

Ward 6 NPA, June 2, 2016
Perry Hall, Champlain College

Draft Minutes

Meeting open at 6:30 with a social hour that included buffet food and drink. Formal meeting began at 7:15; approximately 22 people in the room. Peter Keating thanked Champlain College for the use of their venue and working with us to provide refreshments.

1. Approval of the May meeting minutes were moved and seconded.
2. Sandy Yusen and John Caulo representing Champlain College presented an update. John noted that 20,000 sq. ft. of concrete is being replaced but it is unlikely that there would be any traffic disruption on Maple Street. Completion date: Aug. 15, 2016. There will be no change in drainage as such, more of the area will be in grass. Audience Question (Q): If the college leases 80 units of the Town Center for a dorm, would that dorm be eligible for exemption from property taxes? Answer (A): It won't be a dorm and no, it would be exempt. Q. What about Eagles Landing? A. That will be tax exempt on the improved value of the property. We also pay a fee for service, Sandy said students have graduated now and there will be various events on-campus. Parking will be coordinated with their Lakeside lot to minimize traffic impact.
3. There was no presentation from UVM.
4. Karen Paul gave an update on City Council business. The waterfront path improvement is underway and will be similar to what is already there near the sailing center. Council will vote on the city budget soon. It will have half a cent decrease in the tax rate due to refinancing of city debt. This is year two of the ten year capital budget. New positions in city government include a police-community opiate management position and an IT position as well as added security for Fletcher Free Library. Fifteen members of Americorp-Vista are interning with the city. Council is moving ahead with the Moran Plant project; there will be more extensive sidewalk repairs scheduled. Q. Can you explain the TIF process? Does it mean 80% of the incremental income goes to pay the bond? A. Waterfront TIF was unique; it all went to the city and none to education, unlike the downtown TIF. What that percentage will be I'll have to check. We make conservative assumptions on the expected increase in property values subject to TIF taxes. There's a presentation on the TIF on the city website. Q. If we are paying 75% of the increased value for the bond that only leaves 25% for the cost of increased city services. This doesn't seem like much. A. All the details related to the Town Center are important. Q. Isn't the City changing the historical preservation status in the overlay district with a short time for deliberation, 120 days from the pre-development agreement? Is Council comfortable with that? A. Many people have asked about aspects of the mall project. There will be at least two more Planning Committee meetings. I'll post announcements of meetings on Front Porch Forum to continue gathering public input. This is not a done deal. Q. I follow these things and until a week or so ago, I didn't know about the zoning change particulars. We have no traffic study, no economic feasibility study, we don't know much about Don Sinex. We need more information. A. (from Joan Shannon): The

mall has consumed a lot of our time. But there are other things happening. Council is talking about a charter change to deal with residential waivers for department heads. The form based code conversation continues. Q. What is the future of Memorial Auditorium? A. I have no information on this. Q. Anything on New Moran or the airport? A. (J.S.): I have nothing to add here. (KP): Ask Gene Richards. Q. The paper mentioned spot reappraisals. Do you support this? A. (K.P.): The city appraiser, John Vickery, says that property has increased in value in varying categories and as a result may not be fairly taxed. Is such re-evaluation part of the budget? I'm not sure. (J.S.) I support fair assessment. This isn't a random process. Rental properties have increased in value disproportionately. Landlords raise rents irrespective of the tax rate and whether we reassess or not. This class of property has gotten out of whack. (K.J.) John is very fair. This is not a willy nilly process. Q. Some condominiums are under-assessed. A. (J.S.) If you improve your property, you can expect the assessment to increase.

5. Stephanie Seguino and Miriam Stoll on the school committee: M.S. said there are changes in how the board functions. We voted to move toward policy governance, a process endorsed by the Vermont School Boards Association. This is a move away from the crisis management of the past. It gives you a year's calendar and steps to take in each area of decision-making. It includes specifications on the evaluation of the superintendent. This is now in a 9 month trial period. Essex and Winooski have this system. (S.S.): Mediation didn't resolve the contract dispute with teachers so now each side is presenting its case and data to a fact finder. This isn't binding but informs future negotiations. We had to address the lack of confidence in the board from past years. We are doing so using data to inform our decisions. High school class scheduling has been a problem but is largely solved due to efficiencies, even with less teaching staff. Last year we had 17 AP classes, this year 16. Not much different. Our number of world language classes compares well with surrounding towns. We have more than Essex and CVU, less than So. Burlington. We have a world language class for every 45 students. Q. I'm concerned about dead time when students who can't get the classes they want are put into study halls. A. There's an effort to address this. All who want AP bio, for example, get it. We have three or four years of Chinese, even with low enrollment. We are also addressing the needs of non-high achieving students. Math is back to five days a week, 45 minutes per day, even with seven fewer teachers. Q. How does fact finding work? A. He listens to both sides, their data and arguments, and writes an opinion. It is still up to the board and union to negotiate. Q. How did you arrive at your figures on world languages? A. We divide the number of students by the number of classes offered. BHS offers five languages.
6. Peter Keating introduced discussion of the Town Center saying Don Sinex wanted to be here but couldn't make it. Megan Tuttle of CEDO was available to comment. Question or comment (Q and C): I requested this be put on the agenda. First we were included, than denied. A. You are on the agenda now. I wanted both sides represented. Q. or C.: I'm concerned about development. I had letters in the Free Press and Seven Days this week comparing Burlington's approach to that of Boulder, CO. (Pointing to the window), the view here is worth a lot and at risk with higher buildings. Nature is close here. We don't want to see current height limits raised. Q and C.: Burlington needs to get higher or we won't have open space outside the city.

Farms will disappear. Q and C.: What disturbs me is Mr. Sinex having priority approval for his project, something outside of normal zoning processes. This is an irregular way to approve a project. Fast-tracking is unethical. He's demanding zoning changes and the City is falling over itself to cooperate. He can do a top quality project within existing zoning. Q and C.: Council voted in 2009 against raising the height limit and raising the limit wasn't part of Plan BTV. No one wants to see building on farm land. They will build wherever then can irrespective of what happens here. If what's build here is unaffordable, people will have to live in more rural areas. We need economic vitality in the outlying districts and public transit. Q and C.: There is no evidence that this project will save one inch of farmland. It is so high because it is built on three stories of parking. He should follow the existing rules. Q. and C.: I've been to many public meetings on this over the years and noticed substantial changes to the plan. We didn't want a monolithic block and he changed that. He added open streets. We have to have a financially viable project. It may not be perfect but it is part of a give and take process. We need housing downtown for young people. On all sides of this debate, we share fundamental values. Q. and C.: Will the project be environmentally sustainable? Won't it bring more traffic? We don't want to increase the city's environmental footprint. New buildings should help us reduce the overall environmental impact of the city with such things as area heating and more mass transit. Q and C.: (M. Tuttle): We are collecting and responding to public comments. We have a list of frequently asked questions prepared by the Sinex people. The Planning Commission will have a work session next week, The agenda will be posted. Q. and C: (J. Shannon): Can we do this project under current zoning? It hasn't happened yet. And current zoning would allow a 10 story mall. The new plan lets us break it up its mass. Is it financially feasible? I don't know. We have a developer who thinks so. The existing mall isn't environmentally sustainable. New tenants will be living in smaller units for a smaller environmental footprint. They'll drive less. We need to get more answers. Q. and C. Won't people be driving into the retail shops from the suburbs? Q. and C.: When Eric Farrell planned his 770 unit complex, he agreed to build all the streets and common infrastructure, then turn it over to the city. Don Sinex will get \$22 million of public money to do this. What is the criteria used by Planning and Zoning to determine who gets a subsidy and who doesn't? A. (M. Tuttle): We are re-establishing public streets. And we are a public private partnership. I can't comment on the criteria. (Q. and C. follow-up): We are not a public-private partnership according to the pre-development agreement voted on by Council. A. We are in a cooperative relationship. Q and C.: What if Sinex doesn't or can't build the affordable housing? A. (J. Shannon): With Westlake this happened. We were supposed to have a million dollar surety bond but we didn't. This one has insurance so what you're saying can't happen. (K.P.): A performance bond. It covers private financing and public improvements. It's an additional layer of protection. I won't approve any project without outside legal council available to the city council. We had that in this case. The pre-development agreement is just the first step. Please continue to reach out to us.

7. Member items: Caroline Saba, Steering Committee member: she will soon be going to Washington, D.C. as a Senate page and will need to be replaced on the committee. M. Tuttle noted that there will be three sessions next week on the building

permitting process where the public can comment on their experiences. Q. can we use this lovely room again? A. (S.Yusen): I'll look into it.

A motion to close the meeting was made and seconded at 9:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Charles Simpson