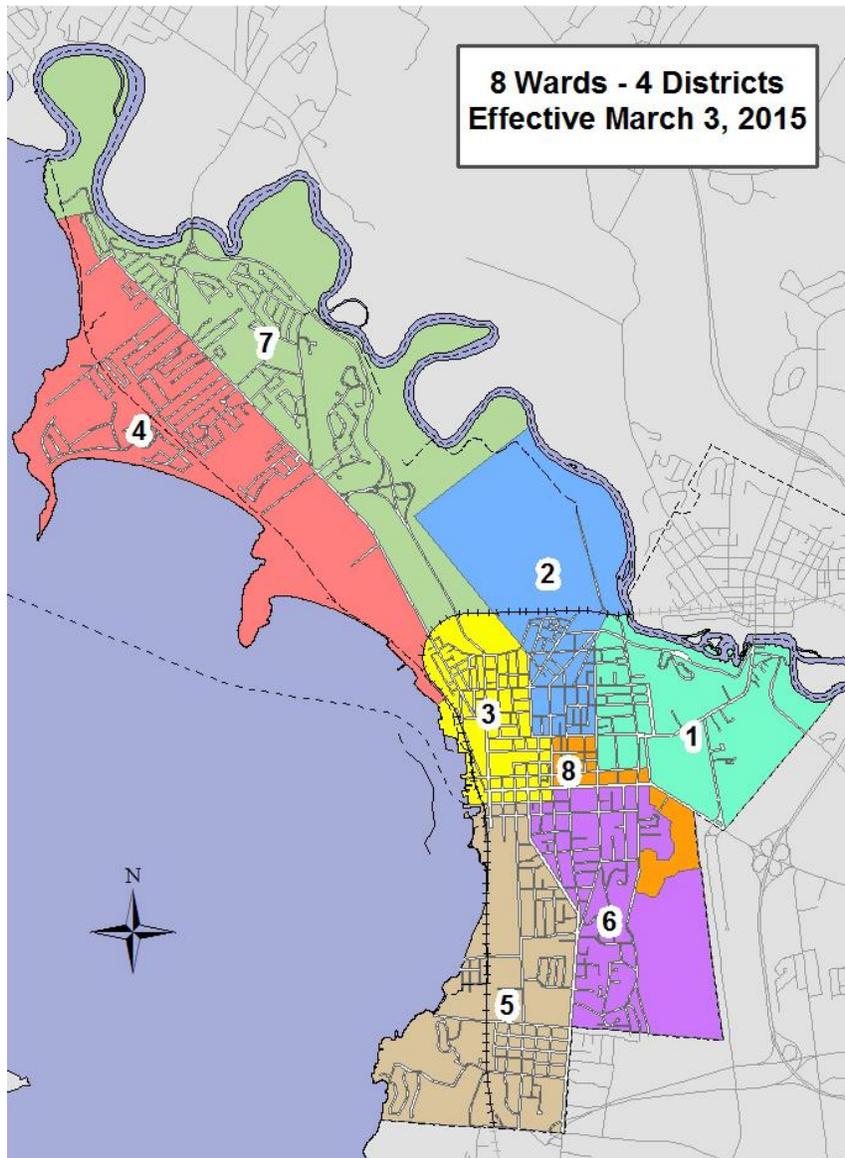




## Neighborhood Planning Assemblies (NPAs) Steering Committee Member Information Packet



Arranged by Burlington CEDO  
Last updated July 2016



## ➤ **Welcome to your Neighborhood Planning Assembly!**

Thank you for joining your neighbors in working to make Burlington a great place to live! Neighborhood Planning Assemblies (NPAs) exist in each of the city's eight Wards. Everyone who lives in a Ward is a member of that NPA.

NPAs provide the basic functions of:

- Meeting your neighbors
- Sharing your opinions
- Voicing your concerns
- Learning about projects
- Staying informed about the City and your Ward



As a Steering Committee member, you will be able to help facilitate this public service for your neighbors and community members. The purpose of this document is to make new Steering Committee members more comfortable with the role and process of the NPAs, and as a guide for prospective Steering Committee members.

### **How did NPAs begin?**

NPAs were created by the Burlington City Council in 1982 under Mayor Bernie Sanders' administration.

The City Council resolved that:

“The Neighborhood Planning Assemblies shall...help provide citizens with information concerning City programs and activities; help obtain citizen views of City needs, and help provide citizens with an opportunity to



participate in making recommendations with respect to governmental decision, including the allocation of revenues.”

In addition to the initial resolution, each NPA has bylaws created by each Steering Committee to specify rules regarding conduct, committee election, etc. These bylaws are on the City site under each NPA’s page.

## ➤ **Steering Committee responsibilities**

### **Preparing for the NPA meeting**

Meetings are held monthly at regularly scheduled times. Steering committees are responsible for providing CEDO with meeting agendas *at least* 48 hours in advance of the NPA meeting.

These agendas should include:

- Time and place of the scheduled meeting
- Outline of agenda items to be discussed

This is to ensure community members are able to participate, and to comply with Open Meeting requirements.

Steering Committees can also choose to gather prior to the regular NPA meeting, to finalize the agenda and discuss issues. These gatherings are also covered under Open Meeting law, necessitating an agenda be posted prior, and minutes taken and posted following the meeting.





## During the meeting

In order to ensure a well-organized and timely event, one or more steering committee members act as facilitators, ensuring that members have equal opportunity to participate in the meeting, and that the gathering remains civil and productive.

Minutes are required to be taken under Open Meeting law. Steering committees are encouraged to fulfill this responsibility, although CEDO is able to provide support.

## Appointments

Each Ward is able to appoint a representative for the Community Development Block Grant panel, which disburses City funds for community development use, such as charity work and economic development.

## ➤ NPA Regular Schedule

Ward	Meeting Day	Meeting Place
1 & 8	Second Wednesday of the month 7pm-9pm	McClure Lobby Conference Room, FAHC/UVM Medical Center
2 & 3	Second Thursday of the month Community Dinner: 5:30pm-6:30pm NPA: 6:30pm-8:30pm	McClure Multigenerational Center 241 North Winooski Avenue
4 & 7	Fourth Wednesday of the month 7pm-9pm	Robert E. Miller Community Center 130 Gosse Court
5	Third Thursday of the month 7pm-9pm	DPW / Parks & Rec Conference Room 645 Pine St
6	First Thursday of the month 7pm-9pm	Morgan Room, Aiken Hall 83 Summit Street, Champlain College



## ➤ **Professional Development Resources**

As a Steering Committee member, you will play a role in facilitating public meetings, setting agendas, and other tasks.

The following is a set of guidelines, which can be adapted to fit the culture and needs of your particular NPA. For codes of conduct specific to your NPA, please consult your NPA's bylaws.

### **How to run an effective and efficient public meeting**

#### **Start on time**

It's your responsibility as the facilitator to call everyone to order and get the meeting off the ground. Members are spending their time to attend, so it's important they feel it's used effectively.

#### **Clarify roles and rules**

Make it clear before you start:

- You will be sticking to the agenda
- Comments are to be addressed to the facilitator or presenters
- No heckling will be allowed
- There will be a question and answer session to allow everyone to have their say following presentations

#### **Follow the agenda**

It's your responsibility to make sure the agenda's followed. If anything extra comes up which needs to be discussed, and put it down as a potential agenda item for the next meeting.



### **Be fair but firm**

Make it clear that vigorous debate is welcomed, but personal abuse will not be tolerated. Remind members to keep the discussion about the issues instead of ad hominem personal attacks, and to keep the direction of the discussion between presenters and members, instead of quarrels between members during meeting time.

### **Keep it moving**

Many people may want to contribute their views, but sticking to the allocated discussion time is critical to ensure the meeting stays on schedule. One approach is to ask members who want to speak on a particular discussion topic to raise their hands, and then allocate time equally. For example, if a Q&A session is blocked for ten minutes, and five people want to participate, two minutes can be allocated for each member's question and answer.

### **Thank your audience**

It's common courtesy to thank attendees once the meeting is finished, and people appreciate it. They are more likely to come to the next meeting if they feel they have made a contribution and/or that their attendance is appreciated. It's also a good idea to let members know the date of the next meeting in your closing comments.

### **Taking minutes**

It may not be the most glamorous job in the world, but it's absolutely necessary to avoid conflict and mixed messages later on.

Minutes need to be:

- Accurate. They must be a true record of what occurred.



- Consistently structured. Decide on a structure, e.g. bullet points or numbers, and stick to it. Your minutes will be a lot easier to follow for those who may have missed the meeting or need a refresher on what took place.
- Brief. You should summarize discussions and decisions rather than attempt to get them down verbatim. This makes minutes more accessible to follow, and lessens the probability of misrepresentation.

Minutes should include:

- A heading, including title, date, time, and location of the meeting.
- Names of Steering Committee members present.
- Name of the facilitator, usually a members of the Steering Committee.

Minutes can then be sent to CEDO, which are then edited and put up on the City's website to be accessible for the public. If a Steering Committee member is unable to take minutes for a particular meeting, CEDO may be able to provide support. For examples of minutes, agendas, and other supporting documents, an archive of NPA materials for each Ward can be found on their pages, hosted on the CEDO site.

## **When a meeting gets out of control**

### **Explain the rules**

Explain the structure of the meeting before it starts. You might for example, make it clear that speakers are not to be heckled – there will be a question and answer section afterwards. Emphasize that all comments are to be addressed to presenters, the facilitator, or Steering Committee members, and attendees must put their hand up and wait to be called upon before speaking to ensure an orderly and productive meeting. The agenda should also be explained; although all members may have a handout of the agenda, doing so aloud can alleviate any confusion.



### **Be polite**

If someone heckles you, try not to get involved in back-and-forth mudslinging. Trading insults won't move the meeting forward, and will only waste the time of the attendees who are there to engage in or listen to meaningful discussion. Firmly point out to the overzealous member that you would like to hear all points of view, but these must be given at the correct time, and with an appropriate level of civility.

### **Don't be afraid to say you don't know**

There's always a chance that a member will hit you with an issue you aren't comfortable with, or a situation will arise to which you're not certain how to respond. If this happens, feel comfortable relying on fellow Steering Committee members who may have experienced the situation before, as well as attending members.

### **➤ CEDO**

Neighborhood Planning Assemblies have autonomy from the City in terms of setting their own ground rules and procedures, but CEDO can be an available resource for the NPAs.

The point person for NPAs is:

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