



Racial, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)

Held in the Fletcher Meeting Room, Fletcher Free Library

OR

via Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/96324562039>

Meeting ID: 963 2456 2039

Or Use Phone number: 305-224-1968

Meeting ID: 963 2456 2039

1. Call to Order

2. Approve Agenda & Minutes

Subject	2.1. August 18, 2026
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	2. Approve Agenda & Minutes
Department	Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)
Type	
Recommended Action	

3. Public Forum

4. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework for Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community

Subject	4.1. Burlington Forward Resolution
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	4. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework for Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community

Department	Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)
Type	
Subject	4.2. Burlington Forward Resolution Feedback
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	4. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework for Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community
Department	Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)
Type	
Subject	4.3. Burlington Forward Revised
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	4. Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework for Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community
Department	Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)
Type	

5. National and Local Landscape: Alcohol & Substance Use

Subject	5.1. Burlington Emergency Medical Services - Report Focused on Alcohol and Substance Use
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	5. National and Local Landscape: Alcohol & Substance Use
Department	Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)
Type	
Subject	5.2. National Trends & Evidence -Based Approaches (Brandon Marshall PhD, Royce Family Professor of Teaching Excellence in Epidemiology and Professor of Epidemiology at Brown University in Rhode Island)
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	5. National and Local Landscape: Alcohol & Substance Use
Department	Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)
Type	
Subject	5.3. Understanding Substance Use and Drug Policy (Kellen Russoniello, JD, MPH, Director of Public Health, Drug Policy Alliance and Drug Policy Action
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	5. National and Local Landscape: Alcohol & Substance Use
Department	Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (REIB)
Type	

6. Adjournment

Subject	6.1. Motion to adjourn
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	6. Adjournment
Department	Council and Board
Type	
Recommended Action	

7. Informational and Non-Discrimination Statements

Subject	7.1. This agenda is available in alternative formats upon request. For more information on access, call Lori Olberg, Licensing, Voting and Records Coordinator (802-865-7136)(TTY 802-865-7142). Persons with disabilities who require assistance or special arrangements to participate are encouraged to contact 802-865-7000 (voice) or 802-865-7142 (TTY) at least 72 hours in advance so that proper arrangements can be made. This meeting will also air on Town Meeting TV the Wednesday after the meeting, starting at 8:00 pm and repeating at 1:00 am and 7:00 am the following day. The City of Burlington will not tolerate unlawful harassment or discrimination on the basis of political or religious affiliation, race, color, national origin, place of birth, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, veteran status, disability, HIV positive status, crime victim status or genetic information.
Meeting	August 25, 2026 - REIB City Council Committee Meeting - Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 5:30 PM, Racial, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (REIB)
Category	7. Informational and Non-Discrimination Statements
Department	Council and Board
Type	

Minutes Taken by Vicky Luciano

Attendees:

Councilor Laura Sanchez-Parkinson (in person)

Councilor Melo Grant (in person)

Councilor Sarah Carpenter (in person)

Christian Berry, Communications and Community Engagement Manager REIB (in person)

Vicky Luciano, Administrative and Financial Coordinator REIB (in person)

Kelli Perkins, Director (online)

Ed Baker (in person)

Chris McGrath (in person)

Bella Fearn (in person)

André Clark (in person)

Ambrose Moore (in person)

Vivian Bose-Pyne (in person)

Mona Tolba (in person)

Sam Donnelly (in person)

Marsha McCombie (in person)

Julia Ginorio (in person)

Bruce Wilson (in person)

Jess Kirby (in person)

Julie Macaga (in person)

Amshula Jayaram (online)

Kellen Russoniello (online)

Kate (online)

Chief Michael Curtin (online)

Tiffanie Katsuva (online)

Maryan Maalin (online)

Brandon Marshall (online)

- **Call To Order**

- Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson called the meeting to order at 5:38 pm.

- **Approve Agenda & Minutes**

- Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson motioned to approve the agenda and meeting minutes as is. Councilor Carpenter seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

- **Public Forum**

- Julia Ginario a Ward 2 resident and a member of the Police Commission, spoke about the Burlington Police Department's 2025 data. She expressed support for the committee's attention to disparate impacts and data collection but cautioned that data collection alone has not necessarily reduced disparities.
 - She reported that Black residents were 4.8 times more likely to be arrested and 4.5 times more likely to experience police violence than white residents.
 - She recommended that all agencies and personnel involved in enforcement collect demographic information and that regular oversight examine potential disparate impacts.
- Sam Donnelly supported the REIB amendments to Burlington Forward and encouraged the committee to continue emphasizing:
 - Matching the response to the type of conduct involved.
 - Using a 24-hour encampment response period for assessment and outreach rather than automatic removal.
 - Assessing the City's capacity and gaps in shelter, treatment, recovery, behavioral health, outreach, and housing.
 - Ensuring that the appropriate responder is addressing each situation.

- Ambrose Moore thanked REIB for its revisions to the resolution, particularly changes addressing potentially dehumanizing language about people experiencing homelessness, relocation of social services, racial profiling, escalation tactics, and training for public response teams.
- Bella Fearn emphasized the importance of effective services being provided as accessibility is key.
- Bruce Wilson, the Vermont Human Rights Commissioner and longtime community advocate, emphasized the importance of including people directly affected by policies in decision-making. He described his work connecting people with services, restorative justice, youth programs, and community resources and argued that residents experiencing homelessness, substance use, and other challenges should be directly involved in developing solutions.
- Vivian Bose-Pyne encouraged the committee to examine whether Burlington Forward's proposed approaches are supported by evidence, whether affected communities have been meaningfully included in its development, and whether affected communities have been meaningfully included in its development, and whether the City's response addresses the underlying causes of the problems identified in the resolution.
- Ed Baker, who discussed his personal recovery experience and professional work in the field, commended the committee for conducting due diligence and cautioned against developing public health and safety policy based on implicit bias.
- Julie Masuga criticized the Burlington Forward resolution for continuing to frame poverty and homelessness as a public safety problem. She raised concerns about past City responses to encampments and police interactions and argued that increased policing, cameras, and enforcement do not address the underlying causes of homelessness and substance use.
- André Clark raised concerns about racist and stigmatizing public comments directed toward Black residents and emphasized the need for more shelter, public health solutions, mutual aid, and support for Burlington's New American community.
- Community members repeatedly emphasized the importance of:
 - Increasing shelter and housing options.
 - Addressing root causes rather than relying primarily on enforcement.
 - Expanding public health responses.
 - Including people with lived experience directly in policy development.
 - Improving communication and coordination among service providers.
- **Equity Impact Assessment: Burlington Forward: A Comprehensive Framework For Safe Public Spaces and a Stronger Community**
 - Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson emphasized that the committee has spent significant time reviewing the resolution and that REIB staff have invested substantial effort in analyzing the document and developing proposed changes.
 - Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson emphasized that the committee should begin shifting toward a more creative, innovative, data-informed, and community-informed conversation about what Burlington should do going forward.
 - Members discussed the importance of recognizing that many community organizations, service providers, mutual aid groups, and residents have been working on these issues for years and should not be treated as new participants in the conversation.
 - Councilor Grant discussed concerns that residents and communities most directly affected by homelessness, substance use, and enforcement have historically been excluded from policy discussions.
 - The committee plans to return its recommendations to City Council on September 14th
- **National and Local Landscape: Alcohol & Substance Use**
 - Burlington Fire Department/EMS Presentation
 - Battalion Chief Marsha McCombie, Chief Curtin, and Fire Engineer Eric Cassavant presented information about Burlington Fire Department EMS data and operations.

- McCombie explained that EMS data comes from multiple reporting systems, which can create discrepancies between datasets. The department is working toward improving its reporting systems and data collection.
- The department reported 741 EMS calls in July 2026.
- McCombie explained that several categories in the EMS data — such as patient refusals, no signs or symptoms, substance use, alcohol use, and other nontraditional emergency calls — represent a significant portion of the department’s workload.
- In July, approximately 45% of calls fell within five categories associated with patients refusing transport/care, substance or alcohol use, no signs or symptoms, or related circumstances.
- McCombie emphasized that these calls still require a response even when the patient ultimately does not require transportation or medical intervention.
- Councilor Grant discussed the potential value of more detailed geographic data including hexagon maps, to show where calls are occurring and how patterns vary across City Council districts.
 - Marsha McCombie noted that Burlington’s Fire Department is handling a significant volume of calls related to complex social and public health needs in addition to traditional emergencies.
- The committee discussed improving data collection around:
 - Substance use and overdose
 - Language access
 - Age
 - Geographic location
 - Repeat calls and individuals
 - Differences between alcohol, substance use, and overdose-related calls
- Marsha McCombie noted that calls initially dispatched as overdoses may ultimately be categorized differently depending on what EMS finds when they arrive.
- The presentation also highlighted the need to distinguish between calls involving actual medical emergencies and situations where people are seeking assistance with other needs.
- The committee discussed opportunities for greater public education about overdose response, naloxone, and when emergency services should be contacted.
- Community Service Provider Discussion
 - Jess Kirby discussed the challenges people face when attempting to access treatment, shelter, and other services. She emphasized that, despite perceptions that Burlington has numerous low-barrier services, significant barriers remain.
 - Examples discussed included:
 - Limited walk-in access to medications for opioid use disorder
 - Strict clinic hours
 - Difficulties accessing inpatient treatment
 - Requirements for documentation and medical records
 - Transportation barriers, including missed Medicaid rides
 - Long waits and complicated referral processes
 - She emphasized that these barriers can leave people feeling defeated and make it more difficult to access treatment.
 - The discussion emphasized the need for:
 - More low-barrier shelter
 - More accessible treatment
 - Greater coordination among service providers
 - Support for harm reduction
 - Improved access to overdose prevention services

- Greater investment in housing and wraparound services
- National Expert Presentations
 - Dr. Brandon Marshall, professor of epidemiology at Brown University School of Public Health, joined the meeting to provide national research and public health context.
 - Kellen Russoniello, DPA, also provided national perspective on substance use, harm reduction, treatment, and public policy.
 - The presenters discussed evidence surrounding overdose prevention, harm reduction, treatment, criminalization, and public health approaches.
 - Kellen emphasized that criminalization has not resolved substance use or overdose and argues for greater investment in:
 - Comprehensive harm reduction
 - Overdose prevention centers
 - Evidence-based treatment, including methadone and buprenorphine.
 - Mobile crisis intervention
 - Affordable and permanent supportive housing
 - Food, healthcare, and economic supports
 - The discussion emphasized the importance of using evidence-based approaches rather than relying primarily on punitive responses.
- **Adjournment**
 - Councilor Sanchez-Parkinson adjourned the meeting at 7:53 pm.