

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
Lakeview Cemetery
hbushnell@burlingtonvt.gov

Minutes

Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting

Wednesday, December 13, 2023, 5:00pm

MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON AT 645 PINE ST, FRONT CONFERENCE ROOM, AND VIA ZOOM

Attendance:

Committee Members: Chair Joe Magee, Councilor Ali Dieng, Councilor Mark Barlow

City Staff: Cindi Wight – BPRW, Gary Rogers – BPRW, Nancy Stetson – Planning, Felix Klitzke - Planning, Holli Bushnell – BPRW

Public Present: Maria Karunungan – Dog Task Force

Meeting called to order at 5:05 pm by Chair Joe Magee

Approval of Agenda

As the Urban Park Ranger program is in the middle of some transitions, Magee suggested removing the item from the agenda. Mark Barlow moved to approve/adopt the agenda as modified, Magee seconded, all were in favor.

Approval of Draft Minutes from 11/29/2023

Magee moved to approve the minutes, Barlow seconded, all were in favor

Public Forum

Public forum was opened at 5:11pm. As no one present wished to speak public forum was closed at 5:11pm.

Dog Taskforce Update –

Maria Karunungan, chair of the task force, shared the final report from the task force. Karunungan shared that the taskforce struggled a bit to figure out how to structure the report because of the aspects of the resolution, but PACC really helped organizing the report with their suggestions.

The report was structured by sharing all the basic recommendations followed by slides providing the details for each recommendation. Recommendations included updating animal related city ordinances, improve licensing process and increase numbers, license cats/prohibit at large cats, improve reporting compliance and enforcement through the creation of an animal control officer, establish off leash dog policy and one other thing.

Updating ordinances will include attempting to modernize and update language, improve animal shelter policy, require the licensing of cats, an increase license fees, dedicate funds raised by increased fees to improve welfare of dogs and cats, and strengthen enforcement measures.

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
Lakeview Cemetery
hbushnell@burlingtonvt.gov

The taskforce found that improving the licensing process would dramatically increasing number of licensed animals. They recommend allocating a portion of revenues for programs for cats and dogs that would improve the lives of the animals. Additionally, under the heading of improving licensing practices, the taskforce recommends expanding community outreach, licensing cats, expanding the consequences of not licensing your animals, granting BPD real time access to licensing info which would allow officers to actively verify licenses during incidents, and fund companion animal programs such as additional park facilities, low cost spay and neuter, and animal related events and education.

Karunungan explained that presently only 11% of dogs are licensed with the city. The taskforce did detailed review of licensing, and BTV rates are low when compared to neighboring cities. Moreover, licensing rates have declined since 2022 even though the city population has increased. Currently the taskforce conservatively estimates that there are 7728 dogs in Burlington. 29% of BTV households have cats, resulting in an estimated nearly 5000 cats in BTV. In an idea world, if all animals were licensed, licensing revenues would be over \$200,000, however even with a more realistic estimate, the city could raise around \$75,000 in licensing fees by putting in more effort to get animals licensed.

A major change to existing policy is the recommendation to licensing cats and prohibit at large cats. Licensing improves the welfare of cats and other animals, aids in identification for animal control, and would better insure public safety. Prohibiting at large cats would reduce disease, injury, and fatalities of cats, reduce neighborhood nuisance, and improve wildlife conservation efforts, especially for birds.

In terms of improving reporting and enforcement, the taskforce recommends creating a certified animal control officer position within the city that is granted investigative resources, adding professional experts to the animal control committee, increasing the accessibility for reporting and ensure issues are responded to (presently reporting methods within the city do not have a category for "animals" or "other"), increasing the consequences for ordinance violations, and improving the city's shelter provisions.

Responsiveness has been an issue as well as a lack of consequences when issues are reported. CSOs are currently allocated to deal with animal issues, and while their work is appreciated, a part time or full time animal control officer would make a huge difference in animal issues in the city. The reason for creation of the dog taskforce was that there were numerous incidents with off leash dogs and dog attacks. As such, the taskforce wanted to make sure they looked at what happens when an incident occurs. If someone is bitten by a dog and that animal/owner is not identified, BPD doesn't have the resources to follow through and the burden of finding that info falls to the victim. The taskforce hopes to make sure there's a way these issues can be resolved.

In terms of recommendations for off-leash spaces, the taskforce feels that adding fenced off leash area at Oakledge and formalizing the two existing fenced areas at Starr farm and Waterfront would be the right steps forward. They want to establish an off-leash policy that has oversight by parks commission. They also feel that creating a pilot program of unfenced off leash areas with clear signage, rules, and a landing page on BPRW website with clear rules and regulations would be important in the implementation of any off-leash programs. The city has 528 acres of parks, and only 3 ½ of those acres

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
Lakeview Cemetery
hbushnell@burlingtonvt.gov

are dedicated to off-leash dogs. The survey the taskforce used to get input on public opinion showed a strong desire for easy-access off-leash areas. Adding a fenced off-leash area at Oakledge was a popular suggestion on the survey, and this would ensure off-leash spaces in parks in all 3 major areas of the city.

Education recommendations include providing a “having a dog in Burlington” informational packet for when new dogs are licensed. Education and outreach would also include PSAs on leashing, feces issues, conflict/aggression reduction, and campaigns to increase licensing and raise community awareness. The presentation included a proposed calendar of educational events.

Karunungan concluded by sharing her thanks to the rest of the task force members for their 2 years of effort. She added that some of the task force members would be willing to continue volunteering if asked, working towards making their recommendations a reality.

Magee addressed the other members of the committee, confirming that the goal of the evening is to ask any final questions before forwarding the report to full council. Magee was amazed by the amount of work the taskforce completed, noting that the final report is detailed and excellent, easy to follow, and that the addition of appendices makes it even easier to follow the history of their work.

Barlow was extremely laudatory of the report. He shared that he had been looking forward to it but was delighted by how easy to read and follow it is. He asked if Karunungan had thoughts as to why BTV licensing numbers so low and falling. Karunungan felt that most people aren't aware that they need to license because they are new to our city, recently adopted their dog without looking into regulations, or it simply doesn't occur to them. Those that are aware of licensing requirements may be reluctant to license because they don't know how their fees are used. Moreover, licensing only recently became available online. Previous to that, the process was cumbersome and awkward, but now it's much easier. Now we just need to spread the word.

Barlow asked if there had been some discussion around the implementation of cat licensing. He made it clear that he fully supports the measure, he just wants to figure out how to go forward. Karunungan felt that improving ordinances is the right first step, and that an ACO would improve capacity for enforcement. She shared that the taskforce has laid out some pieces that would result in cat licensing being enforceable. There's actually a lot of support for licensing cats from an environmental perspective. Cats are really disruptive to wildlife and Vermonters see the value in registering them to help resolve these issues. Ultimately, Karunungan doesn't think cat licensing would be as controversial as it might seem.

Deing felt the report was comprehensive, beautiful, and thorough, and he shared his gratitude for the taskforce's work. He was interested in how the city can strengthen licensing, wondering if perhaps more strategizing around outreach is needed. Karunungan shared that the taskforce explored South Burlington's method – taking out ads in papers, providing prizes/incentives for licensing, and providing transparency for the use of fees. There are some people in Burlington that just don't know how the funds are used, so transparency might be just as effective as incentives. She also shared that the taskforce was considering working with landlords/housing associations to require that dogs in homes be

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
Lakeview Cemetery
hbushnell@burlingtonvt.gov

licensed. Magee was interested to explore the landlord option. He asked for a motion to forward the final report to the full city council.

Dieng added that looking into at using existing systems (bills, other kinds of outreach) to reach citizens might be a good idea. A collaboration between billing and an informational campaign. He also felt that implementation should be gradual so that people have time to adjust to the changes. Dieng moved to forward the report to council, Barlow seconded, and all were in favor.

Recreation Report –

Cindi Wight shared that, following PACC's request for this report, she reached out to city planning for assistance. She shared her gratitude to Nancy Stetson and Felix Klitzke (they/them) for leaning into the assignment and creating the presentation. Ultimately it was a fun project to work on. With that Wight gave Stetson the floor.

Stetson shared that she and Klitzke (who did the lions share of compiling) pulled data from Civic Clerk which showed around 32,000 registrations from May 2018 to present. She added that the total number of registrations in 2022 and 2023 surpassed 2019 levels, exceeding numbers pre-pandemic. 7% more unique participants attended rec programs in 2023 than 2022. Sports and daycare camps are steadily popular programs, but adult programs also show an increase in use. This may be because BPRW started tracking registrations for adult programming differently. Until 2021 they were not tracking free programs or drop-in session in system, but now they are, allowing all visits to be captured.

Stetson shared that the largest group of participants have ages that range between 6 and 17. Between 6 and 14 there are around 2000 kids in Burlington, and in 2023 BPRW/rec saw around 40% of those kids.

Klitzke was able to analyze data from 3 years of summer rec/meals programs. Because it is a drop in program the actual numbers of participants was not tracked in the database, however, the meals served are tracked which is indicative of the number of kids seen at each site. 77% of participants over the years are from Burlington though rates did change slightly based on type of programming.

Stetson shared that she and Klitzke focused on 2022 and 2023 in terms of scholarships, because usage and implementation has changed over time. Adult programming has the highest rate of scholarships. Adults are asked to pay what they can for programming (small amounts) and the balance is collected as "scholarship." Klitzke also broke down scholarships by neighborhood which indicated that the Old North End receives the highest rate of scholarships.

Participants were also broken down by neighborhood. The New North End is overrepresented in parks programming both in terms of all participants and child participants. 50% of parks program participants are from the New North End. The Old North End summer program is rec and nutrition, there is no licensed day camp or full day camp through BPRW for the Old North End. The Boys and Girls club and the Sara Holbrook Center provide programming in that area of the city whereas the New North End and South End does not have access to those two resources. The team also looked at participants in programs in specific neighborhoods by who is participating in those programs and in doing so discovered

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
Lakeview Cemetery
hbushnell@burlingtonvt.gov

that programs tend to serve the neighborhoods in which they take place. Gary Rogers shared that the slides do show an equity problem in terms of accessing programs from other neighborhoods. Families in the Old North End, for example, have trouble getting to programs in the New North End or South End.

Dieng felt that the age breakdown of 18 to 64 was too broad a number to tell a story. He asked if it was possible to get a more detailed age breakdown. Stetson shared that, while adults are not required to provide their exact age when registering she can provide a greater breakdown.

Dieng asked if the information includes those who make use of the Heineburg senior center, and Rogers confirmed that Heineburg is a completely separate entity and not included in the presentation. He added that it would be good to get data on that.

Dieng asked how scholarships are accessed. Rogers shared that when one signs up for programming there is a spot to request scholarship. If a person calls or stops in, staff explain policy to them. Rogers added that BPRW only started flagging scholarships annually this year. They haven't tracked that in the past, but is starting to do so moving forward. There are no barriers to scholarship access, the participant just has to ask. Scholarships do not include rec and nutrition.

Barlow wanted to examine the presentation in greater detail, but found it interesting that participation rates look coordinated by proximity. Wight shared that there is a need for a community center in South End as folks won't go all the way up to North End for programming. All South End events are outdoors. She added that, ultimately, the cost of program doesn't really matter, people are still going to programs and BPRW is able to provide scholarships.

Magee felt that it was interesting to have this analysis to improve survey of parks/non-profit private camps. He wondered what and where the gaps are and what we can do to fill them. Rogers shared that a benefit of Civic Rec is that City Arts just started using it as well as BPRW. Fletcher Free Library has free programs which aren't captured, but now we're getting BPRW and BCA info in programming usage.

Barlow asked if a Urban Park Ranger update would be appropriate for the January meeting and Wight concurred that it would unless there is a desire to focus that whole meeting on the Waterfront.

Magee shared that adding the Urban Park Ranger update to the January meeting might be possible but he would look at scheduling. An agenda for the next meeting will be circled back to after the holidays.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:14pm. The Waterfront will be the primary focus for the next meeting to be held on 1/24/2024 at 645 Pine St and via Zoom.