



CITY OF BURLINGTON, VERMONT
CITY COUNCIL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT &
NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE
c/o Community & Economic Development Office
City Hall, Room 32 • 149 Church Street • Burlington, VT 05401
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Councilor Brian Pine, Chair, Ward 3
Councilor Sarah Carpenter, Ward 4
Councilor Zoraya Hightower, Ward 1

Committee members: Chair Brian Pine (BP), Sarah Carpenter (SC), Zoraya Hightower (ZH)

City staff: Ian Jakus, CEDO; Patti Wehman, Housing Manager of Permitting and Inspections, Councilor Ali Dieng,

Other Attendees: Carina Driscoll, Burlington resident; Jess Hyman, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO); Christie Delphia, Burlington Tenants Union; Devon Ayers, Vermont Legal Aid; Sebastian Rider, Burlington resident;

Wednesday, May 20th, 2020

6:00 PM –7:30PM

Virtual Zoom Meeting

Draft Minutes

Meeting Started 6:00PM

1. Review Agenda

Agenda is approved as presented

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.

2. Public Forum

Public Forum opened with a letter submitted from Carina Driscoll, Burlington resident, about urban homesteading and suggestions that the city might consider to loosen restrictions and promote self-sufficient agriculture. [See Attached](#)

Jess Hyman, CVOEO, invited members of the committee and the public to attend the virtual Fair Housing Project meetings every Friday.

Councilor Ali Dieng asked for CDBG data, particularly how many Burlington residents are supported by block grant funds? Councilor Pine said that data is hard to calculate due to the nature of the grant going to assisting people who are homeless, business owners who may live outside Burlington, etc. Dieng also asked about specific community led programs which receive funding, to which Councilor Pine said the CDBG funds are severely restricted and cannot typically be used at a neighborhood level, and

are limited to be used to support activities that support low- and moderate-income residents. Councilor Pine proposed to invite a CEDO staff member to the next meeting who was able to better answer these questions.

With no further comments from the public, forum closed.

3. Continued Discussion on Tenant Protections

Christie Delphia, Burlington Tenants Union, presented a letter to the committee that outlined their recommendations on improving tenant rights and protections. [See Attached](#). The BTU sees five main areas that will provide immediate and significant relief to the housing crisis:

1. Increasing the Power and Scope of the Housing Board of Review
2. A Code Enforcement Department That Works for Tenants
3. Enacting Rent Control
4. Enacting Just Cause Evictions
5. Safe Parking, Safe Camping

The BTU also has four demands to address tenant protections:

1. “Ban the Box”, which refers to removing a number of questions on rental applications which prevent LMI people from obtaining housing
2. Increase the penalty on all improperly withheld security deposits
3. Expand the retaliatory eviction ‘clock’
4. Publicize the database of landlords, Certificate of Compliance, rental registration, and code violations

The committee discussed the suggested changes based on their feasibility and methods required. The committee said that some of the changes can be done by city council, and some will require a charter change through the state, and they will need to decide which goals are short term and which are long term based on the process required.

Devon Ayers, Vermont Legal Aid, commented that though some will require charter change, does not mean it should not be pursued, even if it takes longer. The committee agreed and said they would need to come up with a timeline for which of them are short term goals and can be accomplished sooner, as opposed to the long term goals which require time.

The committee agreed that these issues would need to be divided into meeting topics, and appropriate people and agencies be invited so that a fuller discussion can be had. The committee agreed to set aside every other meeting for tenants’ rights discussions and the other for regularly scheduled committee agenda items.

Councilor Hightower asked about the process of inviting other agencies and city staff to committee meetings for answers and input. Patti Wehman, Housing Manager for Permitting and Inspections, said inviting people within the city is fairly easy.

Councilor Dieng expressed support for inviting experts to the appropriate meetings, and suggested that the committee take a resolution to council to see what can be done from a legal standpoint.

Ian Jakus, CEDO, gave the new council members background information on the research and recommendations from CEDO. Three of the recommendations from CEDO

were to improve the accessibility of code enforcement data, strengthen minimum housing standards, and requiring landlords to give tenants information on their rights upon lease agreement.

Patti clarified that code enforcement can only control behaviors that violate city ordinances, or can be reported to the police, as they only enforce minimum housing standards, not quality of life.

The committee agreed that the first topic to focus on for the next meeting is the Housing Board of Review, and “just cause eviction” and to invite members from the HBR to attend for discussion.

Christie Delphia, BTU, expressed frustration that codes are enforced based on personal interpretations and not as they are explicitly written.

Sebastian Rider, Burlington resident, expressed frustration that they feel codes are not being enforced and that every year the quality of life and livability gets worse. Rider said that when they call Burlington Police Department, no one shows up.

5. Next Steps

The committee agreed to meet again in 2 weeks, and that the Housing Board of Review will be the focus for next meeting. It was decided that in the meantime, councilors will communicate with the City Attorney’s office and HBR members. Councilor Pine will come up with a schedule and suggested agendas for the next few months’ meetings.

Adjournment

Committee agreed to adjourn the meeting at 7:35PM

VOTING: unanimous; motion carries.