

Parks Commission Meeting

September 8th, 2026 at 5:30pm

645 Pine St., Front Conference Room & Zoom

Staff in Attendance: Lewis, Sauve, Cahill, Gustin, Doyle & O'Daniel

Commissioners in Attendance: Lantieri, Boehm, Mobley, Davis, Bergmann & Mamo

Lantieri opened the meeting at 5:35pm by welcoming everyone.

1. Agenda

1.1 Motion to amend/adopt agenda

Mobley made a motion to adopt the agenda. Boehm seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.

2. Consent Agenda

2.1 August Meeting Minutes

2.2 Battery Park Special Use Permit Request (Pride Parade Fest)

2.3 Calahan Park Special Use Permit Request (BFC Jamboree)

Boehm made a motion to adopt the consent agenda. Bergmann seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.

3. Public Forum – Time Certain, 6pm

3.1 Verbal Comments

Public forum was opened at 6:17pm.

KJ Doyle, BPRW's Event Manager, was present to give an update about the Waterfront Park event season. She began by reviewing the successful season so far, noting that all events that were ticketed saw higher ticket sales this year than the last few years. She shared that the return of the Higher Ground concert series was fantastic. Doyle then touched on the final 3 upcoming events at Waterfront Park – Grace Potter's Grand Point North event, which has had strong ticket sales so far, followed by a Flynn event and then a new event called Mojo Burlington. She continued that this is a grassroots concert and festival production company focused on local music, artists and businesses and they have been working diligently with BPRW to make this event happen here in Burlington. She shared that she is excited to bring another large scale event to Waterfront Park because those increase the Department's ability to support smaller events across the City. Doyle also noted that fundraising walk/run events are about to kick off for the season.

Lantieri offered volunteer support if needed at any point.

Doyle responded that these events are all set but that she would be in touch about her Halloween event soon!

With no one else present, public forum was closed at 6:21pm.

4. Deliberative Agenda

4.1 Vegetation Ordinance Overview and Approvals

Gustin began by sharing his screen and giving a brief overview. He shared that they were there to get the Commission's recommendation for approval of this ordinance. He shared that they have incorporated as many of the comments received so far as best they were able to and if approved tonight they will proceed to the Conservation Board next week and are aiming to bring it to City Council at the end of the month, with anticipation that it will be referred to their ordinance committee in October.

Cahill noted that an exciting addition to the process will be a public meeting on the 21st where community members will be invited to come and learn about the ordinance and the amendments that are being made. He shared his excitement to utilize this as an educational opportunity as well as some tree giveaways. Cahill shared that he feels this ordinance is going to strengthen a lot of Burlington's unique characters in terms of the rare natural community types that exist across the landscape in the urban forest and the shade trees that line the streets and that it feels like a celebration as well as having some measures in place to protect those.

Gustin shared that the current ordinance is missing a lot, and the goal of the update is to establish and maintain diversity in age and species in trees that make up Burlington's Urban Forest, as well as broaden diversity in native species of vegetation in the open spaces. He continued that this applies City-wide, including public property as well as institutional and private properties. He shared that the existing ordinance was adopted in 1962 and most recently amended in 1995 and had some basic standards around burning and removing trees on public property, but not much else. Gustin continued by listing the changes that have happened between now and 1995, including the Open Space Protection Plan adopted in 2000, the creation of the Conservation Legacy Fund a few years after that, a Climate Action Plan that was adopted in 2010, the reality of climate change being real and not being able to meet emission targets globally so shifting to focus on resiliency and adaptation instead, and the brand new Open Space Plan that was adopted earlier this year, which specifically called out updating the Vegetation Ordinance as an action item. Gustin continued that Burlington's green spaces have contributed to climate resiliency, biodiversity, water quality and overall quality of life for the community. He then shared some facts and figures that came in large part from the spatial analysis lab work that was done as a part of the Open Space Plan recently, noting that there is currently 40% tree canopy cover which is a slight decrease of about 1.5% from 2014, which includes about 228 acres of gain but 337 acres of loss in that time frame, hence the slight net decrease. He continued by sharing that the canopy is unevenly distributed throughout the City, as is the tree loss and gains. Cahill chimed in that at one point in time there was a goal connected to the City's Climate Action Plan from 2008 and the only nature-based aspect of that plan was tree planting until 50% tree canopy was achieved, which would be roughly the equivalent of trying to return all of the farmland at the Intervale to canopy. He continued that while it isn't a good sign that Burlington is losing canopy, the heart of this update is keeping the canopy that exists and helping it grow stronger.

Richards noted that cities in general struggle to maintain tree canopy because it tends to get lost in places where they don't have control, which is important to keep in mind here in Burlington. She continued that the updated ordinance tries to help with this.

Cahill continued that the ordinance alone is not going to get Burlington to where it needs to go but the educational and active stewardship aspects of the Open Space Plan is a good vehicle to help with that, so they are two pieces that work well together. He continued that the idea of encouraging active, daily stewardship is what will support these efforts. He used the example of stewardship zones that protect and buffer natural areas, which can be used as a tool for encouraging that type of regular community stewardship, so the timing of updating key things like the vegetation ordinance while rolling out opportunities for the community to engage is vital.

Gustin then shared a slide about the number of trees planted and removed from green belts and parks over the past 15 years or so – 3,104 trees planted, 2,684 trees removed and 1,933 trees planted from the Branch Out Burlington nursery. He then asked Cahill how many trees the Conservation Team has planted.

Cahill shared that for the same number of years, it was probably closer to 10-15,000, but they primarily plan restoration trees which have a 40-70% survivability rate compared to heftier bare root trees, so a different methodology.

Mobley asked if the trees planted from the Branch Out Burlington nursery were a subset of the total trees planted.

Cahill and Gustin answered subset.

Gustin continued by sharing a map of the existing tree canopy percentages throughout Burlington, noting that there are less trees downtown compared to natural areas. He continued that the urban forest helps to strengthen and retain the green fabric of the community while also accommodating housing growth, which is going to be a key factor moving forward. He then shared a map of the amount of loss and gain of tree canopy, noting some specific locations with projects that account for the higher percentages of loss. Gustin continued by sharing the high level objectives of the amended vegetation ordinance including housekeeping items, introducing definitions, jurisdiction and authority, referencing the State statute where applicable including designating a Tree Warden and Deputy Tree Warden, flushing out in greater detail private owner responsibilities along public streets and sidewalks and follow-up when that is needed and the Conservation Board's role in that. He continued that the introduction of mitigation measures when trees are removed on private property has also been added and consists of 3 pieces – the caliper for caliper replacement either on-site or off-site, payment or on-site green infrastructure to handle the ten year storm standard.

Mamo asked what portion of the 40% of tree canopy is public vs. private property.

Richards, Gustin and Cahill all noted those specifics are outlined in the Open Space Plan.

Mamo asked if the ordinance could be an opportunity to improve the decision-making process around how public trees are managed. He noted that the way it is written right now gives complete control to the City Arborist in terms of management plans and removal decisions and he was curious if this could be a good way to have a more robust decision-making process around the removal process.

Gustin responded that the City Arborist does not actually have complete control over it. He continued that public trees are in two boxes – shade trees, which are all street trees and intentionally planted trees in parks, and the State statute outlines the process that the City needs to follow for those, including public events. He shared that there are

some exceptions to this, including a tree that is infested or a tree that is a public hazard or a removal necessary to complete a City project. Gustin continued that the other box are trees in open spaces, which would likely be part of an annual work plan for City staff, which would go through the Conservation Board.

Cahill noted that he felt it would be useful to follow this new ordinance especially when it comes to this piece and to have the Conservation Board create a space to discuss what is in the work plans, encouraging participation as a check and balance and also as an opportunity to support where the limitations are by thinking outside of the box. He continued that he believes once the Tree Board is established and functioning, that it could be a great space for that.

Gustin shared that in order to get this up and running, there needs to be more general standards versus more specific because the tighter the box you're in the less maneuverability you have, so if you start with a bigger box you have the flexibility to move, adjust and adapt in the coming years to see how it is working and what might need to be adjusted and fine-tuned. He continued that he believes what Mamo is getting at can be enabled through this but isn't specifically called out and he feels that it doesn't need to be.

Mamo responded that from a governance perspective to have the jurisdiction language in the ordinance give the City Arborist complete control and authority is a lot to be granted to one individual. He continued that from a property value perspective, an environmental perspective, a neighborhood perspective, to have even the most qualified individual be able to have the final say seems like there is room for improvement in that structure by including somebody like the Conservation Board to review those plans. He acknowledged that there had been a section added in regards to this, but it doesn't have any parameters or say that it will include plans to remove trees or plans to change management strategies.

Gustin responded that this is the ordinance built off of the Open Space Plan which now includes the Urban Forest Plan that used to be separate. He continued that it's actually City Council who has the ultimate call in regards to shade trees and everything that is not a shade tree depends and if it is a public tree, it is probably Comai or Cahill, but if it's trees on private property it would go through a zoning process.

Lantieri chimed in that he feels the heart of this conversation is coming from hearing from community members about tree removals and asking what options they have. He acknowledge that creating this process gets more towards creating space for that but it doesn't call that out specifically. Lantieri continued that he hears it both ways – that there is value in keeping it open so that it can mold into the right thing and that this is something that consistently comes up with community members after the removal has happened. He feels there is something to the idea of notifications and the ability to have space for people to hear what is happening ahead of time, and whether that is defined in the way that the Conservation Board is empowered as the Tree Committee is the question.

Gustin then shared the current State statute, noting that this is the current law whether this ordinance ends up being adopted or not and it includes the exceptions for shade tree removals that have been discussed.

Cahill shared that he could not recall a time that a tree was removed when it wasn't for one of the two exceptions, infestation and/or a hazard.

Lantieri agreed that this is tricky because things like the ash removal are because of an infestation issue.

Davis asked how a resident on a street is made aware that a tree is going to be removed.

Cahill responded that tree work is noticed on-site with signage.

Lewis noted that if it is a street tree, they notice in the days leading up to the work for no-parking in the area and the purpose is noted on the signage for that.

Cahill anecdotally shared that he was not aware any removals that have happened that were not related to an infrastructure project or an infestation or a hazard, which under law do not require notice. He continued that regardless, what he noted earlier about educational every day stewardship and where Burlington moves forward as a community with climate resiliency and nature connection, awareness is vital.

Mobley chimed in to clarify that trees are removed for 2 primary reasons – infestation/hazard and infrastructure. She shared that while she is fully behind the educational and awareness pieces that are being discussed, she wants to keep the realities of City resources in mind when talking about adding in processes. She then asked if a tree is infested, is the only option to remove it.

Cahill answered that there is potentially an inoculation route.

Mobley responded that while that may work, it becomes an equity question when some neighborhoods have the people and time to focus on that while others do not. She continued that there is a real opportunity for more communication and education but she doesn't feel that the ordinance needs to be changed to achieve that.

Lewis responded that there is an opportunity to evaluate and adjust the standard operating procedures and process for staff through an updated Department policy, while being cognizant of staff work plans and administrative time.

Cahill noted that this is where the Tree Board has the opportunity to be present with all of those processes and have an active participation and partnership in it.

After a brief pause for Public Forum, Mamo reflected that if most of the removals occur because of infestation or hazards then having a more robust oversight process wouldn't really impact the day to day operations but instead the more rare instances that don't fall into those categories.

Gustin shared that they can't make the Conservation Board an appeal board but under the State statute, appeals would go to City Council where the public can weigh in. He continued that there is also an appeal process to the Superior Court environmental division of the Vermont Supreme Court, so the hierarchy has been figured out for all scenarios. Gustin reiterated that he feels having a bigger box as opposed to a smaller box right now will be helpful.

Lantieri suggested that this body could potentially work with the Conservation Board on the policy level stuff. He continued that being proactive in these kinds of situations, even if it is short notice for something like an infestation, could be helpful across the board. He shared that finding a middle ground in the policy that is cognizant of the

reality of staff time and provide people the opportunity to be brought into the conversation.

Mamo thanked everyone for tailoring his questions and noted that the only comments he has received from community members since becoming a Commissioner have been related to tree removals. He continued that his Ward was significantly impacted by the ash tree removals and a lot of folks have been asking why they weren't able to give their input and asking if there were options other than removing them.

Richards chimed in that hopefully moving forward there will be a more diversified tree canopy to avoid major and concentrated removals due to infestations in the future. She then noted that people feel a lot of grief when trees are removed.

Cahill agreed and shared his sentiments that it is important to provide a space for the community to feel and work through that grief.

Mobley highlighted the theme that she heard throughout the conversation, which included more proactive communication ahead of time.

Richards noted that there has been a lot of complexity in these moments because while there has been a lot of communication about the ash trees, a disconnect she has experienced is that some people don't know what an ash tree looks like.

Cahill noted that when there is loss, there is emotion and Burlington is a community that gets hyped, which can lead to debates that take time and energy from all sides. He continued by sharing that he feels there should be spaces created where people can process these feelings and build community around thinking of generative solutions about how they want to support their neighborhoods and the City overall. He then shared that this is an exciting opportunity to trial some different approaches.

Mobley made a motion to approve the vegetation ordinance as written and advance it to the next body and recommends considering additional action policy. Mamo seconded.

All were in favor, none opposed.

4.2 Legacy Fund Funding Approval – Ecosystem Services Analysis

Gustin opened that this is for an Ecosystem Services Analysis by Trust for Public Land. He gave a brief background noting that the 2022 nature-based climate solution and 2026 Open Space Plan both talked a lot about resiliency and ecosystem services and with the City currently updating its Comprehensive Plan, the analysis that is proposed here could help inform decision making as well as anticipated redesign standards that will be worked on after the comp plan is adopted. He continued that there are 2 basic pieces of the study – quantifying the economic benefits of ecosystem services with 3 focal areas: storm water management, air pollution removal and nature-based climate solutions and the other major aspect will be the climate cooling effect for open spaces, primarily the urban forest. Gustin shared that the project is expected to take about 9 months and the funding ask from the Legacy Fund is \$108,000. He continued that if approved, it will go to the Conservation Board next week and then Board of Finance. He then shared the hope that this would help inform the Comprehensive Plan.

Mobley shared that she thinks this is really exciting and to have this information for the Comprehensive Plan is critical during this decision making time.

Richards noted that there are so many ways to build infrastructure and to have some valuing of the importance of green infrastructure is truly valuable.

Boehm made a motion to approve the use of Conservation Legacy Fund funds to support the Ecosystem Services Analysis. Bergmann seconded.

All were in favor, none opposed.

4.3 Nature Based Climate Solutions Grant Review Committee

Cahill opened by sharing that this will be the 4th round of the grants and noted that this is an exciting opportunity for the Conservation Board and Parks Commission to work together in a subcommittee to review and award them. He continued by sharing that this has been and will continue to be a meaningful and well organized process.

Mobley shared that it was a great opportunity and a fun way to learn.

Davis shared that she would be happy to do it again because she thought it was a great process and enjoyed evaluating everything with the metrics that were provided.

Lantieri opened the floor for interested Commissioners to self-nominate.

Cahill noted that the commitment involves 2 meetings and some individual time needed to read and score the applications leading up to those.

Lantieri shared that he was interested, but only if others were not.

Mamo noted that he was interested.

Davis noted that she was interested.

Boehm made a motion to nominate Mamo and Davis with Lantieri as an alternate,

Mobley seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.

4.4 Appendix D, Section 7

Lantieri opened this item by explaining that Appendix D is the main place in the ordinance that governs park rules and section 7 is in relation to off-leash dogs. He continued that there was a pilot that expired and the Commission has done some work to update it but it hasn't been finalized. He noted that they would not be taking any action on it at this meeting.

Lewis began by sharing that they would be looking at multiple ordinance updates over time but noted that vehicles in parks has been tabled for now as broader conversations about what that could look like and how the ordinance should be updated to reflect that are happening. He continued that today would entail a broad overview of off-leash dogs with action at a future meeting. He began by sharing that after the last discussion on this topic, the clean version was forwarded to the City Attorney's office for review, who had feedback. One of the major pieces was removing the policy so that it is separate from the ordinance, and can just be approved by this body in the future instead of being codified in the ordinance. Lewis was open to feedback however the group wanted to proceed but specifically noted that the lawyers had a few recommendations regarding referring to the Director as the chief general authority for closing parks and identifying specific use of funds taken in for commercial use of the dog parks to be used for improvements to the dog parks.

Lantieri felt that they could get a cleaned up version of this done offline by the next meeting.

Lewis shared that an off-leash pilot project has been happening in a specific section at Leddy Beach and some questions and concerns came up when the signage was recently

revamped. He shared that he spent some time there and only saw 1 older dog there using the space respectfully and when he asked the owner about any issues they said that they are there regularly and had never experienced any conflicts.

Boehm noted a line about no off-leash areas designated in unfenced areas, would that make it so that the pilot actually isn't allowed?

Lewis answered that that would be a good question for the attorney.

Boehm continued that below that there was a line about other areas may be designated as off-leash areas as per the policy, but she assumed that meant fenced.

Lantieri chimed in that this is essentially where things had been left off last time and the reality is that if they don't approve any off-leash areas people will still bring their dogs into the lake without leashes.

Lewis noted that it is typically better when there are alternative locations for this kind of thing, so identifying an area where it can happen would probably be best.

Mamo asked about Texaco Beach and Starr Farm Beach.

Lantieri answered that technically those would be excluded. He continued that the main issue right now is that the ordinance is expired, so there are essentially no rules regarding off-leash dogs right now, just this shell of defunct language. He reminded everyone that during the last discussion, the direction the group had been leaning was to not have any unfenced, off-leash areas, so this would be a change of intent that is worth considering. He noted that this is the only substantive decision that they would need to come to as a body and then ultimately when it gets passed on to other bodies, there could be changes made.

Boehm liked the idea of having off-leash areas in the policy so that there would be flexibility with changes as needed, so keeping the ordinance vague as fenced and unfenced areas and that they are outlined in the policy.

There was general agreement from the group.

Lantieri was in agreement but shared his concerns about where these policies live and how they can be accessed by the public.

Lewis said he has identified that on the general BPRW work plan to address.

Lantieri summarized the action items, noting that the ordinance needs to be cleaned up, some of the specifics need to be moved into the policy and getting the policy into a place that they all want it to be.

Lewis asked the group to do some thinking on the water access piece specifically.

4.5 Commission Member Chair, Foundation Seat Selection

Lantieri opened this item by letting Commissioners know anyone can self-nominate or nominate others for the Chair, Vice Chair and Parks Foundation seat.

Mobley nominated Lantieri to continue in the role of Chair.

No one else showed interest in the position.

Boehm, the current Vice Chair, encouraged others to consider the role because while she was happy to continue in it, she wanted someone who was maybe interested in the Chair role eventually to have the opportunity to engage with this position first.

Mobley nominated Boehm to be the Vice Chair.

Lantieri asked if anyone was interested in serving in the Parks Foundation seat, which he shared entails a meeting every other month and reporting back to this group.

Mobley asked if the role involved fundraising.

Lantieri answered that there is no requirement to.

Mobley said she would like to attend the next meeting and would make a decision after.

Bergmann made a motion to nominate Lantieri as Chair and Boehm as Vice Chair, Mamo seconded.

All were in favor, none opposed.

4.6 Comprehensive Plan Update

Sauve wanted to provide everyone with updates and some background in terms of leadership, engagement and data to inform some of the decisions and conversations at a meeting being held the next day. She began by sharing the draft slides for BPRW's overall data, which notes parks, facilities etc., and she feels is especially interesting when compared to the national standards, of which BPRW is larger than most cities of a similar size. She reminded everyone that when Plan BTV 2050 is being discussed that adding 7,000 new housing units to the City is a piece of that, so there is a question about how that will impact things. She continued by sharing the public engagement summary, referencing the work the interns who presented last month did as well as the open house in April, other engagement events, various surveys and staff engagement with the process. All of these opportunities have given residents the chance to share what is special about BPRW, concerns/feedback and ideas. She called out that the quality of and access to parks, nature and the lake has been resoundingly positive and important to people who live here. She continued that overall residents are very satisfied with the BPRW system, but there are some gaps, like indoor recreation locations and outdoor swimming areas. It was found that New American residents are more likely to express dissatisfaction with a lot of the components, but the majority are satisfied with some of the elements. Sauve continued that while residents are generally satisfied with sports fields, courts and playgrounds, outdoor restrooms are at the bottom in terms of if needs are met. She then shared a slide about combining "need" and "importance", which indicated a priority for restrooms, swimming areas, trails, indoor recreation and art. She continued by sharing that special events and recreational programs were at the top of the list for "need" and "importance". She continued by noting that in terms of barriers, most residents said that they do not know what is offered which the 2015 plan also indicated, which is where the marketing position and the new logo came from, so the Department needs to dig into why this still seems to be the case, as well as other contributing factors that have been indicated. Sauve continued that some topics that came up throughout all of these engagements and that have been discussed here are safety and unhoused residents and the competing needs are obvious. She shared that staff also have concerns about this and they are wondering what residents would like the City to do. Sauve noted that while there were not any questions about housing developments in parks, there was feedback against that that came through both the surveys and direct interactions with the public. She also shared that they have been receiving negative feedback about fast and dangerous e-motos on the greenway. Sauve then shared that the values that came out of feedback from staff was that staff are passionate about the work they are doing and that shows in the work that is being done even though budgets have been cut over the years. That meeting also

showed that staff want to continue to be leaders in climate adaptation, and she pointed to the Vegetation Ordinance as an example of that. She continued that an underlying theme with staff is being stretched too thin. Next, Sauve went over the draft vision statement, which she noted was quite long, but asked for feedback.

Mamo said he was looking for something in there about “preservation of existing”.

Lantieri agreed.

The group then briefly discussed the housing targets, which were clarified as goals not mandates, and what the proposals for how to that are.

Sauve shared her assumption that the final vision statement will be shorter and simplified.

Mobley feels like this version is the vision with implicit values woven in, which she feels need to be called out because in these conversations about the overall Plan BTV 2050 there are going to be trade-offs, so knowing what the City’s values are in relationship to the vision is going to prioritize the hard choices that need to be made.

Lantieri asked what next steps are.

Sauve shared that it will be going to PACC for review this week, which at that point and after this meeting, it will be public. Then it will be shared at the next open house.

5. Standing Items

5.1 Parks Foundation Update

Lantieri shared that there was a meeting in August and the next one is in October.

Sauve noted that they will be doing engagement in Baird, Ethan Allen and Smalley parks about the playground replacements.

5.2 Director’s Report

Lewis pointed folks to the monthly report and currently the Department is focused on shifting into fall with less seasonal support.

5.3 Commissioner’s Items & Volunteer Hours

Mobley shared that the end of Pine St. near Baird Park is experiencing an uptick of drug dealing and car accidents since it has become a dead end. She noted that the hedge along the edge of the park is currently a hot topic. She had 2 hours to report.

Mamo had a lot of conversations about the vegetation ordinance. He had 4 hours to report.

Lantieri shared that he is continuing to work with volunteers in the Urban Reserve. He had 10 hours to report.

Boehm had 1 hour to report.

Bergmann had 1.5 hours to report. And shared the same sentiment as Mobley about the now dead end Pine St.

Davis shared that she has been visiting Battery and City Hall Parks. She had 2 hours to report.

6. Adjournment

6.1 Motion to Adjourn

Davis made a motion to adjourn, Mobley seconded. All were in favor, none opposed.