

**BURLINGTON CITY COUNCIL
CITY HALL, CONTOIS AUDITORIUM *OR*
REMOTE MEETING WITH CALL-IN
BURLINGTON, VERMONT
MINUTES OF MEETING
January 22, 2024
DRAFT**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Karen Paul
Joan Shannon
Ali Dieng (via
Zoom, then in
person at 7:42
PM)
Zoraya Hightower
(via Zoom)
Sarah E
Carpenter
Mark Barlow
Joe Magee
Gene Bergman
Ben Traverse
Tim Doherty
Melo Grant (via
Zoom, then in-
person at 6:55
PM)
Hannah King

OTHERS PRESENT:

Miro Weinberger
Katherine Schad
Jared Pellerin
Kim Sturtevant
Samantha
Sheehan
Lori Olberg

1. CALL TO ORDER and AGENDA

The meeting was called to order by City Council President Paul at 5:30 PM.

MOTION by Councilor King, SECOND by Councilor Dieng, to adopt the agenda.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

2. WORK SESSION ABOUT PUBLIC SAFETY TAX INCREASE **5:30 – 6:30 PM**

2.1. Work Session About Public Safety Tax Increase

Mayor Weinberger began by noting that the Board of Finance has received a number of updates about the administration's proposed Fiscal Year 2025 budget, but that it is now at the point where the full Council should be informed about the budget build and challenges, particularly if they are asked to vote on tax rate changes. He said that fortunately, they had known that the FY25 budget would be challenging when they finished the FY24 budget, and so they have implemented a number of studies with the hope of finding efficiencies in the City and lessening the gaps in the budget, and have been anticipating this challenge since last July. He said that the large elements driving the budget

challenges are sustained inflation, sunseting federal assistance, and large increases in investments in public safety. He said that addressing these challenges entails reducing spending in non-public safety cost centers, growing existing revenue, and an increase in tax revenues from a tax on visitors and a modest 4% fire and safety property tax increase. He noted that the City is very cognizant of the large property tax increase that will result from the BSD's requested increase, and has tried to limit the increased tax burden for the municipal portion of property taxes.

Chief Administrative Officer Schad began a more detailed presentation on the FY25 budget. She began by setting the context, noting increased costs to the General Fund, decreased emergency and one-time funds available to balance the budget. She spoke about the budget pressures that the City has successfully navigated since the last voter-approved tax increase in FY20. These include responding to a global pandemic, historic inflation, rebuilding the police officer ranks, creating a new host of public safety resources (CSOs, CSLs, etc), creating the Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB) and Business and Workforce Development departments, and focusing on the unsheltered population in the City. She noted that budgetary challenges have risen along with these other challenges, particularly driven by inflation and higher personnel costs, the expiration of federal one-time funding, and a lack of property tax increases since FY20.

Chief Administrative Officer Schad noted that these challenges have culminated in a \$9 million budget gap if no action is taken. She said that this gap can be closed while maintaining the projected public safety budget by capturing growth in grand list revenues and other taxes, reducing the City's operating costs through efficiencies, completing a review and increase of non-property tax revenues within Council authority, extending the full phase-out of one-time funds by one year, and requesting voter approval to increase the current Police and Fire Property Tax Cap by \$0.03 on Town Meeting Day. She spoke about organic growth in grand list and other taxes, which includes about \$900,000 combined between the two. She spoke in more detail about the operational efficiency studies that would identify areas to reduce spending in the largest General Fund City Departments. She spoke about a study pertaining to raising non-property tax revenues, which would include increasing user fees by about 10% to account for inflation while ensuring that youth scholarships and access to programming remain available, and increasing the hotel tax by 2% so that the City and State rate would be 13% (comparable with the rest of the region), which would raise approximately \$1 million per year. She noted that the current budget includes \$1 million of ARPA funding. She spoke about increasing the Police and Fire Tax Cap, which would fully fund the police and fire budgets, and would include the projected increase in officers per the Rebuilding Plan and \$250,000 of flexible police funding for emerging needs. She said that lifting the cap does not obligate the Mayor and City Council to implement the tax increase, but gives them the authority to do so. She noted that the current public safety tax only funds about one third of the Fire and Police needs, and that the remainder comes from the General Fund and other sources. She provided details about the increased public safety costs since the last tax increase in FY20, which add up to around \$4.1 million.

Councilor Carpenter noted that the police department is over budget and understaffed, and asked where the vacancy savings are for their budget. Mayor Weinberger said that they will share vacancy details as a follow-up. He said that with the current year's budget, they are already spending more than the vacancy savings. Councilor Carpenter said that a 4% increase in municipal tax doesn't equal a 4% increase in property tax, and said it would be good to articulate the effects overall. Mayor Weinberger agreed, saying that this would be a 4% increase on the 33% of property taxes that come from the municipality, not from the State, and is smaller than 4% overall.

Councilor Shannon said that she would caution about communicating it as a 4% increase on the 33% of taxes that come from the municipality, since some people have income-sensitive tax bills, which are reduced for the State share based on income, but that such tax reductions don't occur for the municipal portion of taxes. She asked about the reduction of \$3 million in General Fund spending after operational analysis is conducted, and asked whether that includes job cuts and asked why the City is presenting that number if the study is still underway. Mayor Weinberger replied that they think this is an achievable goal based on the operational analysis. Councilor Shannon confirmed that this is a goal to which the administration is aiming, and that that could mean a reduction in services. Mayor Weinberger replied that yes, there could be a decrease in services as a result of this reduction goal, but that they are seeking to minimize service reduction.

Councilor Grant asked about the \$250,000 in flexible funding for the Police Department, and asked why this does not also apply to the Fire Department. Mayor Weinberger replied that the Fire Department plays a key role in the challenges the City is facing and that they are budgeting for substantial overtime for the Fire Department, and that they could reallocate some of that flexible funding to the Fire Department if needed, though they are projecting a need for this funding more on the enforcement side. Councilor Grant said that it would be best to be clear that both departments could access that funding, given that the Fire Department has been nimble in responding during this crisis, given that they responded to 40% of overdose calls on their own in 2023, as well as creating a community response team. Councilor Grant asked about the study around PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) funds, given that certain properties are paying less than they should and that this should be reviewed. Chief Administrative Officer Schad replied that PILOT review is not occurring this year but in FY25, given that other ideas are being implemented in FY24 and there is a lack of staff capacity to also conduct the PILOT fee study this year. Councilor Grant requested a list of the properties that pay PILOT funds and copies of their agreements, and Mayor Weinberger replied that this information could be provided.

Councilor Doherty said that a question that constituents will likely ask is why Burlingtonians are being asked to pay more for the Police Department when they feel that they aren't getting as good a set of services from the Police Department. He asked what community supports are being provided, and Mayor Weinberger replied that the community supports line includes the CSOs, CSLs, supervisors, park rangers, the CARES team, CAIP director, and domestic violence team. Chief Administrative Officer Schad replied that the majority of this line item is new since FY20. Councilor Doherty asked whether this budget projects the costs of growth for the 20 or so officers that were lost since FY20, and Chief Administrative Officer Schad replied that this budget projects for growth in the number of officers to increase to 77. Mayor Weinberger said that the CSOs and CSLs are adding a lot of value to the department currently, and that when the Department is back up to its goal of 82 sworn officers, they may have to revisit staffing levels and determine what numbers are adequate for a fully-staffed Police Department. Councilor Doherty asked whether there are rubrics or metrics to assess whether the community supports are adding value. Mayor Weinberger replied that the City tracks the calls that the CSOs and CSLs respond to, which is a way of measuring productivity, and that the City continues to determine the value of these community resources. Councilor Carpenter added that it will be important to determine if there are activities that the CSOs and CSLs aren't currently doing that they could be doing in future, to fully utilize them.

Councilor Bergman requested more detail about the actual dollar tax increase for the public safety tax cap. He also asked for details about operational cuts, in terms of the work done to date. He also asked for the percentage and dollar amounts in the unassigned fund balance. Mayor Weinberger noted that the \$1 million one-time funding is being used so as to avoid the use of unassigned fund balance to close budget gaps. Councilor Bergman asked the administration to share the legal opinion on the franchise fee that was alluded to. He also said that he would like to see the administration's analysis for both gross receipts and local option taxes, saying that he would support a further increase if there is room to do so. He asked for examples of what the flexible \$250,000 of funding for the Police Department could be spent for. Mayor Weinberger replied that for example, when the Council wanted additional funding for security during the holiday shopping season downtown, this flexible funding could have been used for that.

City Council President Paul asked whether the reduction in Burlington Police Department FTEs at the airport from 8 to 6 is reflected in the chart that compares FY20 to FY25 BPD spending, and Chief Administrative Officer Schad replied in the affirmative. Chief Administrative Officer Schad also noted that they are able to increase the number of FTEs at the airport to 7. City Council President Paul asked about the \$1 million in one-time funding that is proposed for closing the budget gap, since at a previous Board of Finance meeting they were told that there were no more ARPA funds remaining. Mayor Weinberger replied that not all of it is ARPA funding, and that not all of the ARPA funding that was committed to other activities was spent, and that a recent review showed unspent ARPA funding in other areas. He said that there is at least \$400,000 in ARPA funding that could be used for this, and that they are looking for other sources of one-time funding without tapping into the unassigned fund balance. City Council President Paul asked for an analysis of still-existing one-time funding.

Councilor Traverse said that voters are going to look at the tax increase as a package, which includes both the 13.9% increase related to the school district, and this municipal increase. He said it would be helpful to see the full effect of tax increases if they vote in favor of the increase. He said he would like additional information on the revenue currently generated from gross receipts and local option taxes, saying that if there is any flexibility to further tweak these to lessen the pressure on the property tax increase. He asked if there are any other gross receipts taxes that the City is not taking advantage of. Mayor Weinberger said that the administration will follow up with further information. He noted that the City will be about 1% higher than surrounding municipalities with its gross receipts taxes, so he cautioned about increasing it too much further.

Councilor Hightower asked for a breakout of the currently-provided preventative services and new preventative services, to see what is being maintained versus what is being added, for the CSOs and CSLs. Mayor Weinberger replied that they will follow up with this detail.

Councilor Barlow asked for more detail about local option tax and gross receipts taxes for Burlington's regional neighbors, such as South Burlington, Williston, and Colchester. He also asked about the projected \$3 million reduction in operational expenses in the General Fund, and asked how much room there is there to offset some of these larger increases elsewhere in the budget, noting that this operational reduction projection seems fluid. Mayor Weinberger acknowledged that the projection is fluid until the study is finished. He also pointed out that the lifting of the public safety tax cap does not obligate the City to raise taxes to that cap, and that if more revenue comes in from other sources, they may not need to raise the taxes up to the cap. He said that they will have a further update on the operational study's timeline next week.

Councilor Shannon asked about other additional public safety costs that were needed, such as the use of State police presence downtown to fill gaps, and asked about assumptions related to these other costs in the budget. She said she wants to ensure that the City is budgeting for all of the various forms of security needs that they have.

Councilor Grant reiterated the point about the delineation between what a sworn officer can do versus what a CSL or CSO can do. She said that often, officers can't do some of the work around mental health issues that the CSLs can do, saying that the City needs to be mindful of the unique offerings of each position as they pertain to public safety responses. She also expressed frustration about the difficulty of getting data on a consistent basis, saying that the issues being responded to by each type of position should be on the Chief's monthly report, to help inform future staffing decisions.

Councilor Dieng said that the Police Department should be included in the list of departments assessed for the operational study, given that the focus until now has been on rebuilding the Police Department but not necessarily assessing its needs. He said that if the City cannot do this, they should consider a separate assessment focused specifically on the public safety departments in the City.

3. SECOND PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED CHARTER AMENDMENTS FOR MARCH 5, 2023 ANNUAL CITY MEETING **START TIME: 6:30 PM**

3.1 Second Public Hearing On Proposed Charter Change Amendments For March 5, 2024 Annual City Meeting

Acting City Attorney Pellerin noted that state law requires the City to hold two public hearings if charter changes are being proposed, and that this amendment pertains to allowing the Burlington Electric Department (BED) to increase its revolving line of credit from \$5 million to \$10 million. He said that additionally, the Council was considering a charter change revolving the oversight of police, but that this was referred to the Police Commission at the last City Council meeting, and it will come back to the Council for consideration in June.

City Council President Paul opened the public hearing.

There were no public speakers.

City Council President Paul closed the public hearing.

4. PUBLIC FORUM: **TIME CERTAIN – 6:45 PM**

4.1 Verbal Comments

Forum opened at 7:05 PM.

MOTION by Councilor Traverse, SECOND by Councilor Bergman, to suspend the rules and increase public forum to 3 hours and extend it until 10:00 PM.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

COMMENTS:

Burlington residents (in person):

- Jordan Weiner said that the apartheid free pledge should go on the ballot. He spoke as a Jew who lost families in the Holocaust, and opposed the restriction of democracy to get this on the ballot. He said that the Palestine Solidarity Movement surpassed the number of required signatures to get this measure on the ballot, demonstrating popular support for this measure. He spoke about statements made to put this measure on the ballot.
- Helen Scott said that the apartheid-free Burlington resolution is authored and endorsed by Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and secular residents and groups, and that the democratic process was followed to get it on the ballot. She said that they are seeing a pattern of censorship of criticism of Israel, and asked why this is happening now. She said that Israel is committing crimes against humanity, and the majority of the world is horrified. She said that the Council should put this resolution on the ballot and that this is a question of democracy and humanity.
- David Gettys urged a no vote on the apartheid-free pledge. He said that the resolution vilifies Israel and would energize extremists and divide the Burlington community. He spoke about the security measures that the local temple has had to implement, in response to the wave of anti-Semitism in the community.
- Alyssa Chen spoke about a number of arguments used by Zionists with regards to this ballot measure. She said that one argument is that placing the measure on the ballot would cause a rise in anti-Semitism. She said that this conversation will occur in the community whether or not the Council creates a civic venue for it, and that Israel's current genocidal actions have certainly contributed to a rise in anti-Semitism. She said that ignoring this genocide will not cause a decrease in anti-Semitism. She said that another argument asks why the City is singling out Israel, and noted that U.S. involvement and intervention could stop this genocide and apartheid. She said that another argument is that it goes too far to call this a settler project.
- Spencer Karovsky said he is appalled that yet another resolution demonizing Israel is being considered by this Council, saying that the City has its own issues to deal with. He said that Israel is objectively the most progressive and democratic nation in the Middle East, and said that this focus against Israel is targeting Jews. He said that similar outreach should have been displayed for the attack of Hamas on Israel in October.
- Maya Sobel said she has been an active member in the community fighting anti-Semitism. She said that narrowing the frame and placing the blame on the world's only Jewish country is problematic. She said that Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and has been thanked by nonstop rockets and bombings since then. She spoke about the Jews still being held hostage in Gaza. She spoke about the violence of Hamas, speaking about their goals of annihilating all Jews.
- Josephina Light spoke about the pain and sorrow on both sides of this war. She pointed out that it is disingenuous that Burlington's City Council is allowing this issue to divert its time and not focus on the real issues at hand in this community. She said that there are issues in the community that need the City's attention, and that this resolution will bring no benefit to the Burlington community. She said that this resolution will not bring peace and will cause tensions to rise in the City. She said that the City should not use other genocides to describe this one [this current issue].
- Max Abrahams spoke about the terrorist attack against Israel on October 7, saying that the conflict came to him personally, as his Israeli family sought shelter and friends were deployed in a war they don't want. He spoke with concern about the number of anti-Semitic acts that

have increased around the world, including in Burlington. He asked why the City Council is wasting its time and resources on a resolution that will have no effect.

- Ashley Smith said that the City should uphold the democratic right to uphold the citizens' wishes to place this measure on the ballot. He said that the City should have rights to decide where it stands on local, national, and international issues, given that three Palestinian men were shot in the Burlington community as a result of this conflict. He spoke about the Zionist claim that Israel is not an apartheid state, which is false, given the documented apartheid nature of Israel. He noted over 65 laws that discriminate over Palestinians. He said that this resolution does not sow divisions or racism.
- Britta Fisher urged the City not to block this apartheid resolution from going on the ballot. She said that Jewish safety depends on Palestinian liberation. She said that allowing Zionists to define Jewish identity endangers Jews by eroding the definition of anti-Semitism. She said she is heartsick that the language, which opposes all forms of bigotry and oppression, is language that the Council wishes to exercise its power to keep off the ballot despite the 5,000 signatures garnered from Burlington residents. She urged the Council to let the public weigh in on this issue, which is a non-binding resolution.
- Winifred McCarthy-Don began by noting that over 20% of Israel's population are Muslim and many are high-ranking military and other academic, science, and art positions. She said that 8,550 Jews were forced to leave their homes in other Arab countries in 1948. She noted that Vermont is bigger than Israel.
- Rabbi Aaron Filmiss spoke about the sense of openness and love in Burlington and that this ballot item makes many residents afraid, citing anti-Semitism in the community. He said that Israel is a tiny country populated by refugees from across the world, despite millennia of forced conversions. He said that Israel is not apartheid. He said that Israel withdrew from Gaza to exchange land for peace but that Hamas took over Gaza, and now uses its civilians as human shields. He said that Hamas is pro-Iran, not pro-Palestine. He expressed hope that local leaders form a partnership for peace and create opportunities for more facilitated dialogue on this issue.
- Rabbi Eliyahu Junik noted that any petition with the right number of signatures deserves a place on the ballot as the people have spoken, however, he challenged this and said that the City Council can exercise its right as guardians of the City's well-being. He said that petitions should align with the values of the community. He said that this petition does not make the community feel safe, and that it is divisive and false. He said that Israel is not apartheid.
- Rabbi Jan Salzman said that she is not supportive of the Netanyahu administration, nor Hamas. She said that the community needs to listen to each other. She said she would support a motion that places equal blame on the Palestinians and Gaza, in addition to Israel. She said that a ballot item should be more accurate. She said that this current proposed ballot item is causing a lot of pain.
- Adam Winter provided the definition of genocide, saying that the Gaza conflict is not a genocide, but that the pro-Palestinian movement is calling for a genocide against Israel. He noted the number of Arab Israelis in positions of power in Israel, while noting that no Jewish individuals hold positions of power in Gaza. He said that the effect of this resolution will create divisiveness in the community and concern for Jewish safety in the community.
- Jeff Schulman expressed concern for the level of hate and vitriol caused by these resolutions in the City of Burlington. He said that the supporters of the ballot light a fire in the community that doesn't need to exist, saying that any impact of this resolution will have no effect on the situation in Gaza but will only cause more divisiveness in the community.
- Lucy Gluck spoke as an ally for both Jewish and Muslim neighbors. She said that the City needs to look at how it comes together or divides itself. She spoke about anti-Jewish sentiments on UVM's campus. She said she is pro-Israel and pro-Palestine and said that Burlingtonians should come together to discuss peace, and that this petition is bringing divisiveness to the community. She expressed support for the interfaith group that is pursuing a two-state solution.
- Paul Fleckenstein spoke against genocide and apartheid in Gaza and how this division and violence have come to the U.S. in the form of racism, shooting of students, billions of dollars in taxes to prop up an apartheid state, and Zionists aligning with pro-Israel right-wing anti-Semites in the U.S. He said that the Democratic majority on this Council will continue to foster racism and violence by pretending that this divisiveness isn't caused by those perpetuating the genocide.

- Maggie Chadwell expressed concern about the Council disrupting the democratic process that got it elected in the first place. She said that this plan was brought to the people to vote on, and that the Council is protecting the Zionists. She emphasized that this is a local issue and urged the Council to allow the community to vote on this.
- Isabella Lucharelli spoke about taking an activists stance against the genocide in Palestine, and that the City must stand with Palestinians to protect the freedom of all people. She said that by not adopting this pledge, the City is staying silent against these issues. She urged the Council to allow this resolution on the ballot.
- Allison Adams agreed that this issue is divisive, and spoke about the treatment of Palestinians in Israel and Gaza and the West Bank. She said that Palestinians do not have freedom of movement and equal treatment in Israel, and that this meets the definition of apartheid. She said that this ballot initiative isn't divisive, because the division has already existed for decades. She said that the Council should uphold Burlington's democratic values.
- Abby Massell said that the Council and Mayor's agreement or disagreement with the content of the resolution at hand is irrelevant, given that they have as much of a right to vote on this referendum on Town Meeting Day as the rest of Burlington's voters. She urged the City to allow the voters to vote on this. She spoke about the 3 Palestinian men who were shot in this community. She said that violence is already here, due to anti-Arab and anti-Muslim hate.
- Kate Massell spoke in solidarity with the 3 Palestinian men who were shot by a white supremacist two months ago in Burlington. She said that this has brought the Israel/Palestinian issue to Burlington. She said that if the Council prevents this measure from going onto the ballot, it is clearly an endorsement of atrocities like the genocide in Gaza. She said that the shooting of the Palestinians in Burlington did not occur in a vacuum.
- Melanie Needle spoke about the negative impacts that voting yes on this resolution would have on the people of Burlington. She said that these include negative impacts against Jews, that this is a hateful resolution, that this resolution would be in violation of Title VI, which precludes the City from engaging in activities that are discriminatory on the basis of nationality, and that this resolution would single out Israel as not being entitled to the same equality.
- John Tadlock said that this shows that the democratic right to vote is not being upheld in Burlington. He said that the City needs to allow the democratic right to vote on ballot initiatives brought forth by the citizens. He said that the City should push back against the imperialist agenda that creates sanctuary cities in the first place.
- Merrick Broderick called on the Council to allow the people of Burlington their chance to vote on the apartheid-free community pledge. He said that voting against this resolution to allow the citizens to vote would demonstrate that the Council does not trust its constituents to take part in governing this City. He said that this is censorship and is an insult to democracy and the people of Burlington.
- Jackson Francis spoke about the work done by Vermonters for Justice in Palestine and its broader coalition to gather the required signatures to have this placed on the ballot, with the expectation that the City would respect its own charter. He said that an affirmative vote does not support Israel or Palestine, but supports the voters' right to choose for itself.
- Jesse Gustafson spoke in support of the apartheid-free measure and the democratic process. They said that this is a local issue, given the shooting of Palestinian men in Burlington tow months ago. They asked the Council to allow the voters to be heard, rather than obstruct the democratic process.
- Jeff Potash said that the quality of life in Burlington has deteriorated in recent years and expectation that were taken for granted, including properly maintained roads, personal safety, urban cleanliness, exemplary schools, have been waylaid in favor of political grandstanding and social experimentation. He said that this is exemplified by tonight's discussion. He said that the Council was elected to focus on the local issues. He spoke about a growing sense of hatred, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia in the City.
- Adam Franz spoke about the process of obtaining signatures to get the apartheid-free resolution on the ballot for Burlington. He said the Council is likely to overturn this initiative and tend toward oligarchy. He reminded the Council that they are not asking it to vote on the measure, but to vote to allow its constituents to make their democratic decision. He noted that democracy itself is inherently divisive. He noted the City's historic opposition to South African apartheid. He said that the Council should allow this measure to proceed to the ballot in March.

- Rosalee Schecter said that there is a different path forward than this ballot initiative, saying that this resolution prompts the City to choose sides and vilify one over the other. She said that the City should focus on creating opportunities for dialogue and furthering the discussion around peace and healing. She spoke about the group Partnership for Peace, which is leading work toward sustained peace in Israel and Palestine.
- Mort Zachtir asked the Council to vote in opposition to this petition, as it only addresses oppression by Israel and does not mention Hamas or the actions on October 7th. He said that when Israel forcibly took residents out of Gaza in 2006, they left greenhouses. He said that it is emotional on all sides. He expressed hope for a peaceful two-state solution.
- Nereet Zachtir spoke about the suffering of the Palestinians, hostages, citizens of Israel, Ukraine, and all war zones around the world, women under Sharia law, and LGBTQ people who are persecuted internationally. She said that the Council will serve its citizens best by creating cultural programs and activities that create dialogue that unit its residents rather than divide them. She spoke about the homeless and mentally ill in the City that need the City's help, and that this resolution won't help them.
- Crystal Cole spoke as a representative of the Vermont Worker Center, saying that the City should follow the democratic process and put the apartheid ballot measure up for a vote. She noted that opposition to Zionism is not anti-Jewish. She also noted that speaking against apartheid isn't anti-Israel. She said that coexistence is possible. She also said that this is a local issue, and that Burlington should support its Muslim community by showing that it cares about their safety.
- Peg Price said she wants to live in a City that embraces diversity and spoke about how this resolution directly impacts the City. She said that Palestinian Americans, Muslims, and Jews are living in fear right now, and that the City needs to work to build a sense of safety for everyone. She said that she is scared about how this petition will be interpreted, expressing fears that it may lead to more targeted attacks and negative treatment of Jews in the community.
- Ilana Siegel said that this is the third time in two years and second time in six weeks that the topic of Israel is on the table for discussion at City Council. She said that the City should be talking about its many local issues, not about this conflict. She noted that many Jewish members of the community have sent money to Israel, and asked how the City would approach the divestment statement in this resolution. She asked whether Jews would be determined to be unacceptable to live in Burlington and whether synagogues will close. She asked whether businesses will be closed because they sent money to Israel. She asked whether this resolution would be legal under laws of boycott. She said that she would like to create unifying conversations in the Burlington community.
- Robin Mazza said that she supports a two-state solution and that this anti-Israel rhetoric is untrue. She said that children in public schools are experiencing anti-Semitic language that is specifically targeting Jews. She said that Burlington is unsafe for Jews in the City. She said that this petition is grossly one-sided.
- Andrew Shawbeck urged the City not to adopt the ballot petition, and that the City is not designed to be involved in complex foreign policy matters. He said that adopting this pledge will sow discord and disunity in the community. He urged the Council to support peace and unity within the community by voting no.
- Linda Siegel spoke about the number of international issues that the City could be up in arms about, and named a number of them. She noted that this is the third time in two years that this issue has come up in the City and asked whether there is some measure of anti-Semitism at work here to demonize the state of Israel. She said that initiatives such as this reduce the quality of life for many Burlingtonians.
- Adam Bluestein said that the petition to place a referendum on the Town Meeting Day ballot is another attempt to vilify Israel in this chamber, and urged the Council to vote no. He noted that Jews make up just 1.2% of the population in Vermont. He said that this current ballot initiative makes people feel less safe.
- David Herrari expressed disappointment about the citizen petition to add an anti-Israel advisory question to the Town Meeting Day ballot in March, which attributes the terms apartheid regime and settler colonialism to Israel. He said that this initiative is not one-sided, and that the divisive and inflammatory language is dangerous. He urged the Council to vote no on this ballot initiative.

- Celia Lieberman spoke about moving here from Israel after a mass shooting terrorist attack in 2016, which was perpetrated by Palestinians belonging to ISIS. She expressed disappointment that this ballot initiative further polarizes the community and pits it against itself, especially when many here are not personally affected by such division. She said that this initiative will legitimize the sense of anti-Semitism in the community. She said it will also invalidate the pain that Israelis are living with every day and will dismiss the hurt caused by Hamas.
- Shachi Kjet said that residents are begging to be allowed to vote on a subject that so many have already expressed a community need for, and that to be silenced and rejecting the right to vote makes a joke of democracy. She urged the City Council to say yes to the right to vote and to say no to genocide.
- Ben Jasted said that a proxy war is being waged in Burlington. He spoke about the rising homelessness, fentanyl addiction, petty and violent crime, housing crisis, and children going to school in an abandoned mall. He said that the Council is taking vital time, effort, and goodwill and focusing them on this conflict rather than on the community and supporting one another. He said that this is a dangerous game of ideological brinkmanship.
- Thomas Sutton urged the Council to uphold the democratic process.
- Antonio Golan said that this ballot measure's opponents have repeatedly argued that this matter is divisive and it is not within the City's purview. He said that in reality, this is nothing but empty rhetoric, and that the reality is that allowing citizens to vote to have Burlington declare itself an apartheid-free community would put the Democrats in a politically uncomfortable position. He said that years from now, history will recognize Israel's apartheid regime for what it is.
- Michelle Sekalcic said that it is now Burlingtonians' turn to vote as ordinary citizens, and that the Council should allow the democratic process to play out. She asked what kind of lesson this teaches children about civic engagement, because this is allowing the peoples' voices to be blocked because those in power disagree with it.
- Bruce Tisher urged the City Council to vote no on this proposed item, asking what business it is of the City to weigh in on a conflict occurring 5,000 miles away. He asked how this will help with any of the very real, very close issues that the City needs to contend with. He said that City resources should go to places under the City's purview.
- Theo Whelan spoke in support of democracy, which has always been a battle. He said that the 55 richest white men in the country wrote its constitution, and that it was designed to thwart democracy. He spoke about how workers and poor people have tried to improve democracy, including with citizen-led ballot initiatives. He said that one way to solve social issues is to put them on the ballot and letting people speak. He expressed disappointment in the Zionists who are afraid of democracy.
- Aspen Overy said that "never again" truly means "never again", and not just when it's convenient or benefits our economic interests. She spoke about Palestinians being killed in airstrikes and Palestinian babies orphaned by the Israeli apartheid regime. She said that the City has an obligation to be on the right side of this issue and that voters have the right to vote to say this.
- Romeo van Hermann spoke in opposition to any resolution or ballot item that is divisive or anti-Israeli, because there are local issues that need the City's urgent attention, such as the unhoused and tent encampments in the City. He expressed disappointment that the unhoused are not seeing the same level of attention and support that this ballot initiative is.
- Dan Castrigano said that they should declare Burlington an apartheid-free City and that this item should be placed on the ballot to let the people decide.
- Hannah Lawrence expressed support for the apartheid-free ballot measure, and expressed concern about the power grab that would prevent this from going on the ballot. She said that conflating criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism is dangerous and distracting from the real anti-Semitism that is occurring here and around the world. She said that opponents have said that there are more urgent issues to address in the City, but asked what is more urgent than addressing the root cause of the anti-Arab and Islamophobia that led to the shooting of three Palestinian Americans two months ago here. She said that the City's leadership is uplifting a foreign government.
- Lizzie McCullough urged the Council to put the apartheid-free measure on the ballot. She said that efforts to distance the community from the acts of violence going on purposely obscures the truth that US-made weapons kill children in Palestine and Israel, and that these depend on

our tax dollars to fund an apartheid government. She said it would be a shame that the hard work done to bring this measure forward would be blocked by our own elected officials.

- Will Lynch urged the Council to allow the apartheid-free pledge to go on the ballot in March. He urged the Council to understand the humanity of these communities in the Middle East that are so gravely affected by this conflict. He urged the Council to pause and mourn those who have been lost, as well as think about the implications of their actions tonight on their political futures.
- Milzak Karajic said that on behalf of the 6,000 Muslims living in Burlington, they do not feel safe because the Council voted against a ceasefire. He asked how a ceasefire could hurt anyone. He said that this sent a clear message, which was that shooting Muslims and shooting Palestinians is okay, even when they are shot right here in Burlington. He said that it is the Council's job to protect Burlingtonians, and to think about how its actions and stances regarding international issues affect its constituents here.
- Joe Kane said that this body is anti-democratic, and that it was anti-democratic when it chose to give an unpopular handout to the Air Guard with the lease extension, with its appointment of the police chief, and with its pulling of the police oversight board measure off the ballot last week. He said that it was anti-democratic to keep the City Hall Park ballot item off the ballot in 2019. He said that only those who are blinded by privilege can see this municipal government as representative and democratic. He said it is anti-democratic that City Councilors are paid so poorly that the working class need not apply. He said that it is anti-democratic that elections aren't publicly funded. He said that this will set a precedent.
- Chris Gish asked the Council to respect democracy and allow the people to vote on an item that they feel is important to them. He spoke about numerous instances where voters disproved of something but their voices weren't heard. He said that this item does not condemn Israel or Jews, but calls for an end to its apartheid regime, settler colonialism, and military occupation. He said that this measure is the first step toward any real healing.
- Maya Jamaldine said it is ridiculous to have to come here and beg the Council to allow its citizens to vote on a ballot item. She said that her family begged her not to return to Burlington after the Palestinian men were shot, and she spoke about being worried about being targeted if she speaks Arabic or looks too Arabic. She said that it is very disrespectful to not let citizens to vote.
- Haim Losch said that the resolution has incorrect and false statements. He stated that Israel is not an apartheid regime nor settler colonialism. He said that Israel has the right to exist and protect itself.
- Amalia Kane spoke in support of democracy, safety, and justice for Palestinians. She spoke about the collapse of the health system and the massive amount of human suffering taking place in Gaza.
- Mukhadim Bata said that his treatment as a Palestinian here is similar to his treatment as a Palestinian in Israel, except that here he isn't being killed. He said that the policies are similar. He said that it seems that this country is being ruled by Zionists. He asked where American pride is when it comes to policies against Israeli brutality.
- Rach Margolis said that she is here to stand up against hate, hate against Muslims, hate against Jews, and hate against fellow Americans. She said that she is here so that she can tell her children that she stood up against hate.
- Susan Leff said that before she comments on what is being discussed here, she highlighted what isn't being discussed, which includes the Uighur Muslims being held in concentration camps in China, the war crimes in the Ukraine, the Palestinian refugees confined to refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, or other issues. She urged the Council not to put hate on the ballot in Burlington. She said that the pledge is one-sided and endangers both the Jewish and Muslim citizens in the City. She said that the Council needs to work on the problems it has, not make the City less safe for everyone.
- Mazir Karachi said that he moved here for peace and tranquility. He said that this is a human issue, because all people are humans. He said it is the Council's responsibility to ensure peace.
- Dylan Pilcher spoke in support of putting this measure on the ballot and that people should have the choice of making Burlington an apartheid-free City. He said that this should not be a controversial issue. He said that research shows that the West Bank is under military occupation and Gaza is under a suffocating blockade. He said that the City needs to work for justice for all people.

- Emma Redden expressed concern about sentiments heard from the Council and Mayor about blocking a vote on the apartheid free community pledge. She said that Burlington has a history of debate and participatory democracy, and that it feels condescending to suggest that a community cannot hold the weight of this. She urged the Council to allow the democratic process to play out. She said that this movement is multi-faith and multi-racial because they understand that Jewish safety is also tied to Palestinian safety.
- William Keeter noted that at Columbia University, the police used chemical weapons against Palestinian solidarity protestors, which were developed by the IDF to be used against Palestinians and used against people here. He said that this shows that the democratic rights that the City thinks it has can be taken away at any moment. He urged the Council to vote with its conscience.
- Amy Malinowski spoke about a unique feature of Vermont's democracy, which is its Town Meeting Day, and which is used to come together for the common good and to instruct its direct representatives. She said that however, in Burlington, the most recent efforts that people have made to hear each other out have been shut down or attacked by City leadership. She spoke about instances of community-petitioned ballot items being blocked by the Council.
- Fareed noted that every other municipality in Vermont has some sort of measure for direct democracy, but that Burlington does not and has time and again blocked these types of measures. He said that those who will vote against this measure tonight are the same people who have no problem with using state violence right here in Burlington to move homeless people out of the public.
- Martha Carpenter spoke as a teacher from the Ohavi Zedek preschool, noting previous synagogue leaders who have spoken as not in support of the resolution, saying that it is being driven by a small and vocal group that seeks to vilify Israel. She urged the Council to allow the voters to weigh in on this issue and asked that they support the resolution and allow it to be placed on the ballot.
- Jay Jonathan said that the Council wouldn't need to spend all this time discussing this if the City would just let it go on the ballot, which is simple, and more representative of the democratic process. He said that this is a global issue but it also has local implications. He said that preventing dialogue on this conversation is a nod to white nationalism.
- Deborah Clemmer spoke in support of this resolution being on the ballot, saying that the vast majority of Israelis and Palestinians want peace, though their leaders don't. She said that the citizens of both countries are suffering. She said that communities around the country are discussing this because the U.S. government lacks the courage and will to demand that Israel stop killing Palestinians and destroying their land, hence this grassroots movement at the community level.
- Laura Masell urged the Council to allow the apartheid-free measure on the ballot for Town Meeting Day, saying that Burlingtonians deserve to learn, discuss, and weigh in on these difficult issues, without conflating the opposition of the actions of the Israeli government and the U.S. support of this with anti-Semitism. She said that voting Burlington an apartheid-free City would declare the community's opposition to racism.
- Peter Lakowski spoke about South African apartheid and how it mirrored the Jim Crow South in the U.S. He also noted that Germany studied this in the 1930s as well. He said that this is a worldwide phenomenon and harkens back to a time of racial terror. He said that this resolution is a great success because it has sharpened in peoples' minds what is going on in Palestine.
- Logan Roots asked why this resolution is being perceived as bad, since it condemns apartheid and the horrors that are occurring in Gaza right now. He said this isn't a question of anti-Semitism, but a question of democracy, since they are asking the Council to allow this to be put on the ballot for a vote.
- Christopher Aaron Felker spoke about how the rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have made the community feel. He urged the Council to vote no on any initiative condemning Jewish people, since the City is experiencing unprecedented outbreaks of lawlessness, drug trafficking, and homelessness, and asked how the Council feels that it can weigh in on this global issue.
- Kit Andrews said that the issues at hand are peoples' understanding of the history of the current situation in a faraway land and how that relates to the wording on the resolution, and whether the voting citizens of Burlington should be allowed to express their opinion on the

resolution. She said that in her mind, there is only one issue, and that is giving voice to the voters and allowing the democratic process to play out.

- Jake Schumann spoke about the divisive City Council meeting on December 11th, saying that a precedent of systemic racism was established. He encouraged everyone to understand the opposition, because everyone wants the same thing—an end to this war.
- Will Lambeck said that the proposed referendum is not anti-Semitic. He asked the Council to put this on the ballot and let the voters decide, since no single person is the arbiter of what is anti-Semitic or not.
- Emerick expressed shock that residents would put in so much work to get this on the ballot and follow the legal, democratic process, just to have it blocked from the ballot by the City Council. He said that Councilors can disagree with the wording of the referendum, because they can vote against it on Town Meeting Day, which is the point of putting it on the ballot.

MOTION by Councilor Bergman, SECOND by Councilor Traverse, to reconsider the suspension of the rules and extend the time limit of public forum to allow the Burlington residents (in person and online) and the representatives of organizations and property-owners in Burlington who have signed up to speak.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

- Sandy Baird urged the Council to put this resolution on the ballot for the Town Meeting Day vote, in honor of the tradition of Town Meeting Day and American democracy. She also spoke about Burlington as the first municipality to have both a sister city in Palestine and a sister city in Israel. She asked the Council to honor the traditions of local politics and democracy and allow the voters to vote on this issue.
- Emily Lightman expressed disappointment that the reputation of Burlington is tarnished by the obstruction of dialogue and progress. She spoke about how the divisions seen within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are seeping into the community and dividing Burlington itself. She asked the for opportunity to engage in productive discomfort and lean into necessary dialogue. She said that the way forward must begin at the local level. She asked the Council not to support this resolution, but to allow for community engagement in a way that empowers communal conversation.
- Colin Palmer spoke about the effects of the current conflict on the health system in Gaza. He also noted Vermont's participation in trade with Israel, saying that participating in this trade makes Vermont complicit in an apartheid fascist regime. He spoke about how Sears Lane was bulldozed by the City, noting similarities in Israel's actions in Gaza.
- Halley Sussenwein asked whether those who have called Israel an apartheid state have been to Israel, saying that the attacks of October 7th were pure anti-Semitism and hate. She spoke about how she feels unsafe in Burlington and on campus. She urged the Council to vote no on putting this resolution on the ballot and to help find a path of peace that does not alienate any citizen.
- Fiona Duckworth said that the only parts of the resolution she disagrees with are the parts that mention apartheid regimes, settler colonialism, and military occupation. She said that she wants equality for all people and wants Palestinians to feel safe in Burlington. She said she supports a resolution to this conflict, but also wants to bring attention that the language surrounding this conflict requires nuance and thought and conversation. She urged the Council to vote no and to help provide a space for conversation that supports peace in the community.
- C. Green asked the Council to put the apartheid-free question on the ballot in March. He said that the fact that at least 5% of the voting population put their signature to a petition for this to be on the ballot signals that this is truly a local issue. He said that tens of thousands of people have been killed and that is a massive problem, and it should stop.
- Nicole Hanson said that she is a Palestinian who has never been to Palestine because it is an apartheid state. She urged the Council to vote yes on putting the apartheid-free measure on the ballot. She spoke about the limitations on movement in the West Bank for Palestinians. She urged the Council to let the people vote and let the City be a democracy.

Burlington residents (via Zoom):

- Siavo Lavina Chason thanked the Council for attempting to stifle democracy, as it makes her job as a radical so much easier. She urged them to let the peoples' voices be heard. She said

that equating Israel and Zionism to Jews and Judaism is deeply anti-Semitic. She said that Israel is guilty of genocide, not apartheid.

- Valerie Goldberg spoke about the injustice of women being held hostage in captivity and asked how this liberal City that respects women is fine with them being raped and mistreated. She spoke about how Vermonters need to take responsibility for this, and that they owe it to their children to stand up against rewriting history and that the Council should vote no on this. She said that Jews are the indigenous people of Israel and that they can't be colonizers. She urged the Council to vote no on this resolution.
- Patricia Myers said that placing this item on the ballot in March is inappropriate and is outright anti-Semitism. She urged the Council to vote against placing this on the ballot.
- Sharon Bushor expressed concern for the Council and residents of Burlington about the work session around the public safety tax that took place earlier tonight, saying that the work session was rushed, given that it is considering adding a City tax increase to the ballot. She said that there is more information that is needed for the Council to make a good decision on it. She suggested, as an alternative, phasing the tax in over FY25, to lessen the brunt of the increase on residents. She spoke about the disproportionate death that is occurring in Gaza versus what is occurring in Israel. She said that putting it on the ballot is appropriate, but said that the City should additionally have dialogues in the community to get to a mutual understanding and start healing.
- Ferene Paris spoke about the declaration that many on this Council supported, which was a declaration in 2020 of racism as a public health emergency. She said that the issue that is occurring right now in Palestine and Israel and its effects on the local community are no different, and that we have wavered from that stance of racism as a public health emergency. She said that she is worried about the collective state of the community.
- Dee Graham spoke in support of this resolution and putting it on the ballot.

Burlington property-owners or organizations (in person):

- Naomi Burrell spoke as the Director of Youth Education at the Ohavi Zedek Synagogue. She spoke about how Burlington's Jewish community is frightened of the current environment, and said that this fear will only increase if the Council decides to vote yes on this resolution to allow the measure on the ballot. She said that this would cast a very complicated Middle East conflict into a stark yes or no light. She said that this ballot measure would only sow more division in the community.
- Wafik Fayor spoke as a Palestinian refugee. He said that this ballot measure can be considered a local issue as long as the United States supports the state of Israel and taxpayer money is going to support the regime. He said that if Burlington wants to solve its own issues, it should stop sending aid to Israel. He said that this conflict can be solved by approaching it similarly to how apartheid was solved in South Africa. He said that the Council should respect democracy and allow this to be on the ballot.
- Sergey Sprenner said that this is the second time in six weeks that this issue has come before the Council, and the third time in two years. He said that white supremacist comments are still racist even if uttered by people of color, and spoke about having rabbis be lectured in this room about what anti-Semitism is. He said that this resolution was never about fixing anything.
- Marina Schapner spoke as a Jewish refugee from the Soviet Union, saying that she was brought to the U.S. by her parents to escape the anti-Semitism of that country. She spoke about feeling unsafe for herself and her children in this community since the attacks on Israel by Hamas on October 7th. She said that anti-Israel rhetoric eventually leads to violence against Jews across the world.
- Topaz Weiss spoke about how what is happening in Gaza and Israel is horrendous. She spoke about feeling unsafe and helpless in this situation, and added that this referendum will hurt the Jewish community and make them feel unsafe and that it is the product of anti-Semitism.

Forum closed at 10:41 PM.

MOTION by Councilor Bergman, SECOND by Councilor Dieng, to suspend the rules and complete the agenda.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

5. DELIBERATIVE AGENDA

5.1 Resolution: March 5, 2024 Annual City Meeting—Advisory Ballot Question re: Pledge of Mayor And City Council (Councilors Bergman, Magee, Dieng)

MOTION by Councilor Bergman, SECOND by Councilor Magee, to waive the reading and adopt the resolution.

DISCUSSION:

- Councilor Bergman said that he is sponsoring this resolution because he believes in supporting the fundamentals of democracy. He spoke about past examples where he has done this, such as the nuclear freeze ballot item in March 1981. He said that this is about the right of people to have a real and meaningful say on the issues that matter to them. He said that he has been struck by the widespread support in his ward and throughout the City to put this measure on the ballot. He said that denying this right would weaken democracy. He noted criticism that this would divide the community, and responded by saying that the community is already divided and that keeping this off the ballot will not bring the community together. He said that there will be conflict in the Middle East over this until there is a peace that addresses the root cause of this conflict, and that keeping this item off the ballot and ending the Citywide debate on it will not change that. He noted criticism about the characterizations within the pledge portion of the ballot question, and that it is one-sided and doesn't address other countries' atrocities, and he replied that this is what an election is for, and it will allow a full and honest debate on apartheid and colonialism. He said that voting to place this on the ballot does not put Councilors on one side of the debate or the other, and he urged the Council to not deny the voters of Burlington this opportunity. He said that the Council must act on this because it was brought to them by the voters and this is the City Council's job to do. He spoke about how putting the nuclear freeze petition on the ballot in 1981 actually made a difference in international dialogue.
- Councilor Hightower spoke about how she has learned a lot on this issue from people on all sides of it. She said that the Council needs to be more educated on this issue. She said that because the City has had a hate crime occur here, the Council should create the space to come together to discuss what happened. She said that because this was brought to the Council by petition, she will support to put it on the ballot. However, she said that there are speakers who come to speak during public forum who have no personal ties to this issue but speak in violent terms, and said that sometimes it feels as though they are unaffected by their own words, and cautioned that they choose a different path, because others are affected by their words and it is sometimes difficult to listen to, especially if others have endured trauma due to this issue. She said that speaking violently and dehumanizing people causes violence and dehumanization and that hate creates more hate. She said that she will work to bring forward a resolution that promotes discourse and a community conversation, because this is needed in the community. She spoke about how the first resolution related to this issue was tabled and there was no action, despite having a divisive conversation about it. She reminded everyone that one of the three Palestinian men who was shot asked the community to think of the dehumanization of Palestinians that have become collateral in a conflict. She said that this current resolution came to the Council from the community due to the Council's inability to find language or come to a conclusion about the resolution in December. She said that Burlington has a unique responsibility in light of what happened here in November. She said that she does not support the language around apartheid and ending colonial settlements, and would rather see language around a ceasefire in the pledge.
- Councilor Traverse expressed appreciation for the effort put in to organize and collect signatures for this petition, but said he would respectfully vote against placing the proposed referendum on Burlington's ballot. He noted that there are multiple examples in Burlington and across the state of municipal governing boards electing against placing petitions for questions before their voters, and he cited

Supreme Court rulings allowing such. He agreed with Councilor Bergman around the outpouring of sentiments around this item, and said that the biggest concern from his perspective is around the hundreds of comments received by members of the community who are unsettled, hurt, and afraid that the City Council would take up an issue that is solely critical of Israel. He spoke about the rise in anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the community. He expressed concern that placing this question on the ballot would cause further division and harm in the community. He acknowledged that this question may spur productive dialogue and debate, but said that he would rather keep this discussion going through other avenues than a ballot item.

- Councilor King spoke about her engagement with the community over the past number of weeks on this issue. She said that she voted for the ceasefire measure in December, but said that this question is different and was written in a way that is one-sided. She said that this petition would increase the division in the community and that Burlingtonians on all sides of the issue have said that they do not feel safe in Burlington. She said that she would prefer if members of the community found ways to dialogue with each other to promote peace, and that she would actively support such activities and would put time and resources toward this and tangible ways to contribute to humanitarian efforts.
- Councilor Magee said that this room is the most tangible access that people have to their government, whether through their City Councilor or the Mayor's office, and that this is where people come to have their voices heard. He said that this City has a long history of standing against oppression and apartheid. He recognized the effort that it took to collect signatures and petition for this issue to be on the ballot, and said that it is not the Council's place to stand in the way of that. He said that the community owes it to itself to show up and discuss this in as many venues as possible and find common humanity in these situations. He said that this Council should not stand in the way of democracy.
- Councilor Carpenter said that she cannot support put this on the ballot, noting that the structure that allows for advisory, non-binding ballot items would not be used for the common good in this instance. She said that she supports most of the language in the first portion of the pledge, but expressed puzzlement with what it means to be an apartheid-free City, and asked how that would be implemented, given that it's a statement. She said that the City needs facilitated dialogue. She said that she has learned a lot about the Middle East through the course of this process, but said that she is still learning and is not ready to pick a side, which is what this ballot item would require. She said that Burlington has a strong history of coming together, but said that this ballot item will not foster the dialogue and conversation that the community needs to promote peace.
- Councilor Grant spoke in support of the college students who shared their stories, saying that UVM has had a great deal of controversy in their non-reaction to charges of anti-Semitism, and adding that UVM can still do better. She noted Bernie Sanders as saying that a just cause for war does not excuse atrocities in the conduct of that war, in response to Netanyahu's response to criticism about the conduct of his campaign. She said that the City needs to think about the tens of thousands of people who have been killed in this conflict. She said that placing this item on the ballot would uphold vibrant democracy. She said that the relationship that the U.S. has had with Israel makes this conflict not equivalent to some of the other international conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine and the plight of Uighurs in China. She said that she also doesn't feel safe in the community, having dealt with equity and policing for a number of years, but that it is nothing new. She said that bias and racism in schools is a terrible problem, saying that they need to do more education in schools to combat this for Muslims, Blacks, and now Jews. She noted that with regards to apartheid, the occupied territories are occupied. She said that the community is not as progressive as it thinks it is and that it needs to be real about some of its discussions.
- Councilor Barlow acknowledged that this issue divides the community and makes the community feel unsafe. He said that the ballot is not a healthy way to continue this dialogue, nor the way to find common understanding or unit on this complex

topic. He said that he would support Council action to promote a facilitated community dialogue on this.

- Councilor Dieng agreed that this issue is complicated, divisive, and unsafe, and that this is the third time that the Council is allegedly targeting the Jewish community (which is untrue). He said that they are all members of this community and that they agree that what is happening between Israel and Palestine is wrong and it is a genocide. He said that they love and support the Jewish community here, but that is not the problem. He said that the issue here is around democracy, and that the Council's fundamental role is to respect human rights and freedom of speech, which is what this resolution is about. He asked to allow the voters to have a say. He urged the public to listen to the recent Mayoral debate about free speech. He said that the City is opening the door for more controversy if it does not allow this measure on the ballot. He said that it will continue coming to the City Council until they allow the people to have a say.
- Councilor Bergman said that he is struck by how criticism of Israel is conflated with anti-Semitism, which is a long-standing political tactic. He said that as a non-Zionist Jew, he does not believe that they are the same or that criticism of Israel is anti-Semitic. He said that he hopes that this false equivalence continues to be rejected, and he additionally hopes that the conflation that ties all Jews to wrongful acts is also rejected. He spoke about how he, other Councilors, and the Mayor, have regularly gotten emails from a local neo-Nazi. He said that quashing a vote on this question will not decrease anti-Semitism in this community. He stated that anti-Semitism is vile and that threats of violence against Jews are unacceptable, and critics of Israel must be clear about this. He said that supporters of Palestinian freedom need to be clear that the work to end the occupation requires a rejection of anti-Semitism. He noted that one of the most successful strategies of the defenders of Israeli policies is to delegitimize non-violent forms of resistance, including BDS (boycotting, divestment, sanctions). He quoted Jonathan Kuttab, an international rights lawyer and a citizen of East Jerusalem, regarding the use of non-violence in this conflict.
- Councilor Hightower said that she is supporting putting this on the ballot tonight and that she is supportive of a community forum, but not at a replacement. She would like both. She said that this Council has a history of saying that it can do things better than the community initiatives brought forward but that sometimes it ends up not following through on those statements. She said that for any member of the community who has been targeted and feels unsafe, they should know that members of the Council have also been directly targeted because of their identities as well, and that they emphasize.
- Councilor Grant said that the Council really needs to think about how it handles certain issues, since it does not handle some issues well. She said that the Council has been ignorant and insensitive about some issues of equity within the community and that it needs to figure out how to act upon them and be empathetic. She said that the Council needs to be trusted in order to help foster dialogue within the community.

VOTING (by roll call): Councilor Barlow – nay, Councilor Bergman – aye, Councilor Carpenter – nay, Councilor Dieng – aye, Councilor Doherty – nay, Councilor Grant – aye, Councilor Hightower – aye, Councilor King – nay, Councilor Magee – aye, Councilor Shannon – nay, Councilor Traverse – nay, City Council President Paul – nay (5 ayes, 7 nays); motion fails.

6. ADJOURNMENT

6.1 Motion to Adjourn

MOTION by Councilor Magee, SECOND by Councilor King, to adjourn the meeting.

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

The meeting adjourned at 11:32 PM.

RScty: AACoonrad