

**Ward 5 NPA Minutes  
February 19, 2015  
7:00pm Miller Center**

**Ward 5 City Council Candidates, Chip Mason & Mike Fife**

Chip- Democrat. Running for re-election. Excited by Plan BTV South End.  
Mike- Progressive. First time running. Been here for two years. Interested in making more opportunities for young professionals. Used to be an Americorp. Financial literacy program for Champlain College. Mentor at King Street Youth Center. Wants to work more for youth and homeless individuals. Currently a research assistant at UVM. Certificate in mediation studies.

Questions:

Q: Retirement Fund; why have I not heard more about it?

A: Chip- City cannot impose a solution. created a task force that met on a weekly basis to find out what problems and solutions were. This was reported out with recommended action items which suggested a hybrid system which does not put the full risk upon the taxpayer. Perhaps suspend the 3% Cost Of Living Increase. Has commenced bargaining with unions and they are waiting to see how the conversations turn-out. Certain things the Retirement Board address and other things are addressed by the Council. 8% growth has been projected which just isn't feasible.

A: Mike- As an experienced financial coach, it is a hard balance to make. People rely on that money. Need to be more careful with the money. 8% does not make sense.

Q: What is your system for change?

A: Chip-There is a system. We have a plan of 28 different options. The committee decided that that system needs to be simplified and addressed. We are in a big enough hole that we cannot just move forward in a different direction.

A: Mike- Make it cheaper and get more money. These are real issues. We need to balance crunching the numbers about how much money the City needs to spend and how much money is burdened on the taxpayer.

Q: Top 2 priorities of the Retirement Fund

A: Mike- Jobs (especially for young people), Affordable Housing, Complete Streets

A: Chip- Affordable housing/ affordability of living in Burlington. fear losing the middle class. Look at efficiencies; we need revenue that cannot be found in taxes. Plan BTV South End; smart development and planning. Burlington Telecom.

Q: How bad is the risk of Burlington Telecom on the taxpayers?

A: Chip- I don't think that there is additional risk. And we hear in the public that people want public ownership of Burlington Telecom. The more we own of it the less we get back in the short term

A: Mike- The more we own, in the long run, the more we get back. I think moving forward, we have thresholds to meet. and my understanding is that 50% will go to p-corp which I think is a good deal. I would prefer for it be community owned so it can be an asset to the people not to a company that could buy. I am running to provide an alternative voice both to what Democrats and fellow Progressives say.

Q: Jobs and Plan BTV. We have an enterprise zone in the South End which is 4% of the city and is where we can still have industry, should we change that to residential when that could negatively affect the city.

A: Mike- I think keeping it part industry is a good idea. But we have to listen to the community and perhaps only put a limited amount of housing there. We can put more housing downtown. We need space for companies to grow.

A: Chip- I, personally, would not put a lot of residential on Pine St but that does not mean that I am against *any* housing.

Q; Would you consider being part of the steering committee if you do not win?

A: Mike- Yes

Chip- I want to hear a diversity of voices on the council and to be an advocate for low and moderate income individuals.

Mike- Thank you for allowing me to serve you so far.

### **Learn about Ballot Items on the upcoming Election**

- School Budget of \$68,585,138
- T.I.F district downtown, authorizing using 10 million to upgrade

Concerned that this is specifically going to private companies- Well this will improve public infrastructure through the use of private companies

- Reserve Funds- to provide flexibility
- Non-citizens to serve on Boards
- Non-citizens right to vote in VT municipal and school elections-- should we amend the state constitution
- Change boards' terms to three years
- Eliminate requirement to state political affiliation for certain City Boards

Next Monday Night at Contois, 7 pm, people will be there to answer questions in depth

### **Latest from our School Board, Miriam Stoll**

#### Ballot items

School Budget- smallest increase ever. Has been up to 11%. This budget redesigned many of the programs keeping in mind a breadth of services, what was going on throughout the state, and how to make more programs more effective and efficient.

We have had a lot of changes. The superintendent has been great and I look forward to the new superintendent

I know a lot of people are worried that the increase was too low. We have been running very inefficiently and though we have cut down on increases, we have made improvements in the academics for our students

T.I.F.- There are programs in the building on the edge of UVM. We want to use the money the City has generated from leasing the building to UVM to find home for the programs in that building.

We need to realize that we are not the first city to make it legal for non-citizens to vote for school elections. I think it would be great for Burlington because 30% of our children are new Americans and need a voice.

Our new superintendent is great. We looked at people from all over the country and Canada. Students, staff, and community preferred him over the other candidates. Coming from Ontario in a very progressive district and he has experience dealing with a similar population. He wanted to come here because he would some international experience. This will probably be here

for 3 to 5 years. He also has a child coming to College in America. He speaks several languages and is very international.

Commenter- I think it will be great that he will come in here and help make a culture change and that it persists once he leaves.

Q: Will he be able to deal with the city politics?

A: We took him to forums and meetings throughout the City so he has a pretty good idea. I also talked to his references and they also said amazing things about him.

I am running again unopposed. I am running again because I love the interaction with all of the community members.

### **Presentation on the Burlington Town Center Project, Nathan Wildfire**

Public process is going on right now until Saturday

About a year ago, two investors bought it and one investor bought the other. The guy who bought it, Don, started coming to public meeting saying he was interested in the opportunities the mall represented. Wouldn't be great if we spruced up the mall? And the City jumped on board.

They take underdeveloped properties and make them better.

Can this be apartments, office space, meeting place, etc?

Hold up, we need to consult the community. They were at first confused because that is not what they did in NY. But they agreed saying that they would need help to do this.

Mayor Weinberger saw something and wondered if it would work for Burlington. The developer paid the city to hire a technical team to vet proposals. And this is what Burlington is doing now.

We had an event at Contois, Jan 8- Circulation mobility, Mix of uses (housing, retail, etc), Urban design (what does it look like), Public amenities (public accessibilities). Ended up with almost a thousand comments. They are posted on the burlington.gov website. There is a big board inside the mall to collect information. There are around ten comment boxes around the city. Where would you like them in your ward?

These 4 days- Two stores past L.L. Bean. 1st session was a kick-off. Today, there were four workshops; kind of played tetris with square footing. Ended

with 5 of these. Four more workshops tomorrow and then open house so people can come and see what the workshops created and to leave more comments. Get to work with the designers.

Comment- could you bring a map to the high school?

We will do the same process Saturday. The comment boxes and online comments will be available for another month. Around April, the people who bought the mall will come back with a first draft plan for the mall.

Working with career services and res life at UVM. Hit up the Civil Engineering students

Reconnecting Pine and St. Paul possibly. Glass arcade through the mall to walk or bike through to the other side of the mall (no cars). They have one in London, Denver, Millan, etc.

Q: How do we hold the developers accountable to take our ideas into consideration?

A: The developers have to go through the same processes as usual so whatever plan they decide on has to be approved.

The owner has, so far, been really supportive of the open forum setting. Has given \$150,000 up-front for the dream team which shows a sign of good faith but we should always be skeptical until we see it happen but we have been given a lot of signs that he has good intentions.

Everything but Macy's and L.L. Bean is owned by the mall

Q: What is the timeline for completion

A: Well the project has to be done in phases because they have stores already. Betting that it will take a year and a half before shovels hit the ground. This is, potentially, a \$250 million project.

### **Wrap Up and Open Forum**

Ward lines have changed, there has been redistricting. Though Ward 5 has changed the least