

Public Safety Committee
Thursday, August 27, 2026
Remote via Zoom/In-Person in Sharon Bushor Conference Room, 1st Floor, City Hall,
Burlington, Vermont
DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: Buddy Singh (Chair), Melo Grant, Evan Litwin, Laura Sanchez-Parkinson

Staff Present: Jessica Brown (City Attorney), Rachel Jolly (CEDO Assistant Director), Becky Penberthy (CCCJC Justice Programs Manager), Mary Danko (Library Director), David Lines (Howard Center Street Outreach at FFL)

Public Present: Maddie Posen, Bella Fearn, Brian Clifford, Tammie Brownell, Chris McGrath, Jonathan Farrell, Ed Baker, Nolan Rampy

Meeting called to order at 5:32 PM by Councilor Singh.

1. Adopt the Agenda
1.01 Adopt the Agenda

Motion to Adopt Agenda as written.

Motion by Councilor Litwin, Seconded by Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson
Final Resolution: Motion Passes
Yes: Unanimous

2. Adopt Minutes
2.01 Motion to adopt draft minutes from July 23, 2026 and July 27, 2026

Motion to adopt draft minutes from July 23, 2026 and July 27, 2026 as written.

Motion by Councilor Litwin, Seconded by Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson
Final Resolution: Motion Passes
Yes: Unanimous

3. Public Forum
3.01 Verbal Comments

Maddie Posen of Ward 8 expressed support for the Burlington Forward framework and commended City Council members for passing the resolution asking for help from the governor and implores the governor, mayor, and council to come together to solve these problems, including enforcing existing laws against drug use as part of that effort and addressing public safety concerns in the downtown area.

Bella Fearn, of Ward 3 and an organizer for Vermont Harm Reduction Advocates, provided notes to the Committee on proposed changes to the Burlington Forward resolution and spoke to

Section 4.03 regarding the overdose prevention center, stating that the resolution as written would create more barriers to establishing OPC and restrictions increase risk of overdose and creates barriers to alternatives for public substance use, worsening the issue of public drug use. Fearn recommended that councilors look at the [Service Assessment Report](#) completed in March 2026 to inform Burlington Forward as far as the framework relates to the Overdose Prevention Center and how to ensure it would be accessible for those in need of its services and ultimately ensure the center's effectiveness. Fearn also added Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform is starting an NPA tour to provide updates and education about the OPC to community members, with the next meeting being September 9 for Ward 1 at 7:30 PM.

Brian Clifford, who organizes with mutual aid groups operating in City Hall Park and works with BTV Cop Watch, expressed opposition to the law enforcement-related measures of Burlington Forward, stating more police presence downtown will not have the desired impact, citing that the last few summers of increased police patrols have not resulted in a drop in drug-related activity in the downtown. Clifford also noted concerns about racial disparities and Use of Force incidents only worsening with more police presence and that councilors need to consider how black neighbors will be impacted by policies from Burlington Forward.

Tammie Brownell, a Burlington resident and business owner, commented we need to expand our definition of safety beyond physical safety and think about the general public's mental health. Brownell emphasized supporting businesses and strengthening the overall community will allow Burlington to be in a better position to support the unhoused population, and that consequences pave the way to recovery.

Chris McGrath, a Burlington resident, expressed concern that the Burlington Forward resolution's call for more law enforcement presence and activity will lead to short-term success but not yield long-term meaningful results, stating that history has shown us this does not work.

Jonathan Farrell, Ward 4 resident and executive director of COTS, expressed support for the Burlington Forward resolution because it will bring people together to talk about strategies for downtown and guiding people to recovery and believes the current situation is detrimental to everyone and enforcement of existing laws is important.

Ed Baker, speaking as someone with lived experience of substance use disorder, commented the most unsafe population are the ones dying from overdose on the streets, stating they have been alienated from society and struggle with many issues and trauma beyond houselessness and addiction. Baker states those factors make this small population difficult to engage, which is the main benefit of the overdose prevention center because it would meet these people where they are at, noting that it is a small but necessary part of the overall long-term solution the community needs, and to obstruct it is to worsen the problem everyone is trying to solve.

Nolan Rampy, a Howard Center clinician and president of the Howard Center Union, echoed Baker's comments and stated being against the Burlington Forward resolution. Rampy shared they have witnessed funding for social services go down year after year, and that the resolution only offers a solution in terms of more punitive action against a vulnerable population to make downtown Burlington safe for commerce, which is not the way to do it. Rampy said actions like

rezoning so Food Not Cops cannot serve food to the homeless community or prevent needle exchange programs is gross, and while the problem desperately needs to be addressed, this resolution is only going to bring law enforcement down on the most vulnerable population.

Public Forum closed at 6:05 PM.

4. Consent Agenda

4.01 BPD Report with questions/answers from committee members

Adopted as part of the consent agenda.

4.02 BFD Report with questions/answers from committee members

Adopted as part of the consent agenda.

4.03 Proposed Amendment to BCO Sec 41-45A(f)(3) - Appeal Hearing Scheduling Timeline

Adopted as part of the consent agenda.

Motion to adopt the consent agenda as written.

Motion by Councilor Litwin, Seconded by Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson

Final Resolution: Motion Passes

Yes: Unanimous

Discussion:

Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson commented their disappointment at chiefs' absence and stated the Committee would have benefited from the chiefs' presence at this meeting. Councilor Grant seconded.

5. Deliberative Agenda

5.01 Mary Danko Fletcher Free Library Public Safety Data/Feedback Report

Library Director Mary Danko with David Lines from Howard Center Street Outreach gave a presentation on Fletcher Free Library's experiences and approach to public safety in the last year. No action was taken.

5.02 Rachel Jolly CJC: Update on City Circle

CCCJC Director Rachel Jolly and Justice Programs Manager Becky Penberthy provided an update on City Circle to the Committee. No action was taken.

5.03 Discussions on Items in Burlington Forward

The Committee discussed the latest recirculated draft of the Burlington Forward resolution and how they will approach work sessions. No action taken.

6. Adjournment

6.01 Motion to Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:07 PM.

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