All-Wards Neighborhood Planning
Assembly Minutes – Full Notes

Date of Assembly: 8/15/2017
Start Time: (Commence): 6:30 PM
Finish Time: (Adjourn): 8:30 PM
Location: The Miller Center, 130 Gosse Court, Burlington
Notetaker: Nate Orshan

Steering Committee Members in Attendance:
Amanda Hannaford – Ward 2 & 3
Jim Holway – Ward 4 & 7
Martha Molpus – Ward 4 & 7
Nate Orshan – Ward 5
Charles Simpson – Ward 6
Chris Trombly – Ward 4 & 7

Others in Attendance:
Dave Hartnett – City Councilor, North District
Phet Keomanyvanh - Community Development Specialist for Public Engagement, Community and Economic Development Office (CEDO)

(1) Open Forum

Summary:
Suggestions offered for speakers for Fair Housing, for a request for improvements to the Burlington High School campus, and for the new Parks and Recreation director.

Phet: I sent in a request for the Fair Housing presentation for September.

Jim: We’re hoping to get the Burlington High School campus into the September or October NPAs. The high school campus is overdue for work, so we have a video to explain why we think it’s time to do something.

Dave Hartnett: It would be prudent for all NPAs in October or November to meet the new Parks and Recreation director (who’ll be named by end of this week). There are two finalists from out of state, one from in-state.
Phet: My role is around support, what we can do to have effective meetings, having them be civil, etc.

It would be great to bring in some professional development come in to help with, e.g., diversity. I was thinking we could talk about (a) public meeting and open meeting law (City Attorney Eileen Blackwood can support us) and (b) cultural competency. If people want it, let me know when it’d be a good time; I’m thinking public meetings in fall, cultural competence in spring. I can add the work that I myself am doing around underrepresented communities.

Nate: Yes!
Chris: We talk about attendance a lot.
Jim: I’d echo that.
Dave: Given our diverse pop in the New North End, sometimes people are uncomfortable going to a place they don’t know. How about doing a meeting in, e.g., Northgate apartments.
Chris: We’ve talked about having meetings at remote locations, and issue was, e.g., would it be handicap-accessible?
Phet: Franklin Square in Ward 7 is accessible. I can help find a location.
(3) All-Wards Meeting Scheduling

Summary:
All agreed that the All-Wards meeting schedule should be the third Wednesday of the following months: October, January 2018, April, and June.

Phet: Re All Wards timing, we’re going to talk about scheduling. Do we want to do it every other month? Quarterly?
Jim: Quarterly’s sufficient overall for what we do. I’d hate to lose people if they think there are too many meetings.
Phet: It’s all about what YOU guys want these meetings to be.
Martha: When we changed from quarterly to every other month, it was because there were a lot of things going on in the city. It’s good to be flexible. Several months is a long time when there’s a lot of stuff happening.
Jim: Yeah, it’s always been an evolution re timing. The NPAs that seem to stay healthy are the ones that evolve instead of taking a hard line. Remember: These meetings are a sharing of resources & ideas; our purpose isn’t necessarily to communicate when there’s a hot issue in town. Technology’s also advanced so that we can do a lot that way.
Chris: Quarterly I can do, but bi-monthly’s too much for my family. But we could do, i.e., per Phet’s suggestion, a couple of meetings in the fall and a couple in the spring.

Phet: Before we leave, we should schedule the next meeting. It’s good to have all the NPAs here!

Jim: (We’re missing Ward 1/8, who are 2 people…) It’d be good to talk with Richard Hillyard. Some people in the community have said they’d like the NPA to grow.
Phet: There’s interest in the student body to get involved, but there’s also history of town/gown tensions.
Dave: Maybe somebody at UVM administration could get involved. Maybe somebody there would like to get involved, help Richard.
Charles: Students have worst voting records of any wards, so any connection we could make would be great!
Phet: I could provide interns, connecting them to NPAs. So we could have one be on the NPA.
Jim: I have a meeting coming up with Joe Spidell on a different topic, so I’ll add this to the list. When we were involved in creating Ward 8, we saw this as a risk (i.e., low NPA participation). The risk is the turnover of students; they don’t have or want to have deep roots. But NPA gives opportunities for training students into civil engagement.
Charles: We did have a student government rep from Champlain College.
Jim: Would Dave Hartnett check in with Karen Paul about getting students involved?
Dave: Yup.
Phet: Youth do get involved, but when it comes to local government, they’re, like, “I didn’t know…” So it’s about incentives that appeal to them, e.g., credits, a stipend, a time during the meeting to talk about their issues.
Jim: There was a suggestion for all committees to have a youth seat.
Dave: Some commissions have youth seats, e.g., Parks. Not all of them.

Chris: Action items? All-Ward schedule?
Jim: Every two months would be good, at least for the next one.
Jim: Then how about the next one in January? So October, then January, then April, then June.
Phet: I will send that schedule to the group.
(4) Logistics Discussion to Add Presenters to Agenda for Each NPA
– Jim Holway, Ward 4

Summary:
Showed a working prototype of a web application he developed (http://www.city-wide.org) that could be used to help manage some functions of NPAs, including adding presenters to agendas.

Jim: Someone says, “I want to be on the NPA in Ward X. How do I get there?” We certainly can make an online form to have people indicate where they want to present, etc. I made a web utility.

http://www.city-wide.org
Amanda: Is there a way to post agendas?
Jim: Yes, behind the scenes, it’s scraping the city website. The city DOES make all the agendas available.
Charles: I think it’s fantastic. Particularly because of the transparency, getting an overview of all the of Wards. I’d suggest there be an advisement which suggests what KINDS of things are required to come before the NPAs, framing it a bit.

Chris: So the NPAs would own this?

Jim: Yes. It’s a hybrid. Front-end’s owned by NPAs, a community resource. The City’s NPA site provides the content (scraped by a bot).

Next steps: Give Jim feedback! You won’t be able to fill in the form and have it show up to the public.
Summary:
Discussed the upcoming Memorial Auditorium public forum to be held at Contois Auditorium on September 26, which will include a few short presentations and then public statements. There was additional discussion re including a statement from the Mayor’s office.

Charles: Amanda, Jim, Martha are on an ad-hoc committee for Memorial Auditorium: The big meeting will be in Contois Auditorium on 9/26. There will be a moderator, two short presentations, and then the main block of time will be public statements.

We’re working on a questionnaire for people’s experience with Memorial Auditorium. It would be great if we could get funding for the publicity of this, e.g., for a banner on City Hall park steps. Maybe posters.

There’s at least one group organized to promote one particular idea. We need to have some informational material there.

Jim: Of interest to all wards: We learned quickly that the nature of each NPA means they all have their own leadership and styles. All-Wards has been about sharing ideas; it’s rare that we collaboratively act on an issue. The resolutions regarding Memorial Auditorium were different for each NPA, so we had to figure out the common thread of them all, which was: an unbiased forum hosted by the NPAs.

There was some uncertainty that created a little hiccup. So please convey to your ward: We’ve put up a firewall between NPA folks who are activists. We want to make sure there’s trust in the integrity of the process.

Charles: Also, re funding, I don’t know if we have to pay for videotaping.
Phet: You can borrow equipment from CCTV and have a volunteer do it.
Dave: I can talk to CCTV and make sure there’s equipment.
Phet: FYI, the room setup has to stay “as is”, i.e., the way it’s set up for BTVCC meetings. They don’t want us messing with the layout.
Jim: That may interfere with people in the room, but as long as we have the upstairs available...
Charles: I expect we should be prepared to project a video, too.

Jim: I want to thank the folks at the city for making this very easy for us! E.g., putting up something on the signboard in front of Memorial Auditorium.

Phet: Just email me the form you sent to Zack, so I can make sure that the clerks and the facility people follow through.

Amanda: What’s the total number of chairs?
Dave: I think 100 plus upstairs.

Dave: Re Memorial Auditorium, it has great historical value to the city. Big regret for city that we’ve allowed it to go to hell. I hope this will be the start of something. I’ve been a strong believer in this. We own the building, and I think it should be where all
the offices are, then turn City Hall into a Faneuil Hall. Before we allow the building to leave our ownership, there’s a lot of things we can do with it.

Martha: That’s exactly what we’re hoping for, benefiting from whatever people’s visions are.

Charles: As Tom Visser reminded us, it was part of a flurry of construction in the 1920s.

Jim: Miller Center is an example of a building that was in even worse shape than Memorial Auditorium and was turned into something great. A question for Dave is, How can you help us that it doesn’t follow the trail of the Moran Plant, people getting frustrated with it.

Dave: Where the building sits is a big difference. It’s the gateway to downtown. It has a lot going on.

Amanda: Any suggestions for people we should invite for guests or in the audience? Dave: It’d be a shame if the Mayor’s administration wasn’t there. Champlain College, who used it for years. We should have UVM there as well.

Martha: As guests? We need to preserve the time for citizens.

Amanda: Yes.

Nate: What happens after this meeting?

Charles: I can imagine a committee of NPA people and key players (including Parks & Rec & CEDO). How that’d be established, I’m not sure. The NPA should be the vehicle.

Martha: Mayor’s said that there should be a public process, so this is the initiation of that.

Amanda: I’ve thought of it as a citizen-as-stakeholder group?

Martha: Yes.

Dave: I think it’ll send a loud message that there’s public desire to keep the building. A mistake would be to have it, then sit back and wait for a reaction.

Martha: We have to be prepared for people wanting to tear it down.

Dave: I wouldn’t tie it into the NPAs, because then people will think that it’s an official City thing. If you can get Allen Abair to be connected, that’d probably help.

Jim: Re the firewall I mentioned before, the group that’s thinking about preserving it, they’re working on their own.

Charles: Jim Lockridge’s petition that has > 1,000 signatories.

Jim: Jim L. started a Change.org petition. It had 900+ as of a few months ago. He’s going to be asking NPAs to accept the letter that’s in front of the petition, i.e., that we accept it as part of the record. My thought is that it would be included in our summary to the Council and the Mayor. Jim asked that we get the word out. He’s thinking it will be something that happens AFTER the 9/26 forum, i.e., October or November meeting.

NPAs have advisory resolution power, so if an NPA wants to, we could write, “Dear BTVCC, this report was brought to us, we’d like you to take it into consideration as you move forward in your deliberations”.

Chris: One issue: There’s no guarantee of tenancy for 242 Main in the future Memorial Auditorium.
Dave: This shouldn’t be about one issue, one band, etc., What happens is that people get deaf ears, “Oh, he’s just looking for a place for 242 Main”. I think the City Council would be receptive to getting something done with that building.

Jim: E.g., the North End Youth Program was another stakeholder for the Miller Center building, and I recall that having them talk too much turned people off.

Phet: I’ll staff it for taking meeting minutes. Will there be an opportunity for the Mayor to give their side? If you are presenting a history of the value of Memorial Auditorium, it’s likely the public will say, “Yes!” to keeping it. But thinking as a City representative, it’d be good to know why Memorial Auditorium is in the shape it’s in. Dave: Sure! I’d like to know where they stand. 10, 15 minutes. And I think we’ll need a partnership.
Jim: We’ve gone back and forth on that. We’re still working that out. It comes down to: We want to be sure that most of the time is for people who step up to the microphone. But we don’t want anyone thinking that we’re trying to exclude the administration. The long view is: Partnership.
Dave: The current CEDO director has the same mind as you, trying to open up processes to the public.
Charles: How about celebrating the history at the NPA in the fall?
Jim: That was on the last All-Ward’s agenda but got lost. Upshot on it: I’ve been working on people who said they’d reach out to Bernie. It’s a slow process. If we do this Memorial Auditorium thing well, then the public may be more willing to celebrate the 35 years of NPAs.

Dave: I wanted to come down tonight and thank the NPA members. The NPAs have made me a better city councilor.
Phet: I agree that you should celebrate it! I’m on the planning committee for Celebrate Burlington, so we could do a proclamation.
Jim: If Celebrate Burlington is a community event, that’d make sense.
Phet: I probably won’t start getting together with, e.g., BCA until Sept...

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