

**Public Safety Committee
Thursday, September 7, 2023
Remote via Zoom
Burlington, Vermont
APPROVED MINUTES**

Members Present: Karen Paul (Chair), Melo Grant, Tim Doherty

Staff Present: Kristen Kaichen (Legal Administrative Assistant), Shannon Trammell (BPD Executive Manager), Michael LaChance (Fire Chief)

Public Present: Michael Gaughan, Kelly Devine, Ed Baker, Joan Shannon (Councilor), Billy, Joe Magee (Councilor), John, Dana Paverman, Jill Badolato

Meeting called to order at 5:37 PM by President Paul.

**1. Adopt the Agenda
1.01 Adopt the Agenda**

Motion to Adopt Agenda as written.

Motion by Councilor Doherty, Seconded by Councilor Grant

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

**2. Adopt Draft Minutes from May 9, 2023
2.01 Adopt Draft Minutes from May 9, 2023**

Councilor Grant requested a statement on Page 3 of the Draft Minutes from May 9, 2023, be revised to read “Councilor Grant advised against the need for more officers and staff while attitudes remain unchanged” instead of “Councilor Grant argued against the need for more officers and staff if attitudes remain unchanged”, stating this language more accurately reflected her position.

2.02 Adopt Draft Minutes from August 17, 2023

Motion to Adopt Draft Minutes from May 9, 2023 per Councilor Grant’s revision and Draft Minutes from August 17, 2023 as written.

Motion by Councilor Doherty, Seconded by President Paul

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

3. Public Forum

3.01 Verbal Comments

Michael Gaughan, a member of the Planning Commission and a South Winooski Avenue resident, expressed support for the drafted resolution which emphasized public safety solutions, stating that the problems associated with drug dealing are different from using and require a different approach, and that the allowance of drug dealing throughout the city is inconsistent with Burlington's values.

Kelly Devine of the Burlington Business Association thanked the Committee for welcoming Downtown business folks in voicing their concerns. Devine expressed alarm at the number of overdoses BPD responded to in the last 24 hours and emphasized that people are really suffering from drug use, drug dealing, and the prevalence of these problems in the community. Devine recommended the Committee reach out to Tammy Boudah of the Howard Center for more insight and offered the Burlington Business Association's support.

Ed Baker was encouraged by the City Council's recognition of the drug crisis and emphasized the importance of viewing it as a public health emergency with public safety concerns as opposed to predominantly a public safety emergency. Baker stated Burlington cannot prosecute its way to a solution, advocated for more harm-reduction intervention strategies, and asked the Committee to consult public health officials as the resolution develops.

Councilor Shannon was concerned that the latest version of the resolution abandons public safety concerns in comparison to the initial draft resolution and that the language needs to be more positive toward the State if Burlington is to secure State support toward a solution.

Billy spoke to the initial draft resolution, stating that there were a number of people who felt the document touched on valuable findings and recommendations. Billy asked why the current version of the resolution was before the Committee in lieu of the former and if the public safety aspect would be brought back in the future.

Public Forum closed at 5:55 PM.

4. Consent Agenda

4.01 Chief's Report: BPD

Motion to Accept the Consent Agenda and take the actions as indicated.

Motion by Councilor Grant, Seconded by Councilor Doherty

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

Discussion:

Councilor Grant clarified with Chief LaChance that there was not a new report from Burlington Fire Department at this time, as those reports are typically prepared and released every other month.

5. Declaring the Drug Crisis an Emergency Resolution

5.01 Discussion on Resolution re Declaring the Drug Crisis an Emergency

The Committee discussed the resolution declaring the drug crisis an emergency and invited attending public to comment:

- By way of introduction, President Paul noted there was an earlier resolution posted declaring the drug crisis a public safety emergency, which was shared well in advance with Committee members, the full City Council, as well as the Mayor and administration. Concerns were raised that the resolution would create a narrative that the City of Burlington has worked hard to address in recognizing substance use disorder is a disease that requires medical treatment substance as a public health issue while drug dealing and other related activity in neighborhoods are issues of public safety. Due to this concern, an alternative version of the resolution was drafted by the Mayor and Councilor Magee and posted for discussion, supported by this Committee. President Paul also noted the first draft was intended to take into account all repeated feedback from committee members with regard to drug activity in neighborhoods as well as incorporating community feedback we heard at the previous public safety meeting.
- Councilor Grant clarified that the resolution does not aim to abandon public safety, as the issues related to substance use disorder require a holistic approach, and instead seeks to advocate for more resources and support from the State. For more information on the inspiration behind these resolutions, Councilor Grant recommended the public refer to the last meeting on August 17 where the drug crisis was discussed at length. Councilor Grant added this resolution would also achieve a major goal, being that updates on the drug crisis become a recurring City Council agenda item so the community is informed about the City's progress. Councilor Grant expressed support for merging the resolutions and setting a hard deadline for completing the resolution.
- Councilor Doherty agreed with Councilor Grant's statement on needing a holistic approach and also agreed that substance use disorder is a disease requiring a medical response, stating the City and City Council have sufficiently demonstrated their commitment to this perspective through a number of resolutions, policies, and initiatives. Councilor Doherty emphasized that the discussion is not about whether there is a public health crisis, but that constituents are asking the Council to acknowledge the public safety aspect in conjunction with the public health aspect and implement more effective public safety measures. Councilor Doherty added that drug distribution has profound public safety ramifications for the City that residents face on a daily basis, and proposed that the Committee take more time to work toward merging the two resolutions before bringing it before the full Council because both public health and safety are important.
- Councilor Magee stated that a resolution focused solely on law enforcement does not capture the whole issue and would lead to greater harm, pointing to how much money has already been spent on enforcement in the drug war, how much worse the problem has gotten, and that drug overdoses increase twofold after a drug bust, according to studies. Councilor Magee emphasized no one single solution is going to solve the drug, overdose,

or housing crisis and stated harm-reduction has not gotten the full support it needs to be successful and hopes the Council can speak with one voice on this issue.

- Dana Paverman of South Winooski Avenue added public health and public safety go hand in hand and thought a marriage of the two resolutions would be more holistic and emphasized the importance for children and families that the safety focus is not diluted, adding that there need to be clear boundaries and limits for what behavior is acceptable.
- John, a resident of Ward 5, echoed Paverman's comment that public health and public safety are not mutually exclusive and as a parent and employer, implored the Committee to focus on public safety, especially as employees are confronted with situations in which they are at risk on a weekly basis.
- Jill Badolato voiced support for Councilor Doherty's perspective, sharing with the Committee that she will not walk downtown alone due to safety concerns, and while no one wants to see anyone harmed or in pain, the resolution should consider everyone who lives in Burlington and that the City needs to act with a sense of urgency in developing solutions that consider everyone and both public safety and health.
- Ed Baker stated Burlington is at a tipping point and in danger of diminishing important progress that has been made over the last decade, noting the stigma around drug use is still alive. Baker added if not for the lack of support from the State and Legislature, Burlington might have been in a position today to respond and handle what is happening, referencing allocated funds that have yet to be released or spent as well as the governor's decision to veto a bill related to overdose prevention. Baker voiced support for Councilor Grant's ideas to put pressure on the State.

The Committee resolved to continue work on this agenda item at the next meeting.

6. Review of City's Emergency Plan

6.01 Review of City's Emergency Plan

Postponed until the next meeting, the date of which is to be determined.

7. Other Committee Business

7.01 Other Committee Business

The Committee agreed to schedule the next meeting date offline.

8. Adjournment

8.01 Motion to Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned with no objection by President Paul at 7:00 PM.