

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant  
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## **Minutes**

### **Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting**

Thursday, May 12, 2021, 5:00pm

**MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON AT 645 PINE ST, FRONT CONFERENCE ROOM AND VIA ZOOM**

#### **Attendance:**

Committee Members: Chair Joan Shannon, Councilor Mark Barlow, Councilor Ali Dieng

City Staff: Doreen Kraft – Burlington City Arts, Sara Katz – Burlington City Arts, Colin Storrs – Burlington City Arts, Cindi Wight – BPRW, Samantha Dunn – CEDO, VJ Comai – BPRW City Arborist, Holli Bushnell – BPRW Staff

Public – Patrick Shank – BCA Advisory Board, Jake Schumann – Dog Task Force Volunteer, Eric Axelrod – Wood for Good

Meeting called to order at 5:04pm by Chair Joan Shannon

#### **Approval of Agenda**

Councilor Mark Barlow moved to approve the agenda, Councilor Ali Dieng seconded, all were in favor.

#### **Approval of Draft Minutes from 4/19/2022**

As neither Barlow nor Dieng were present for the previous meeting, the minutes were approved without a vote.

#### **Public Forum**

Members of the public were invited to speak at the start of each agenda item.

#### **UPDATE: Memorial Auditorium**

Samantha Dunn, Assistant Director of Community Works with CEDO, walked the committee through a draft of the slide presentation she intends to bring to the city council later this month. The presentation provided an overview of the history of the Memorial Auditorium project – background on the building, history of safety and structural issues, ongoing deterioration, and current status, as well as the various options on the table when the council last considered redevelopment of the space.

When last considered, there were 4 options on the table – to shutter the building and essentially put it in mothballs, to provide a basic renovation that would make the building safe for public use again, to renovate the building into a community hub space, or to redesign the entire block – the super block concept. The council did not ultimately vote for any of these options, however, the building was essentially put in mothballs by default during the height of the pandemic. Over that time, the building

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has continued to deteriorate. City staff has been entering the building daily to check on boilers from 1958, make sure the sprinkler system is functional, and document any vandalism or squatters present.

Dunn informed the committee that CEDO intends to complete one more assessment to establish what needs to be done presently to stabilize building. Included in this assessment will be hazardous materials testing, a cost estimate for abatement/remediation/repair, and a cost estimate for demolition. By all accounts, it is clear that the city must stabilize the building or demolish it, it cannot be left as it is.

Based on the results of community surveys and public meetings, it's clear that residents do not want to see Memorial demolished. The cost to stabilize the building was included in the bond that was passed on town meeting day. There is around one million dollars available for the project and the cost for stabilization is estimated to be around \$660,800. This stabilization work will likely buy the city three to five more years to develop a new plan for the building. Essentially, we would be stabilizing the building to put it in mothballs again for three to five years.

Barlow asked if the assessment had identified any hazardous materials. Dunn confirmed that when Atlas last assessed the building they did not find any PCBs, however there will definitely need to be some asbestos remediation. Barlow asked if the \$3.35 million listed in the presentation as the cost for demolish is a solid number and Dunn confirmed that the number is fairly firm based on estimates for earlier in the year. The costs will be around \$350,000 for abatement and \$3 million to demolish the building and remove the materials.

Dieng asked if CEDO is considering any other options besides demolishing the building or stabilizing it to mothball the space again. Dunn explained that they are still looking at other options, however, there is a need to make a decision on whether to demolish or stabilize the building immediately. The presentation to the city council will include more information on the possibility of a private/public partnership, however, the city needs to stabilize the building now if they want to have a building to redevelop in the future.

Dunn went on to explain that the estimated cost for redevelopment work is based on 2018 numbers and are presently inaccurate. As construction costs continue to rise CEDO estimates that doing the work proposed in 2018 will likely be 37% higher than anticipated. The city does not have this capital, even if they went out for another bond just for Memorial. Additionally, the Burlington High School project will take up the remainder of the city's bonding capacity. Voters have already turned down the redevelopment bond for Memorial at the last election, and the school is high priority for the community.

Dunn added that the city has been approached by a private group of Burlington citizens who would like to fundraise and redevelop Memorial. Dunn does not think this group can raise the fund required, but it does beg the question, should the city give this group some time to raise the funds before they seek out other potential private partners? City has also been approached by private developers (for both

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redevelopment of just Memorial as well as for the super block). Should the city choose to work with a private partner, the work on memorial would be a private development of a mixed use space. Dunn does believe that the city can preserve the existing memorials in the building while the rest of the building is redeveloped should a private partnership be the preferred redevelopment plan. CEDO plans to present to council on 5/23 and will ask for further input at that time.

Barlow agrees that, based on the projects the city has on the table, acquiring a new bond for Memorial is not something the city could manage presently.

Shannon asked if the building is worth preserving until we can secure the funds to redevelop it.

Barlow added that he has always preferred the super block concept, but sees nothing proposed at this point that is working towards that goal. He feels that, without having an imminent plan, it seems like stabilizing it so we can process our options makes sense.

Dieng was encouraged by the consideration of a public-private partnership, and likes that community members want to be assist in raising the fund/redevelopment. That said, he feels the council will need more details to come to a conclusion, and those details have not been forthcoming. Dieng asked if funds could be allocated towards memorial from the upcoming federal infrastructure bill. Dunn was unsure if funds from the infrastructure bill could be used for Memorial. At present, no one is sure how those moneys will be used. Memorial is a place that would really benefit from those funds, but the bill looks like it's more focused on traditional infrastructure. Dunn will try to address the use of funds from the federal infrastructure bill when presenting to the full council. Dieng asked if there are historical preservation funds from state or federal government, and Dunn confirmed that historic tax credits are available and that there may be additional funds possible with private-public partnership.

Shannon asked Dunn to provide potential funding sources when presenting to the full council. She feels it's important to keep in mind that any private fundraising will be in competition with the school (and all other projects that exceed the city bonding capacity). She is hoping to be provided a clearer vision of possible public-private partnerships as well. She asked what the current ideas on the table are for a public-private partnership (both for just the building and superblock). Shannon noted that the council may need to go into executive session to discuss public-private partnership further. Dunn commented that, with a private entity, there is the possibility of retaining some public use. Specifically, Dunn feels that maintaining memorial spaces on the third floor and public access to that part of the building is quite likely. Dunn did ask what public uses the council would most like to see. Shannon explained that that information is available in the public surveys. She would like Dunn to incorporate that information into the presentation to remind the council what the community initially wanted. Shannon also felt it would be helpful to understand how the economics change in when discussing the redevelopment of the building vs superblock.

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Barlow requested specifics on what has been proposed by private entities be brought to council as well.

Doreen Kraft commented that the committee (and council) should try to see Memorial redevelopment in the context of other development within Chittenden County. She noted that South Burlington is looking into build performing arts space as well. She feels there may be new synergies available on a county level.

Jake Schumann took a moment to publically comment that the auditorium a memorial to WWI veterans first and foremost. He feels that the building is demolished there needs to be a new memorial to those veterans to replace what was lost. Schumann thinks it might be interesting to incorporating a new memorial for those lost to COVID. He feels that would be a worthwhile endeavor, to memorialize a time when we all had to be apart by building a space where we can all come together.

**UPDATE: Dog Task Force**

Jake Schumann sent out a report prior to the last PACC meeting and was present to following up on that information. He stated that the task force is working on a lot of different fronts because they decided to break the mandate into subgroups so they could work on each item separately. The group meets monthly to share updates. Schumann anticipates coming back to PACC with a full report in the near future, and has come to PACC to ask for an extension on their deadline. Schumann also reported that the task force may need to add new member due to the resignation of Ute Monson, the at large community member who is a dog owner. Jake will resend his first report to the committee following the meeting.

Dieng asked if Schumann felt there is a need for another member or another perspective. Schumann reported that there are several other people who were interested and have joined in the work with the group even though they're not officially on the committee. The task force members have welcomed this participation. That said, the only difference these working members and a task force member would be voting ability. Schumann feels having another vote would be the only reason to recruit a new member.

There was a question of whether or not PACC should be charged with finding another voting member of the task force. Schumann suggested that PACC examine other applicants from the original call for members. Additionally, he noted that there have been a couple of community members who are already involved in the work as well as a candidate put forward by Monson before she left. There is the possibility of someone from the conservation board joining the task force as a voting member. Finally, Schumann noted that a veterinarian was originally one of the assigned members of the task force, but there were no applicants for that role; that viewpoint might be helpful to add if a candidate can be found.

Dieng asked how much more time Schumann feels the task force will need to generate a report, and Schuman confirmed that he has asked for extension until October 28, 2022. Wight confirmed that BRPW is happy to extend staffing for the additional 6 months requested.

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Shannon called for a motion recommending the deadline extension. Dieng moved to extend deadline for dog taskforce report to October 28, 2022, Barlow seconded, all in favor. The motion passes.

Following the motion, Schumann stated that he did have some small things he wanted to discuss with PACC, but they can wait until his next report. Cindi Wight acknowledged Schumann for stepping up as a citizen and thanked him for taking on that leadership role on the task force. Shannon seconded Wight's sentiments. She also asked Holli Bushnell to make sure the task force report deadline extension was added to the next city council consent agenda.

**UPDATE: Public Art Guidelines**

Patrick Shank provided a brief overview of the presentation he, Doreen Kraft, Sara Katz, and Colin Storrs gave to the committee at the previous meeting. The city intends to implement a 1% for public art policy on all new capital projects. Before this policy can begin, guidelines intended to guide the development and management of the city's Art in Public Places Program (how public art is administered) needed to be developed. Sara Katz drafted these new guidelines based on public art programs throughout the country. Drafts were shared with former city attorney Eileen Blackwood and current city attorney Hayley McClenahan, BPRW, Planning, and Public Works – all of these departments have signed off on the guideline.

Dieng asked if REIB had been consulted in light of the fact that one of the reasons for the development of these guidelines was to improve representation. Katz confirmed that she did reach out to Tyeastia Green, former REIB director, before she departed from the position. Katz and Green also worked together to commission some artwork, but Green did not get a chance to look at the draft language. Katz noted that she would be happy to follow up with new REIB director. Shank commented that one of the existing criteria does address representation and inclusivity in public art, and while he was unsure of how much REIB was involved with development of ordinance, the criteria is there. Katz confirmed that she did spend a lot of time working with REIB and addressing to directly address the "requirement to ensure representation by artists who reflect a range of cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds."

Katz explained that they looked at programs in other cities that were specifically attempting to change their policies to be more inclusive and equitable. The core intention of the guidelines is to be inclusive in representing artists of all backgrounds, working in all mediums, from many parts of the world, and to represent a broad range of voices. Public art has the most potential to engage the public at large - there are so few barriers and it's a great way for the city to provide access to the arts in a free and inclusive way.

Shank explained that the next steps for the guidelines include getting feedback from PACC at this meeting. The BCA board will be meeting on May 23, 2022 to recommend approval of the guidelines. Should they do so, the guidelines will go before the full council to be voted on before they can be adopted.

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Shannon asked to have the most recent draft of the guidelines sent to committee members. Shank suggested that they send the draft along with the latest version of memo which provides clarity and context for the guidelines. Katz confirmed she would do so. Committee members will provide feedback via email, and if there is need for discussion PACC will attempt to hold another meeting about any issues that need to be addressed.

Dieng asked what the timeline is to bring the guidelines before the council. Katz stated that BCA would like to do so as soon as possible. They do not have a specific date in mind, but would like to get on the agenda before the summer sessions begin.

Kraft concluded by offering to take new committee member Barlow on a tour of BCA facilities.

#### **Flooding at Lakeview Cemetery**

Wight began by explaining that there are multiple areas in Lakeview Cemetery that have flooding issues. That said, the Muslim Section in particular has issues due to it's a location in a lower area where running water naturally directs. BPRW has done work to attempt to catch water flowing off the road, but has had limited success. Additionally, winter can compound issues in that section when freeze-thaws patterns begin. Every time there is a thaw the water flows downhill into the Muslim section and then freezes. This can happen repeatedly resulting in multiple layers of ice. Wight viewed the section with Cemetery Maintenance Manager Steve Bachand (who has been monitoring the area for the past year) earlier in the day, and determined that the city may need to bring in an outside engineer to see what some solutions might be available. These might include bio-swales between the Muslim Section and Section 7 that could capture water (see existing bio-swale in Leddy parking lot). Wight noted that there is a sewer line in the area if we end up needed to pipe into it. Wight will be meeting with Amela Lulic, the individual who is petitioning the city council to assist in resolving the flooding issues, on Friday, May 20<sup>th</sup>.

Shannon asked if DPW is or should be involved. Wight returned that an outside engineer is needed due to the civil nature of DPWs work. Wight noted that this is the only area of the cemetery where water "ponds", that the land is not smooth – it dips and undulates, and that while it can be worked on and improved in the short term, there is a need for a long term solution to allow continued use of the space. Wight will ask the planning team for engineering estimate. She hopes that this work might make the list of projects funded by the unassigned fund balance as there are no funds in the cemetery budget for this kind of work.

Barlow asked if there is storm water management at Lakeview. Wight was unsure and will check with planning team.

Dieng asked why Muslims were segregated from the rest of the cemetery property. Holli Bushnell, the office staffer for the cemetery department, explained that the city was approached by the Islamic

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Society of Vermont in the mid-2000s regarding allocating burial space to the community that would allow them to follow the burial practices of their faith (segregation of men and women, direction, specific interment practices, specific guidelines concerning headstones/markers). There are other faith communities that have purchased multiple lots in Lakeview specifically for members of their community (Temple Sinai and Calvary Nepali Church), however the Islamic Society did not purchase these lots. Initially, there was only an MOU between the Islamic Society and the city, however specific guidelines for use of the space were developed in 2012 (see attached) that give the Islamic Society control of both who can own lots in the section, who can be buried there, and what kinds of markers can be placed. Additionally, there are people of Muslim faith buried in many other sections of Lakeview. The separation of this section was by request of the Islamic Society of Vermont.

Dieng commented that he has heard from constituents with concerns about a proposed ordinance change that would allow perpetual care funds to be used for building repairs. These constituents fear that this change will mean a lack of care for the two closed, historic cemeteries – Elmwood and Greenmount. Dieng asked how much of the cemetery's current budget was being spent on the buildings. Wight explained that absolutely no funds have been spent on building repair or upkeep over at least the last 4 years (if not much longer). Additionally, upkeep at Greenmount and Elmwood were never an issue prior to the pandemic when the cemetery lost not only its full budget for seasonal employees but also the contract with the state corrections department which brought in community service workers to assist with mowing every week. This left the department with only two full time employees to handle the upkeep for all three cemeteries. At that time, virtually all funds were put into the care and upkeep of the grounds.

Wight explained that there is \$300,000 from the most recent city bond allocated towards repairing the office and chapel. Office is falling apart and must be repaired. It is an historic building from at least 1880, designed by EC Ryder, the same architect as the Louisa Howard Chapel. Wight explained that, at the last commission meeting, community members shared during public forum that they believe Lakeview is kept to a much more pristine level than Greenmount or Elmwood. These individuals want the cemetery department to pay more attention to closed cemeteries. Bachand indicated to Wight that he has focused his attention to make sure Greenmount and Elmwood are trimmed and looking great for Memorial Day, when the inactive cemeteries are most often visited. He did say that Lakeview might not look quite as perfect as a consequence, but Bachand will focus on areas that still have active burials and make sure they're in great shape for visitors.

#### **Wood for Good Funding Request**

Eric Axelrod explained that he is the owner of Wood for Good, a 501c3 volunteer based wood bank based in Jericho and serving Chittenden County. Wood for Good has been instrumental in providing wood for low income/folks in need for several years and has worked with BPRW to remove cut wood from parks in the past to use for donations. Last year Axelrod purchased 4 cords of wood from the city and gave away 75 cords to families across the county. City Arborist VJ Comai reached out to Eric

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regarding 25 cords of wood that the tree crew cut at North Beach, and Axelrod happily accepted the donation. Unfortunately, the wood was cut too small to put on the logging truck Axelrod used and he ended up only being able to fill the truck halfway, leaving about 15 cords behind. He is asking PACC and the City Council to consider providing funds to help his non-profit transport the wood to Jericho. Axelrod promised to make sure at least 50% of the wood he removes from North Beach goes to Burlington families in need.

Shannon commented that she did speak to Comai about this and he feels it is both the best use of the wood and the cheapest solution. There are no funds left in the tress budget to remove the wood.

Comai joined the meeting and explained that in the late winter trees did a long overdue assessment of campground trees for safety reasons. They found multiple large trees in decline that needed to come down before the summer season for the safety of campers/visitors. The removal process resulted in a lot of large chunks of wood on the ground, some of which the crew cut up smaller pieces that will be processed by the campground and sold to campers throughout the season. That left multiple large logs are in excess of 3' in diameter which had to be cut smaller than standard because of the equipment available from the city. Normally the crew would chip what they can and take the rest to the McNeil power plant. This wood can't go to McNeil unless it's processed it into smaller pieces (cut, split, and loaded for transport, about 2 weeks of work for 20 minutes of electricity). Comai feels that donating the remaining wood to Wood for Good is a great use and will help families in need and would really help the department.

Shannon asked what the cost for Axelrod to remove the wood would be and if it's something that could be covered by councilor initiative funds. Axelrod explained that the rate is \$140 an hour for Barrett's to truck the wood from North Beach to Jericho. He thinks the wood left is probably 3 loads total, and each load takes about 1 ½ to 2 hours to complete delivery. The likely cost will be around or under \$1000.

Barlow asked what criteria Axelrod uses to determine the recipients of the wood. Axelrod explained that Wood for Good operate just like a food bank. He doesn't want people to have to justify their need for wood, and while h knows some people might cheat the system he feels it's worth it to get wood to people who really need it. Consequently there no criteria for applicants. Barlow asked how people find out about the organization, and Axelrod stated that he advertises at food banks and on craigslist and Facebook Marketplace, but most people hear about him by word of mouth. Axelrod hopes to double the amount of wood they provide to families this year from 75 cords to 150. He asks that if the committee has other ideas for how to publicize his organization he'd love to get the info out there and help as many people as he can.

Barlow felt this project is a good use of councilor initiative funds. Dieng asked Axelrod how he plans to make sure 50% of the wood goes to Burlington families. Axelrod stated that he does need to find more recipients in Burlington to meet his goal. Shannon suggested setting aside 50% of the wood and holding



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it for Burlington residents and Axelrod agreed that this might be a good solution, however, wood does need to be distributed before the autumn.

Dieng asked if Axelrod sells the balance of the wood at the end of the season and Axelrod explained that all is wood is donated, no one every pays a dime for it. Dieng also supported the use of councilor initiative funds for the project.

Shannon asked if the request for funds needs to go before the board of finance. Dieng explained that any request needs to have an introductory letter detailing who is asking for funds, what they're asking for, and what the funds will be used for. The board of finance will use the letter to determine whether to accept or reject the request.

Shannon asked if Axelrod and Comai could draft such a letter and they agreed to do so. Shannon moved to have PACC recommend to the board of finance the use of \$1000 of council initiative funds for then removal of wood at North Beach Campground by Wood for Good, with the understanding that 50% of the wood will be reserved to be distributed to Burlington families in need. Barlow seconded the motion, and all were in favor. Axelrod will draft a letter to the board of finance detailing the plan for the wood discussed with PACC and send the letter to PACC upon completion. Barlow will provide a template letter to Shannon and Comai to assist.

**Schedule next meeting**

The next PACC meeting will be held on June 22, 2022 at 5pm. The meeting will be held at 645 Pine St in the front conference room as well as via zoom

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:50pm.