



Ward 6 Neighborhood Planning Assembly
Thursday, October 2, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. Greek Orthodox Church, 600 South Willard Street

*Facilitator: Peter Keating; Minutes: Charles Simpson;
Cookies: Julie Richards; Videographer: Kaylee Mumford or Jeremy Partyka*

- 6:45 Social time & cookies
- 7:00 Agenda overview and approval of September Minutes
- 7:05 Champlain College & University of Vermont Updates
- 7:15 City Councilors: Norm Blais & Karen Paul
- 7:25 School Commissioners: Stephanie Seguino and Alan Matson
- 7:35 Steering Committee Member Election – Champlain College student Ben Chason-Sokol would like to join the steering committee as its fifth member
- 7:45 VT House and Senate Candidate Forum – All Chittenden County Senate candidates and House candidates whose districts include Ward 6 are invited to share their views and identify their priority issues
- 8:50 Other Business
- 9:00 Adjourn

Ward 6 Steering Committee:

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David Zuckerman (P/D) 598-1986 davidz@together.net

For information on accessibility, alternate forms of the agenda, including something on the agenda, etc., of the Ward 6 Neighborhood Planning Assembly, contact any of the Steering Committee members listed above. The Ward 6 NPA's strive for flexibility in planning before and during the meeting. Accordingly, the specifics of the agenda and the allocated times may change.

Ward 6 Neighborhood Planning Assembly
Minutes from the **October 2, 2014** Meeting

The meeting began at 7:05 pm, at the Greek Orthodox Church, Peter Keating facilitating.

1. Minutes from the September 4, 2014 meeting presented and approved with one change proposed by Lisa Kingsbury. Item 3 was changed to read in effect, 450 beds to be added to UVM's central quad dormitory project, replacing the present 391 beds.
2. The Champlain College spokesperson, John Caulo, gave an update on changes at the college. These included:
 - a. A celebration in the afternoon of Oct. 18 on the new quad thanking the neighbors for their support during the construction of new buildings on Maple Street.
 - b. The Eagle's Landing project is nearing final approval save for one more meeting with concerned neighbors.
 - c. The college is a largely car-free campus using shuttles to take faculty, staff and students to the lakeside parking area. Shuttles use a direct route and there is a new pickup point on So. Willard. Once the newest construction is complete, the route will revert to the previous one and avoid most neighborhood streets. In reply to an audience query about bus impact, Caulo explained that bus size is related to passenger demand and less than full-size city buses. While he was aware of neighborhood concern, the busses remove considerable auto traffic from the neighborhood.
 - d. Eagle's Landing doesn't require an Act 350 review and while there is still some fine tuning being done to address neighbors' concerns, he expects construction to start in late winter 2015 and take 17 months.
3. Lisa Kingsbury, representing UVM, indicated that construction projects approved for the university were continuing in the planning and permit process. These include the STEM project, the Alumni House, and improvements to athletic fields.
4. City Counselor Karen Paul explained that the council passed a commemoration resolution recognizing the importance of John Dewey to the city. There will be a parade on Church Street in Dewey's honor soon. Improvements to the bike path are underway. The council's Ordinance Committee of which she's a member will soon look at the buffer zone issue again in the light of a recent court decision, a downtown smoking ban, and unfunded liabilities associated with the city employee pension system. The Cliff Street sidewalk is about to go to bid, she said.. Counselor Norm Blais said amnesty for small-scale marijuana use or possession wouldn't likely be an upcoming ballot item but non-citizen voting may be on the March ballot. Improvements to North Avenue to accommodate bikes will be reviewed by the city council soon.
5. School Commissioner Stephanie Sequino said that a 15 member advisory group has been assembled to help evaluate candidates for school superintendent and will start work in January. The school committee is ready to select a new finance chair. Given recent unexpected changes in this year's district expenses and revenues, the board needs to do a better job in forecasting budgets and is doing so, including taking steps to cap expenses in line with the budget. A district report on inclusion and equity will be presented soon. Aspects of inequity noted and addressed in the report include racial/ethnic disparity in disciplinary action applied to students.
6. Benjamin Chason-Sokol was nominated and approved as a new member of the Ward 6 NPA steering committee. He is a senior at Champlain College and active in the wider community.
7. A candidate forum followed. Present were 3 candidates for the House and 10 for the Senate. Peter Keating asked them to briefly comment on the most important issues they'd like to address in the next session.

- a. Johannah Donovan (H.): legislation to tax single-use plastic bags; revisiting a prior bill to encourage school board consolidation.
- b. Barbara Rachelson (H.): Making Vermont affordable for all by addressing property tax issue and enhancing the economy; given that we spend 1.5 billion on education in the state to serve 88,000 students, we need to look carefully at outcomes.
- c. Jill Krowinski (H.): Enhance access to paid sick days for Vermont workers; institute a universal college savings account plan for Vermonters to enhance college attendance.
- d. Tim Ashe (S.): Achieving universal health insurance; there are still 20,000 uninsured Vermonters. Tax policy in relation to education and health care needs attention. We need to capture the sales tax on on-line purchases to help state revenue and achieve equity with brick and mortar stores in the state.
- e. Dawn Ellis (S.): Listening to every voice when crafting legislation; building healthy communities by emphasizing preventing problems rather than simply responding to them; growing Vermont's innovation economy.
- f. Joy Limoge (S.): Applying common sense solutions to state problems; insuring transparency in state government in relation to spending; promoting job growth.
- g. Paul Washburn (S.): The unfunded healthcare mandate is unreasonable and needs to be addressed; we could have joined the federal system. Government shouldn't be in every aspect of our lives. Programs should be evaluated for their effectiveness, not simply with an eye to cut expenses.
- h. Phil Baruth (S.): We need another effort to craft a school board consolidation bill that will pass. We passed a bill last session regulating chemical toxics in children's products. He'll be looking at economic development issues as well in the next session.
- i. Michael Sirotkin (S.): Income inequality is his priority issue and in that regard he'd address the misclassification of workers including the many incorrectly classified as independent contractors and thus denied benefits. As a result, they may be paid low wages and the tax payments due the state are not collected. All state contracts should specify that prevailing wage rates should be paid to workers. He'd enhance access to earned sick days for workers. As he addresses education and health care issues, he would be guided by their impact on low-wage Vermonters.
- j. John Cisar (S.): Marijuana needs to be legalized because that's the best way to regulate it and hence to effectively fight illicit drug use. Legalization would give civilian authorities the oversight they now lack and add as much as \$11.4 million in state revenue. High taxes, including those for education, are causing too many people to leave the state.
- k. Virginia "Ginny" Lyons (S.): We need affordable health coverage for all. Where this includes care for substance abuse, we need to see how much and which programs are effective and affordable. Public health is a continuing issue though we passed a bill last session regulating toxic substances in children's products. We need support for weatherizing houses to reduce heating costs and for solar initiatives to generate jobs in the state. Lake Champlain water quality continues to need attention.
- l. Diane Snelling (S.): As a member of the appropriations committee, she has an impact on every dollar of state expenditure. Her perspective is to study which dollars create that change. Insuring water quality continues to be an issue; she worked to pass a shoreline protection bill last session.
- m. David Zuckerman (S.): Important issues are water quality, health care, marijuana legalization-which with related tax receipts from tourists could generate a good deal of state revenue. Last session he worked to help pass an end-of-life care bill, a GMO labeling bill, and a bill adding physician options in treating Lyme disease.

The forum continued with questions taken from the audience.

Q. How can we move toward implementing universal health care?

A. **Zuckerman**: While a payroll tax and health insurance tax would be high costs for employers, universal health care would provide them with a stronger and more stable workforce.

Limoge: As a small businessperson, I know I couldn't afford it. I provide my employees

health care now. **Washburn**: While a lot of people look to Europe as an example of universal health care, Germans get only a basic plan; what's talked about in Vermont is a Cadillac plan.

Ashe: The money is already there in the health care system but at the rate we are going, the costs are going to rise to an unsustainable level. The governor needs to present his funding plan. But crafting the right plan isn't easy. **Krowinski**: Democrats in state government aren't

a rubber stamp for the governor; we need to find the funding answer. Doctor Dinosaur worked well in providing all children access to health care. **Lyons**: Creating the right plan is a complex process. The governor will be presenting his plan in January or February of 2015

and at that point we'll also have to face a transition problem as we move people, say teachers, from existing plans to a new plan. **Cisar**: It is irresponsible for the public to be

asked to face elections but not know the governor's plan and associated costs. **Baruth**: No one is happy with the rollout of Vt. Health Connect, in part because it had to meet a federally-imposed timetable. Now we control the timing so we shouldn't rush and as a result end up

with problems. **Ellis**: If we could mobilize the small business owners who are in favor of universal health care but need certainty as far as costs go, that would pressure the governor. We need to listen to those who now have health care but didn't prior to the new state plan.

Their health care represents both a savings and a public good.

Q. At the state level, would you support the reforms that Burlington made in gun safety, specifically excluding guns from bars, allowing police to secure guns at the scene of domestic violence incidents, and mandating a safe storage system?

A. **Donovan**: Yes. **Krowinski**: Yes. **Rachelson**: Yes. **Ashe**: Yes on safe storage and the rest if they are found constitutional. **Ellis**: Gun violence is a health issue and I support a health care approach to responsible gun ownership. **Limoge**: No. **Baruth**: Yes. **Sirotkin**: The legislature will likely support a bill to mandate universal background checks for gun purchases, which he supports. If the state sees no problem of inconsistency from town to town, he'd support the home-rule approach taken by Burlington. **Cisar**: It's the illegal drug trade that fuels gun violence so legalization of some drugs would help. As it is now, dealers can't resolve disputes in the courts so they resort to violence. Federal court provisions may preclude Burlington's approach in gun legislation. **Lyons**: Yes. **Snelling**: Such municipal laws may require charter changes but if they are approved locally, she'd support them. She supports universal background checks for gun purchases. **Zuckerman**: Yes, if the ordinances are constitutional. Universal background checks would address gun violence associated with domestic conflict which drug legalization wouldn't.

Q. We need better voter turnout. Voters often don't understand that the state formula imposes much of the school tax bill for residents. We have a broken model for funding. While people move here to obtain services including education, their costs have become unsustainable.

A. **Lyons**: Would you propose we shift to an income tax to fund schools? **Snelling**: We spend \$1.5 billion on education for 90,000 students. I think we can level this out by looking at how we spend the money. **Donovan**: We need to enhance the conversation. **Rachelson**: Small districts and small school size are a financial problem. When we are presented with a school budget, we can't tell how much goes to services and how much to overhead. **Baruth**: The state add-on is hard for voters to understand. There are now redundancies in administration. We need to assure people that small, successful schools won't be closed as we consolidate school districts but we all may reach agreement on closing some outlier schools. **Ellis**: a school building has value beyond school use, such as for services to seniors. They could be a community learning facility.

Q. Given the state's participation in No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top with performance assessment based on standardized tests--often outsourced to private companies and some say leading to teaching-to-the-test, should the legislature support such numerical testing schemes for the evaluation of education?

A. **Donovan:** Fortunately, the Secretary of Education has criticized such excessive testing.

Baruth: When a school is deficient in test scores, they respond by addressing that area by adding extra study time which they can only find in the lunch and physical education periods. So they shrink these. My daughter has to get from one class to the lunch room, eat, and be back in the next class all in 21 minutes. My children are now studying at a public school in Sweden where educational outcomes are great yet there is ample physical education and no such standardized tests. We've gone way too far in the wrong direction. **Zuckerman:** Such testing doesn't work. I hire high school graduates to work at my farm stands and find that they can't make simply arithmetic calculations such as adding several numbers. What we need is critical thinking skills. **Lyons:** Learning is a process not necessarily reflected in a test. Such tests aren't appropriate. **Cisar:** We need to teach critical thinking.

8. A motion to adjourn the meeting was moved and accepted at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Charles Simpson



Ward 6 Meeting
Date: October 2, 2014
Sign-in Sheet

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