

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant  
Lakeview Cemetery  
hbushnell@burlingtonvt.gov

## **Minutes**

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

Wednesday, September 28, 2022, 4:30pm

**MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON AT CITY HALL, SHARON BUSHOR CONFERENCE ROOM AND VIA ZOOM**

#### **Attendance:**

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

City Staff: Doreen Kraft – Burlington City Arts, Colin Storrs – Burlington City Arts, Samantha Dunn – CEDO, Holli Bushnell – BPRW Staff

Public – Carmen George – Carmen George Weddings: Officiant, Photographer, and Florist

Meeting called to order at 4:35pm by Chair Joan Shannon

#### **Approval of Agenda**

Councilor Mark Barlow moved to approve the agenda with the following conditions: remove items 4, 5 and 6 from the agenda as BPRW Director Cindi Wight was unable to be present due to a family emergency. Councilor Shannon seconded, all were in favor.

#### **Approval of Draft Minutes from 7/13/2022**

Barlow moved to approve the minutes, Shannon seconded, all were in favor

#### **Public Forum**

Public forum was opened 4:37pm. Carmen George requested that the committee and BRPW ask the Burlington Police Department to place surveillance cameras in Oakledge Park, specifically at Forever Young treehouse. George has spoken with Director Wight about this request several times, noting that the Forever Young Treehouse is a rare, special space that is the only handicap accessible treehouse in state of VT and it deserves the protection cameras could support. Over the last several years the treehouse has been damaged, vandalized, lit on fire, and had a 3'x2' section of bark removed. No one has been caught or held accountable for damage. The internal space is filled with homophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, and misogynistic graffiti. Additionally, several unhoused individuals have been living in the treehouse, spreading out all their belongings making it unusable for the rest of the public. George states that she cares deeply about homelessness, but this is not a free shelter. The continued misuse of the treehouse is creating a barrier to accessibility and making it an unwelcome space for the public. George concluded by reiterating her request to the committee to advocate for surveillance cameras at treehouse to keep it welcoming and accessible to everyone.

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Hearing the urgency of George's request, Shannon moved to add item 6, the vandalism and misuse of the Forever Young Treehouse be added back to the agenda, in spite of a lack of BPRW representation. All were in favor.

Public forum was closed at 4:41pm

### **PACC Mission Statement**

Per the request of City Council President Karen Paul, Shannon read the current mission statement:

It is the mission of the Parks, Arts and Culture Committee to be the Council conduit for waterfront issues and operations, acting as the Council oversight of Parks and Recreation, Burlington City Arts and other arts and entertainment issues, as well as acting as an oversight to the Library. The PAC Committee will work in collaboration with the Library Commission, Parks and Recreation Commission, Community and Economic Development office, the Burlington City Arts board as well as all private and not-for-profit parks, arts and cultural resources to receive updates on pertinent concerns acting as a liaison to the City Council on recreational, art and culture events, issues, needs and goals.

Shannon then requested that committee members provide any potential changes to the mission statement. Barlow pointed out that the original statement did not include the cemetery commission. He reworked the mission statement as follows:

The mission of the Parks, Arts, and Culture Committee is to act as liaison to Burlington, Parks, Recreation, and Waterfront, Burlington City Arts, and Library departments; as well as other city departments when acting in advance of presenting arts and cultural issues to the City Council. The Committee will work in collaboration with Burlington Parks, Cemetery, and Library Commissions as well as Community Economic Development Office, the Burlington Parks Foundation, and Burlington City Arts Board, and other parks, arts and cultural organizations for recreational, art, and cultural events, issues, needs, and goals.

Dieng felt it was important to add that PACC will work with all city departments to promote arts, parks, and culture within the city and that language should be added that includes the private sector. Ultimately, Dieng did not equipped to draft a mission statement during the allotted meeting time. Instead of taking action during the meeting Holli Bushnell will email Barlow's draft statement to the committee and they will finalize the language over email and discuss at the next meeting.

### **Memorial Auditorium Update**

Samantha Dunn from CEDO explained the progress that has been made since April. The full City Council was updated early summer and provided with an action item to move forward with either stabilization of the building or demolishing. The Council voted unanimously to support to stabilize. That process is

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currently underway. CEDO released an RFP for first piece of stabilization on 9/28/2022 to improve roof. Other components of the stabilization project include mechanical equipment upgrades to prevent critical systems from freezing, some work on parapet where there's water infiltration, and safety measures to make sure bricks don't fall off building which is currently a risk.

In terms of building use, CEDO is working to identify a private partner for adaptive reuse of the building. This concept envisioning entering into a 99+ year lease, giving another entity the ability to develop the building and bring it back to life in a way that aligns with the city goals while allowing the partner to do what they would like. The RFP for this has been generated. Dunn requested that PACC provide feedback and guidance on city goals and proposal scoring. She also asked if any PACC members would like to be on committee.

Barlow asked if the proposals for partnership had any requirements for any use or if they include a public use covenant. Dunn stated that the city could sell building and the buyer could do whatever they wanted, but the goal of the partnership is to get a proposal with public use component.

Shannon stated that the city has issued an RFP for Memorial before and wonders what is different about this RFP that would allow us to expect a different response. Dunn explained that the previous RFP was for an operator of the building based on the premise that city would redevelop building (2018 vision). The city is no longer able to redevelop building on their own, so now they're looking for a partner that would do the development/renovations. It is possible that the original respondent, Higher Ground, would come back with new proposal, but other entities have also expressed interest. Several groups have already reached out to Dunn with ideas. The goal of the new RFP is to get many proposals and figure out who to enter exclusive negotiations with.

Shannon asked if any community outreach had been incorporated into this RFP, and Dunn confirmed that the top 5 community desires from the 2018 survey were incorporated into new RFP request and that 20% of scoring for the proposals is the ability to incorporate in 1 or more of desired public uses.

Barlow asked what constituted a public benefit. Dunn explained that things like engagement with the streetscape and public access would be examples of additional public use. The committee determines best public benefits, but proposals indicate what they think is their public benefit.

Dieng asked if the RFP had already been released. Dunn stated that she was looking for feedback from PACC before releasing the new RFP. Dieng returned that information from the 2018 survey shouldn't be part of discussion anymore as so much has changed over the last 2 years that the data may no longer be relevant. There were no issues with the High School at the time, nor had the city implemented their properties reappraises. Dieng felt that a new community survey about memorial was needed. He also asked if the city can wet requirements to buyer that insure they follow community desires.

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Shannon agreed with Dieng that community priorities may have changed dramatically since 2018. While she's aware of how much effort went into community engagement 4 years ago, touching base with the community again would be a good idea as the answers received might be vastly different from original desires. Shannon asked if another survey could be issued that asks the question if housing should be considered a public benefit in the community's opinion (ask specifically). Additionally, Shannon felt that the "memorial" aspect of the building's original intent was missing from the proposal guidelines. She felt there's a sacredness to the auditorium, noting the plaques memorializing community members who were lost during WWI. Retaining that memorial is critical and should be a scoring item.

Dunn commented that a way to review and evaluate what's been presented is part of the scoring process, but may not be worth 20% of the full score. She added that perhaps retaining the existing memorials should maybe have more weight in the final score.

Dieng asked if any individuals or entities have reached out to the city about taking over Memorial and Dunn was able to confirm that 3 different groups have approached the city about Memorial in the last year. She continued by explain that the concept of a 99 year lease means that Memorial will be retained as a public asset and can be returned to full city use once the lease is completed. The lease makes it possible to maintain the asset without spending money. The next generation will be able to make a different decision about the asset and use. She concluded by explaining that developers are comfortable with a 99 year lease because it allows them to access financing otherwise not available. Dieng returned that he feels very encouraged by the 3 inquiries that have already been made and that the 99 year lease sounds like a positive step forward.

Shannon reiterated that things have changed tremendously over the last few years and things could change really fast again. She reiterated that reserving Memorial Auditorium as public space would allow for changes to adapt over the years. Public space is very different from just public benefit.

Dunn stated that she intends to incorporate changes discussed into the RFP. The timeline for the RFP is as follows: the RFP will be issued next week (10/3) and proposals will be due 12/9. Dunn will share the updated RFP with committee and the committee will share any concerns directly Dunn.

### **Dewey Park Public Art**

Colin Storrs provided the committee with a brief overview of the public art installation project at Dewey Park. In fall 2021 REIB, in partnership with BCA, lead the commissioning of a public art sculpture on the subject of belonging. A panel comprised of community members, neighborhood representatives, the ONE farmer's Market, students, and others convened to select 5 top artists out of the 38 proposals received. These 5 artists received a \$1000 stipend to develop in-depth proposals. Of those 5, Humanity Memorial was selected by the committee after a nationwide call for artists. The winning proposal, Belonging and Embrace will be a 20' tall stainless steel landmark surrounded by granite seating and a concrete base in the form of two entwined Sankofa birds. The project is currently in permitting process, the sculptor, Ai Qiu Hopen, is building piece, and the city is securing contractor for installation. BCA will

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be holding public meetings to insure public awareness of the project. The installation is scheduled March or April 2023.

Barlow asked about the durability of the stainless steel, and Storrs was able to confirm that the two, giant cut and bent slabs of stainless will be powder coated.

Dieng asked about what steps have been taken for the preservation of this public art. Storrs stated that an anti-graffiti coating would be applied to the stainless steel and there are funds in the budget for light maintenance if there is vandalism. The materials are very weather resistant and the piece itself will be placed in a park that is regularly maintenance and will have appropriate lighting. With the recently adopted 1% for public art policy, BCA program can have a more budget-friendly maintenance fund (above what BPRW does), but this piece requires very little maintenance outside of unforeseen vandalism.

Dieng asked if there will there be a plaque there to explain the art, and Storrs confirmed that a plaque is part of the planned installation.

#### **Vandalism and Misuse of Forever Young Treehouse**

Proposed solution – police put up cameras.

Shannon stated that she has talked with Chief Murad about cameras, and his stance is that they are difficult to monitor. The City Council recently approved funding for purchasing and placing more cameras throughout the city. Shannon wondered if something be added to Oakledge and the treehouse that could be part of new camera system. Moreover, Shannon felt it would be impactful to hold a meeting concerning safety and misuse of parks. She asked who the committee feels needs to be involved with that conversation.

Dieng commented that I&T has had a budget for around 100 cameras approved, their role is to just buy cameras and servers. BPD will be making the decision about where camera placement will happen. Dieng feels that the case needs to be made for placing cameras at Oakledge as the damage to the treehouse is a major concern. Generally speaking, Oakledge needs more security and Dieng wondered if park patrols could be involved and provide more monitoring for treehouse. Dieng agreed that all parks need some type of security system, but Oakledge should be near the top in terms of priority.

Shannon agreed with Dieng that more security is needed in parks across the board. She also appreciates George's statements about why the forever young treehouse needs extra concern. It's unique across the state, a very special space, and it's no longer able to be used by the public because it's been consumed for private use (poor/illegal private use). The challenge is that the cameras do no equal enforcement. There is a question of how we go from cameras recording all the unwanted and illegal activity to actually enforcing the laws. Cameras in the treehouse won't make a difference unless we enforce laws. There have been issues in parks throughout the city, and, despite best intentions, there

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has not been headway made with the unhoused population. Shannon asked if the committee would like to have broader discussion about public safety in parks and how to address all issues going on in parks. Dieng and Barlow both felt this was a good idea.

Shannon reiterated that the treehouse should be a priority in the upcoming conversation. George felt that identifying the perpetrators would be a start to improving the state of the treehouse. Even if restorative justice cannot be forced on perpetrators, at least the city would have an idea of who is causing the problem, and maybe from there they could have a better sense of how to address issue.

Barlow agreed that the vandalism and lack of safety in public parks is a city wide issue. He believes it's related to resourcing and prosecuting the perpetrators of the acts. He commented that the urban park rangers are new resource and he would love to figure out how to use these new rangers for public safety. In terms of cameras, he feels that with BPD being so understaffed, anything we can do to deter acts would be helpful, and cameras could be a factor in that. At least the city would have more to work with than they do presently. Barlow met with Chief Murad last week, and the chief feels we may have to start closing our parks at night. Maybe that's part of the discussion as well. Ultimately, Barlow is for larger discussion about public safety in parks next meeting.

Shannon asked about the possibility of adding a livecam to the treehouse. George was fully in support of this idea along with adding signage indicating that visitors were on camera. She feels the Forever Young Treehouse would be a great location for a livecam pilot program.

Shannon stated that PACC will try to schedule their next meeting ASAP. Bushnell will send out a doodle poll including George, Abbey Duke of the Parks Commission, Lacey-ann Smith from BPD, and Sarah Russell – Special Assistant to End Homelessness with CEDO. This meeting will be specifically about public safety and security in the parks. There will be a possibility of voting on pilot program for livecam in treehouse (and other parks), and the treehouse will be major focus of discussion.

**Schedule next meeting**

The next PACC meeting will be scheduled via doodle poll.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:25pm.