



DRAFT MINUTES

JOINT CITY COUNCIL PLANNING COMMISSION 15 OCTOBER 2026

The South Burlington City Council and Planning Commission held a joint meeting on Thursday, 15 October 2026, at 7:30 p.m., in the Auditorium, 180 Market Street, and by Zoom.

MEMBERS PRESENT: T. Barritt, Chair; E. Fitzgerald, L. Smith, A. Chalnack, Dr. B. Zigmund, City Council; J. Louisos, Chair; D. Leban, C. Laurence, M. Mittag, D. MacDonald, M. Emery, J. Moscatelli, Planning Commission

ALSO PRESENT: J. Baker, City Manager; N. Storellicastro, Deputy City Manager; P. Conner, Director of Planning & Zoning; K. Peterson, City Planner; S. Padigo, L. Huffman, A. Daudet, L. Patterson, consultants; C. Rainville, B. Visger, R. Doyle, B. Britt, B. Denkaley, B. Denham, MS

1. Pledge of Allegiance:

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Instructions on exiting building in case of emergency and review of technology options:

Ms. Baker provided instructions on emergency exit from the building and reviewed technology options.

3. Additions, deletions or changes in the order of Agenda items:

Members asked to add an item 5a, approval of a City Council Resolution honoring the service of Planning Commission Chair, Jessica Louisos.

4. Comments and questions from the public not related to the agenda:

Ms. Louisos noted that with the new paving and line painting, the speed bumps are hard to see at night because they have not been painted.

5a. Approve Resolution 2026-16 honoring the service of Jessica Louisos:

Mr. Smith read the Resolution.

Ms. Leban then moved to approve Resolution 2026-16 honoring Planning Commission Chair Jessica Louisos. Mr. Mittag seconded. The motion passed with all members of the City Council and Planning Commission voting in favor.

5. Receive and Discuss the 60% draft of recommendations for the Parks and Open Space Master Plan and provide feedback:

Ms. Peterson said Planning staff felt this was a good place to see where the Plan is. She noted that the meeting notes contain a history of the project.

Ms. Huffman then outlined the phases of the project as follows:

- Phase 1 – Inventory every park and open space measured against City standards (completed)
- Phase 2 – Community engagement
- Phase 3 – Gaps analysis
- Phase 4 – Draft recommendations
- Phase 5 – Final Plan/Adoption

With regard to community engagement, Ms. Huffman said that they received 457 responses to an online survey. In addition, 60 people attended an open house, and there were 80 “in-box” comments received. 42.5% of respondents stressed that parks should have basic amenities such as rest rooms and drinking fountains. 78% felt there should be more open spaces.

Ms. Huffman then noted that in doing their gap analysis, they used the following standards of measurement:

- a. 7-1/2 acres of open space per 1000 residents
- b. A park or natural area within ¼ mile of every resident
- c. 51% protected open space

Mr. Chalnack felt there should be more than 51% protected open space. Mr. Mittag noted there is now 56%.

Ms. Huffman then showed where the City stands in relation to those standards:

- a. 8.4 acres of open space per 1000 residents
- b. 56.2% protected open space
- c. The ¼ mile park/natural area for every resident is not met.

Ms. Huffman noted that South Burlington is growing, and more residents will rely on public parks close to home. It is estimated that the current population of 20,756 will increase to 31,700. She also noted the City's median age of 38.2 is decreasing. These figures would turn two of the "passing grades" into shortfalls by 2050 if there is no new investment.

Walking access to parks/open space has the biggest gaps. Several of the City's densest population areas are outside any walkshed.

Ms. Patterson, the consultant's GIS Analyst, showed a map indicating the ¼-mile walkshed, a ½-mile bikeshed for public parks and natural areas. She then identified where existing homes/developments are with relation to these areas.

Ms. Leban noted that shared use paths do go through open spaces and are more used than parks because many of the parks have wetness areas. She said the use of these paths does qualify as recreation.

Mr. Laurence said that some neighborhoods (e.g. south of Rice High School) do not show up on the map.

Ms. Patterson said they also examined zoning in relation to walk and bike "sheds." She showed areas of allowed housing which do not fall within the 2 "sheds."

Dr. Zigmund questioned whether areas not within the City of South Burlington were considered and noted that there are continued wooded areas, etc. in the City of Burlington which are used by South Burlington residents. Ms. Patterson said they did not consider those areas.

Ms. Patterson agreed that trail systems are a very important part of a “linear park system,” and they do count toward the goal. The project recognizes that a large percentage of the City’s parks do qualify as a “linear park system.”

Mr. Chalnack asked about the Hill Farm area. Mr. Mittag said it is zoned for medium scale development.

Ms. Patterson said their mapping is based not only on proximity but also on access. Ms. Leban pointed out access to various open space areas. Mr. Conner said that a number of those are “trails” which do not count as “access.” Ms. Peterson added that there may be paths through private land, but these are not considered true “access.” She added that a complete park has the basics (drinking fountain, permanent restrooms, shade, seating, shaded seating) plus at least one active and one passive amenity.

Active amenities include:

- a. Playgrounds
- b. Sports courts
- c. Ballfields
- d. Open field space

Passive amenities include:

- a. Paths/trails
- b. Scenic views
- c. Picnic sites
- d. Pavilions

Ms. Peterson said there should be one from each of these groups in a park. There are also special amenities that could be considered including:

- a. An aquatic feature
- b. Dog park
- c. Skating/bicycle park
- d. Ice rink

Mr. Smith suggested adding an indoor recreation center to the special amenities.

Mr. Mittag did not think restrooms or drinking fountains were appropriate in natural areas. Ms. Leban disagreed and said restrooms are necessary, and some parks that don't now have them and should have them.

Ms. Patterson said most of the City's parks are currently missing at least some of the basics:

- a. 1 of the 11 parks has no restroom
- b. 2 have no drinking fountain
- c. 5 have no shaded seating
- d. 6 have no seating
- e. 8 have no shade

Ms. Daudet then addressed open spaces. She showed a map indicating various types of open spaces:

- a. Public parks
- b. Private or institutional lands
- c. Public natural areas
- d. UVM-owned lands
- e. Protected limited access lands

She then questioned whether the purpose of those lands has been established and what type of plan there is for each area:

- a. A protective overlay or conservation easement that sets the land aside for conservation
- b. A management plan or active care such as mowing, planting, control of invasive species
- c. Can the public visit? Some protected land is closed by design under an easement. This still counts to the 51%.

Mr. Conner said that what is shown on this map is all formally protected. Dr. Zigmund said UVM land is not necessarily protected. Mr. Conner agreed.

Mr. Smith said there should be definition between what is durably protected and what is protected by some other mechanism and is vulnerable.

Ms. Huffman said they then considered whether there is a management plan stewarding the open space toward its purpose and found the following:

- a. 11 areas in South Burlington have no management plan. These include Hubbard, Mayfair and Goodrich
- b. 4 are under the management of the Winooski Valley Park District
- c. 2 have Vermont Land Trust easements
- d. A campus plan governs UVM lands

Mr. Mittag noted that Hubbard will have a conservation easement at some point.

Ms. Huffman said their findings point to where the City should invest first. The questions to consider are:

- a. Does it help to meet a City Plan standard?
- b. Does it serve residents with few other options?
- c. Does it serve a neighborhood, city or a region?
- d. Does it strengthen the network?
- e. Does it protect habitat, water, etc.?
- f. Is there funding and is there staff in place to take action?

Ms. Huffman stressed that a park missing a basic comes before a park missing a pool. There are choices to be made based on whether the park is near a higher or lower density area. Some access gaps need a crossing or a path before they need a new park.

Ms. Huffman also noted that planned paths can work as “linear parks.” She added that twelve of the 30 corridor projects in the Active Transportation Plan could become linear parks with seating and shade along their way. Four could now be recognized as linear parks. Eight could become linear parks if some park features are built into the design.

Ms. Louisos said that because she is now experiencing physical issues, she would want linear parks to have the same amenities as other parks. She did not want to count something as a park that is not really a park. Ms. Emery said there should not just be a bench. There should be amenities buffered from the road. Ms. Huffman said a wooded or green edge is the first requirement of a linear path. It should also connect areas such as schools.

Ms. Leban said some paths could have “exercise elements” and noted there are none of these in South Burlington now.

Mr. Chalnack said the Waterfront Path in Burlington is a park. He needed help defining these.

Ms. Huffman then outlined the goals of the Master Plan as follows:

- a. Finish the parks the City already has
- b. Bring a park within walking distance of more homes
- c. Keep pace with growth (plan for up to 63 more acres by 2050 with new parks and open spaces added when there is new housing)
- d. Plan for facilities asked for by residents for indoor recreation, aquatics, dog parks, pickleball, etc.
- e. Stay above the 51% open space for the long term
- f. Take care of land already protected
- g. Connect natural areas through trail corridors
- h. Work with partners

Dr. Zigmund asked if there is a tool to begin to implement the goals, a matrix of some sort. Ms. Huffman said not in the sense of a template. You can say that before adding more parkland, be sure all existing parks have all amenities and are serving residents ideally. Then possibly begin to make investments in new inventory to the park system/open space.

Ms. Leban said there is one area near the river and some in other places that are wet and could never be built on. These could become parks/open spaces for low-level activities. She noted that City Center Park was made more usable because of the boardwalk. She also said that the west side of Shelburne Road has nothing because it is almost inaccessible to the public. There is a desperate need for a park there. She encouraged the consultants to look at that.

Ms. Huffman said goals 1 and 2 would be priorities. Both Mr. Mittag and Ms. Emery would add goal 3 as a priority so that it is possible for everyone to access a park.

Ms. Louisos asked if the consultant would be identifying specific projects. Ms. Huffman said their report is design so staff can make recommendations based on available funds.

The question arose as to whether parks near denser neighborhoods should be a higher priority. Ms. Huffman said the draft recommends that a partly complete park that serves higher density homes should be a high priority, the same as a

park missing the basics. This is because nearby residents have the fewest alternatives. Another possibility is to prioritize by what a park offers on its own with nearby density considered later as funding comes available.

Mr. Smith said he would like to see flexibility. He noted that a park in a smaller neighborhood may be underserving the residents. Ms. Huffman suggested changing their priorities to “high density or underserved neighborhoods.”

Mr. Chalnack asked for a list of specific parks that need amenities and specific areas which are underserved.

Another question for consideration is whether closing walking gaps should come before adding acreage. The draft suggests that early funding should go to crossings before acquiring acreage. Mr. Smith again asked for flexibility and noted the City should act if a piece of land becomes available. Mr. Chalnack agreed and suggested reversing the priorities. He said you can always build a path; you can’t always get the land. Ms. Louisos said they need to do both.

Mr. Mittag felt the City should add the land adjacent to Wheeler which is accessible. He favored buying land ahead of growth.

Ms. Huffman then asked if there are actions to take to secure open space or whether the City should focus on making more protections permanent. She stressed the need for stewardship of open spaces.

Mr. Chalnack said there are risks, one of which could be State law. There are also other tools available such as TDRs.

Mr. Smith said caring for land is important, and it would be short-sighted not to buy land if it comes available. He felt the City needs to be “nimble.”

Ms. Huffman cautioned that if the City buys too much land, they may not be able to afford the needed stewardship. She stressed the need to know both the purchase price of land and the cost of its maintenance. Ms. Fitzgerald agreed to the need to work within revenue guardrails.

Mr. Mittag said the City may have to buy just the development rights to a property and not the land. He also said the City needs to increase the Open Space Fund tax. Mr. Barritt said that would have to be a decision of the voters.

Public comment was then solicited and received as follows:

Mr. Visger: Asked the City to add deferred maintenance not only new amenities. He also asked the City to consider Goal #54 of the City Plan and to check the data from community input.

Mr. Doyle: Using “acres per 1000 residents” creates a ceiling as to how many people can live in the City. He noted that East Terrace is nowhere near Centennial Woods, and there are spaces that are not easy to access. He also felt the City is way behind in maintenance, and that buying more land would be “gluttonous.” He said the City of Burlington has a huge team to take care of land. He also cited the discrepancy between areas that are highly assessed and have no access to parks and others that are not as highly assessed which are close to parks.

Ms. Emery noted receipt of a comment from a resident in the Chamberlain neighborhood expressing concern with the carriage roads in Red Rocks Park.

Ms. Huffman said comments from this meeting will be reflected in their next report.

6. Other Business:

No other business was presented.

As there was no further business to come before the Council Mr. Smith moved to adjourn. Ms. Fitzgerald seconded. Motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 10:06 p.m.

Clerk