to low-cost capital, commercial space, workforce equity, Black home and land ownership, anti-displacement, and wealth-building—not merely enforcement and public-space metrics.

11

**Protect community-based cultural empowerment** — Recognize the Richard Kemp Center as community implementation of the promised Cultural Empowerment Community Center. Establish a recurring, transparent City investment partnership that supports community-defined outcomes while preserving Black-led independence and governance.



# DRAFT

12

**Renew racism as an active public-health emergency** — Restore permanent public-health-equity capacity; require an annual racial-health strategy, social-determinants measures, prevention and wellness investments, and public reporting. Public health must govern policy on homelessness, substance use, mental health, public-space intervention, and service siting.

## NON-NEGOTIABLE CONDITIONS IF ENFORCEMENT PROVISIONS REMAIN

If the Council retains any expansion of policing, surveillance, citations, trespass, encampment enforcement, or interagency enforcement, the following conditions must be written into the resolution—not left to later administrative discretion:

- Independent civil-rights and racial-impact review before implementation, including review by the City Office of Civil Rights once established and formal technical review from the Vermont Human Rights Commission within its jurisdiction.
- No new enforcement authority for personnel who are not sworn, professionally trained, supervised, insured, subject to complaint review, and bound by clearly published constitutional and civil-rights standards; Public Space Response Teams should remain non-enforcement.
- No camera expansion until the City adopts a surveillance-governance policy covering purpose, placement, access, retention, sharing, audit, demographic impacts, public notice, and prohibition of new biometric/facial-recognition uses absent separate public authorization.
- No encampment-removal performance target based on speed or clearance. Measure successful connection to shelter, treatment, housing and services; document displacement and racial/disability impacts; protect property and due process; and require meaningful alternatives before removal wherever legally required or practicable.
- No categorical public-health siting exclusions driven primarily by downtown image or commercial preference. Syringe services, overdose prevention and other evidence-based interventions must be evaluated through public-health evidence, accessibility, neighborhood impact, and disparate-impact analysis.
- No outside law-enforcement deployment without a written MOU, a single accountability protocol, public cost and duration, use-of-force reporting, body-camera requirements, demographic data, complaint referral, and cooperation with independent review.

## THE UNFINISHED CITY COMMITMENTS BURLINGTON FORWARD MUST HELP COMPLETE

| 2020 / unfinished commitment         | Required completion now                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Divest / reinvest</b>             | Publish the full financial and policy reconciliation; create a permanent upstream reinvestment mechanism tied to measurable safety and racial-justice outcomes.                   |
| <b>Public-safety transformation</b>  | Update the CNA/Talitha-era transformation plan using 2025 force data; preserve durable non-police crisis response and independent civilian accountability.                        |
| <b>Policy + training</b>             | Reconstitute the REIB Policy Team and Training Team; restore twice-annual Citywide systemic-oppression training and at least three annual public-safety/law-enforcement sessions. |
| <b>Race data + equity assessment</b> | Complete a Citywide race-data apparatus, full equity assessment, public dashboards, disparity baselines, and corrective-action triggers.                                          |
| <b>Economic justice</b>              | Finish minority-owned procurement, capital-access, workforce-equity, Black home/land ownership, anti-displacement, and commercial-space strategies with budgets and targets.      |
| <b>Public health</b>                 | Restore sustainable Public Health Equity capacity and renew Racism as a Public Health Emergency as an active governance framework.                                                |
| <b>Reparations</b>                   | Reconstitute and fund a Reparations Implementation body to move from study toward concrete remedies, education, policy change, and redress.                                       |

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| 2020 / unfinished commitment | Required completion now                                                                                                                                     |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Civil rights                 | Create a City Office of Civil Rights distinct from REIB and strengthen complaint, compliance, oversight and public accountability.                          |
| Cultural empowerment         | Provide sustainable partnership and investment for the Richard Kemp Center and other Black-led community infrastructure while preserving community control. |

## WHAT THE REIB COMMITTEE MUST DO NOW

The Committee should not limit its work to adding equity language around an enforcement-centered architecture. It should use its jurisdiction to require that Burlington Forward become part of the whole-of-government racial-justice and civil-rights strategy Burlington already committed to build.

1

**Return a materially amended resolution** — Do not report Burlington Forward favorably unless the amendments above are incorporated into the operating provisions, timelines, metrics, institutional authority, and budget—not merely the preamble.

2

**Order a 60-day commitment reconciliation** — Require a single public matrix covering every major 2019–2021 racial-justice commitment: authority, funding, actual spending, responsible department, status, outcome, unfinished obligation, and completion date.

3

**Require equal urgency** — Every enforcement deadline in Burlington Forward should be matched by deadlines for civil rights, racial-disparity reduction, economic justice, public health, REIB capacity, community reinvestment, and transparent accountability.

4

**Center affected-community power** — Require meaningful participation by Black residents, unhoused people, disabled people, people who use drugs, youth, immigrant/refugee communities, racial-justice organizations, service providers, neighborhoods, workers, and businesses in implementation and review.

## Conclusion

Burlington Forward is being debated as though Burlington is beginning a new public-safety conversation. It is not. The City began this conversation years before George Floyd, when repeated use-of-force incidents exposed deep failures in policing, mental-health response, oversight, and racial trust. In 2019 Burlington created new equity infrastructure. In 2020 it went further and explicitly diagnosed systemic racism as an economic, health, governance, and public-safety problem. It chose a systemic response: divest, reinvest, restructure public safety, build cultural and economic power, strengthen REIB, collect data, train government, pursue reparations, and create accountability.

That framework was not completed. Today the City continues to face severe racial disparity in police use of force while Burlington Forward proposes to expand the very forms of discretionary enforcement, public-space control, surveillance, trespass, and outside policing that require the strongest civil-rights safeguards. At the same time, organized business concerns about downtown order, investment, visitor experience, and property have received immediate institutional attention. Those concerns matter—but they cannot be allowed to outrank the safety, rights, wealth, health, dignity, and democratic agency of the communities that the government has historically harmed.

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**VRJA'S POSITION:** Do not use Burlington Forward to turn away from the racial reckoning. Use it to finish the work. Public safety without equal protection is not equitable public safety. Economic vitality without racial economic justice is not shared prosperity. Equity without enforceable civil rights is not sufficient accountability. Burlington can move forward only by completing the transformation it already promised.

## Selected evidence base

City of Burlington, Racial Justice Through Economic and Criminal Justice Resolution (June 29, 2020); City Council record and resolution. City of Burlington, Special Committee to Review Community Policing Practices report (Feb. 2020) and updated use-of-force policy materials (June 2020). City of Burlington / VRJA, Racism as a Public Health Emergency materials (July 2020); Burlington Racial Equity Strategic Roadmap (2021); Reparations Resolution (2020). Vermont Racial Justice Alliance, Operation Phoenix R.I.S.E. and June 2020 communications; VRJA Public Action Advisory. VTDigger, Burlington use-of-force disparity and settlement analysis (Aug. 17, 2026); Vermont Public and VTDigger reporting on Grenon, Meli, Jok and Kilburn. Burlington Forward original resolution and committee "What's Changed" draft (reviewed Sept. 7, 2026). Lake Champlain Chamber, Downtown Business Alliance launch (Aug. 11, 2026). Citi GPS, Closing the Racial Inequality Gaps (2020) and Closing the Racial Wealth Gap (2024); Lisa D. Cook, research on racial violence and patenting; National Institute of Justice research on neighborhood resource deprivation and violence. This document was created with AI assistance.



# BURLINGTON VERMONT

**To:** City Council

**From:** Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) City Council Committee (Laura Sánchez-Parkinson, Melo Grant, Sarah Carpenter)

**Date:** September X, 2026

**Subject:** Impact Assessment for the Burlington Forward Resolution

**Cc:** Mayor's Office, REIB Office

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## Background

On August 3, 2026, the City Council introduced *Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework for Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community* and referred the resolution to four committees, including the Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) City Council Committee. The City Council's motion stated:

*"Refer the resolution to the Committees on Public Safety, REIB, CDNR, and PAC and request a report back to the full Council on any recommended amendments on items within each committee's jurisdiction by September 14, 2026..."*

## Our Approach to Review the Resolution

Because the resolution did not identify specific provisions for review by the REIB Committee, the Committee determined that a broader review of the resolution was appropriate.

To conduct this review in a thoughtful and systematic way, Committee members discussed using the State of Vermont Impact Assessment Tool as a guiding framework. Developed by the Vermont Office of Racial Equity, the tool is designed to help assess the potential impacts of proposed policies, including identifying unintended consequences, considering who may be disproportionately affected, and ensuring that proposed solutions respond to the needs of diverse communities.

Using principles from this framework, the REIB Committee, in collaboration with REIB Office staff, reviewed both the process used to develop the resolution and its content.

### Expert & Community Engagement

The REIB Committee held three meetings to engage the community and hear from experts including those with lived experience and local and national professionals (including city staff) in the fields of substance use, community safety, and mental health. Below are the meeting dates and links to the agenda, minutes, and recordings:

- Tuesday, August 18, 2026  
[burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10132/files/agenda/20799](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10132/files/agenda/20799)
- Tuesday, August 25, 2026  
[burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10148/files/agenda/20859](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10148/files/agenda/20859)
- Tuesday, September 1, 2026  
[burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10153/files/agenda/20921](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/event/10153/files/agenda/20921)

Two members of the REIB Committee (Melo Grant and Laura Sánchez-Parkinson) are also members of the Public Safety Committee and Laura Sánchez-Parkinson serves on the Community Development and Neighborhood Revitalization (CDNR) committee where the resolution was also taken up by the committee and community. For meeting agendas, minutes, and recordings, please visit: [burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/](https://burlingtonvt.portal.civicclerk.com/)

We want to thank the 100+ community members who engaged throughout this process. Your time and perspectives are critical to the future of this resolution and will shape the direction of how our city moves towards a more healthy and safe community for everyone in our city. We welcome sponsors of the resolution to watch all recordings including public forums and discussions.

### Areas for Consideration

The REIB committee has identified four high-level considerations for the resolution and for future development of resolutions. These considerations were informed by committee discussions and insights from experts and community members:

1. **Reconsider the resolution's structure and framing to reflect a systems-level understanding of the challenges and clearly distinguish homelessness, substance use, mental illness, and poverty from criminal conduct. Try to better identify constituents that are impacting public safety and use of public spaces.**

The resolution would be strengthened by grounding its analysis in relevant historical context and existing strategic frameworks. Although these issues may

intersect, treating them as interchangeable risks reinforcing harmful assumptions and advancing short- and long-term responses that fail to address their distinct causes and conditions.

**2. Engage a diverse range of stakeholders early and meaningfully.**

Effective policy development requires early input from people directly affected by a proposal, city staff responsible for implementation, community partners, and subject-matter experts. While the drafters of Burlington Forward did receive preliminary input and intended to use the bi partisan Council Committee process as the primary way to get input; introducing this resolution without sufficient stakeholder engagement seemed to contribute ~~ed~~ to confusion, frustration, and limited buy-in. Future proposals should consider how to best incorporate more engagement from the outset to identify potential impacts and unintended consequences, strengthen proposed solutions, and build shared understanding and support before reaching the City Council. The Council should consider how committees can be used to better collect early input.

**3. Seek guidance early when considering proposals with potential legal and budgetary implications.**

Consultation with the mayor and department heads, particularly the Chief Administrative Officer Attorney can help determine whether proposed actions are legally permissible and practically achievable. Proposals do not need to be fully developed before they are introduced; however, the Council should be cautious about advancing ideas that may create expectations among the public if significant legal or budgetary limitations could ultimately prevent implementation.

The committee wants to thank city staff and community members who took the time to offer detailed feedback on the resolution (see attachments), this includes:

- The Office of Racial Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, Dr. Kelli Perkins and Christian Berry
- Vermont Racial Justice Alliance (VRJA)
- Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform (VCJR)??

We hope the City Council will consider the REIB Committee and community's feedback for the Burlington Forward resolution and the development of future resolutions.

Commented [1]: Are there others?