



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; Bill Ward, Directory of Permitting and Inspections; Patti Wehman, Housing Manager of Permitting and Inspections; Josh O’Hara, Housing Board of Review Chair; Patrick Kearney, Housing Board of Review Member; Betsy McGavis, Housing Board of Review Member; Patrick Murphy, Housing Board of Review Member  
**Other Attendees:** Ben Traverse, former Housing Board of Review member; Christie Delphia, Burlington Tenants Union; Sandrine Kibuey, CVOEO; Devon Ayers, Vermont Legal Aid; Angela Zaikowski, Director of Vermont Landlords Association; Erhard Mahnke, Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition; Keith Pelsbury, Burlington resident; Caryn Long; Burlington resident

Wednesday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020  
6:00 PM –7:45PM  
Virtual Zoom Meeting

**Draft Minutes**

**Meeting Started 6:00PM**

**1. Review Agenda**

**MOTION** by Councilor Pine, **SECOND** by Councilor Carpenter, to adopt the agenda as presented

**VOTING:** unanimous; motion carries.

**2. Public Forum**

Public Forum opened with comment from Caryn Long, Burlington resident, expressing frustration that codes are not enforced and that the neighborhood feels unsafe to walk through.

Councilor Carpenter gave clarification that the discussion at hand was largely on what the Housing Board of Review currently does, and how it could be expanded as per CEDO’s recommendation.

With no additional comments entered, forum closed.

### **3. Overview of Housing Board of Review**

Committee opened the discussion with a presentation by the Housing Board of Review led by the chair, Josh O'Hara, on what the current role of the board is. O'Hara described the function of the board as low cost judicial process for tenants as a means to alleviate the costs and burdens associated with small claims court. O'Hara stated the majority of their cases are related to security deposit disputes between tenants and landlords, as well as minimum housing standards enforcement violation appeals.

Councilor Carpenter asked the board about their volume of cases and how many are related to minimum housing standards. Josh O'Hara described the volume of cases as security deposit cases between three times more frequent than minimum housing standards and that the board saw less than ten cases each year for the last five years. O'Hara described these minimum housing standard cases as being mostly filed by landlords seeking an appeal or extension to a violation notice.

Councilor Carpenter asked the board what they do to educate tenants on their rights, if anything. Members of the board described their various efforts as raising awareness for their services through the CVOEO tenant hotline, Vermont Apartment Owners website, Vermont Housing Authority website, educating tenants on a case by case basis, and doing an annual campaign with UVM's Office of Student and Community Relations for off campus student outreach.

Patti Wehman, Housing Manager of Permitting and Inspections, suggested increasing awareness of tenants' rights by distributing a handbook to landlords for their tenants at the time of lease agreement. An existing handbook created by the Vermont Apartment Owners association was discussed as needing updating before redistribution.

Josh O'Hara commented that the Housing Board of Review does have a role in increasing tenants' awareness of their rights, however their main priority is as a judicial board.

Devon Ayers, Vermont Legal Aid, commented that their website is a good resource for tenants and is as up to date as possible.

Sandrine Kibuey, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, commented that CVOEO has a tenant hotline as well as an extensive website with materials and resources.

Angela Zaikowski, director of the Vermont Landlords Association, described a few issues with having landlords mandated to distribute handbooks as it being costly due to the cost of printing the materials, as well as difficult to mandate due to leases not being required. Angela suggests increasing access to the Vermont Housing Authority online handbook which is kept as up to date as possible.

The committee continued the topic of how the Housing Board of Review can be expanded in their judicial role to assist tenants beyond security deposit disputes. HBR members suggested creating a new form for tenants to file an appeal in order to increase accessibility.

Ben Traverse, commented that the board is likely hesitant in giving suggestions on expanding their powers due to their responsibility to being judicial and impartial, and Traverse would like to volunteer to work with the committee on this issue.

Bill Ward, Permitting and Inspections Department Director, drafted a possible postcard which could be given to tenants by codes enforcements after complaint is made so that tenants are aware of their right to an appeals process and protection from retaliation.

The committee opened the discussion to the public. Erhard Mahnke of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition, suggested increasing transparency in code enforcement data if possible, requesting additional funding to keep the information updated, duplicating the mention of resources on every website possible, and hosting tenant/landlord education workshops to increase understanding.

Keith Pelsbury, Burlington resident, supports increasing tenant education as a neighbor to tenants and commented that it can be difficult to maintain positive neighborhood relations when minimum housing standard complaints are not anonymous and often lead to intrusive housing inspections.

Christie Delphia, Burlington Tenants Union, supports increasing tenants' education an awareness of their rights, as well as higher fines for landlords who refuse to repair properties according to minimum housing standards with the proceeds funding tenant assistance. Delphia agreed to work with Traverse on ways to expand the Housing Board of Review going forward.

#### **4. Develop CDNR work plan**

The committee ran out of time to have a complete work plan discussion and agreed that to move forward an outline would need to be created to guide committee meeting discussion topics based on deadlines and which people and organizations would need to be invited. Councilor Pine agreed to draft this outline for committee approval.

#### **5. Next Steps**

The committee agreed to meet virtually in three weeks on June 24<sup>th</sup> at 5:00pm.

#### **Adjournment**

Committee agreed to adjourn the meeting at 7:44PM

**VOTING:** unanimous; motion carries.