



## **NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING ASSEMBLY**

### **MEMBER'S HANDBOOK & BY-LAWS**

"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 decisions, including the allocation of revenues."

Burlington City Council Resolution September 1982

Revised: 8/97, 1/17/02

## **WHAT ARE THE NPA'S?**

Neighborhood Planning Assemblies (NPA's) are grassroots, neighborhood organizations that were established in each of Burlington's seven Wards to encourage resident participation in City government. Working as neighborhood advocacy groups, NPA's helped improve Communication between the residents of Burlington and City government through regular meetings scheduled in each Ward. NPA's serve as organized, democratic forums where neighbors can learn about public issues that affect them, and advise the City of their concerns and needs. From stop signs to major development projects, the NPA's offer you an innovative way to get involved in neighborhood and City issues and make your opinions heard.

This handbook, intended for NPA members, or anyone interested in learning more about the NPA's, contains a short description of what the NPA's do and how they function. At the back is a copy of the By-Laws for your Ward.

## **WHAT DO THE NPA'S DO?**

NPA members concerned about safety in their neighborhoods have successfully lobbied for increased police protection and worked with block leaders and the Police department to organize effective neighborhood watch systems. They have been influential in obtaining improved access to City parks and their ideas have been incorporated when master plans for these parks have been developed. NPA's have also been responsible for neighborhood beautification with tree and flower planting projects and have contributed to programs for the City's youth.

NPA's are able to influence public policy in several ways. One of the most effective ways they can express their sentiments and concerns is in the form of a resolution. These resolutions are distributed to the Mayor, City Councilors, and appropriate City Departments, ensuring that elected officials and Department Heads know how their constituents feel about issues before final decisions are made. It is customary for NPA's to share their resolutions with one another so that everyone is kept informed about prevalent opinions on issues or projects of public concern.

In addition to their advisory role, NPA's are also involved in decisions regarding community development and participate directly in the allocation of Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds by electing representatives to sit on the CDBG advisory board.

CDBG funds are used to support many critical human service, housing, neighborhood, and community development needs in Burlington. Likewise, in the past several years, most NPA's have been allocated CDBG funds to sponsor neighborhood improvement projects. Project ideas come from neighborhood people, like you, who see a need for something in their neighborhood and then work to make it happen.

NPA's are also called upon to elect representatives to serve on various committees, advisory groups, and task forces in the City such as the Main Street Task Force, the Riverside Avenue Revitalization Committee, and the Bike Council. In addition, they elect representatives to serve on the City's Conservation Board, which assesses the environmental impact of development proposals, and helps map out development policies. Such involvement is important because it assures that residents, representing the opinions of their Ward, are participating in public policy decisions.

Many NPA's serve an educational function as well by sponsoring candidate debates or presentations on current issues and, at certain times, may meet together to address issues that affect larger areas of the City. Newsletters and block parties have been additional ways some NPA's have helped foster involvement and a feeling of community in their neighborhood.

Each of Burlington's neighborhoods has its own unique history, resources, and problems to be solved and the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies reflect this diversity.

Because many of the NPA's grew out of already existing neighborhood groups, each has a different character and a different approach to resolving issues. What the NPA's share, however, is the power and resources of their members and the ability to involve people in the process of City government.

In Ward 5, the **NPA** has been actively involved in the planning and redesigning of the Southern Connector, traffic calming, the construction of bus shelters, and assisting the Champlain School PTO in its efforts to upgrade the school's playground. Your NPA offers you an opportunity to get involved in a meaningful way in the issues facing your community. The more active and committed the members are, the more powerful your NPA will become.

# Ward 5 Neighborhood Planning Assembly

## By-Laws

### PREAMBLE:

New England has been called the cradle of American democracy because it is the home of town meeting government. These community gatherings reflect a unique heritage of spontaneous decision-making, volunteer activism, and grass roots constituency vital to the character of the State of Vermont. The Neighborhood Planning Assemblies make it possible for the residents of Burlington to participate in this tradition in a municipal setting, where citywide meetings are not practical. The Neighborhood Planning Assemblies are government on the ground level.

They exercise checks and controls on city government, establish mutual communication, and prevent excessive concentration of power in the Mayor or the City Council. The intention is not to replace civic government, but to empower the people to influence existing government in a cooperative and advisory capacity, and to provide a consistent yet flexible structure for enabling them to do so. This ensures that civic government responsibly and responsibly exercises the authority it has been given by the people.

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES.** The Guiding Principles of the Ward 5 NPA are that:

The NPA will provide a safe and welcoming forum where residents can actively share their voice about issues that matter to them, and where they can learn from the voices of others.

The NPA will cultivate involvement by a diverse spectrum of community members through active outreach and through eliminating barriers to participation.

The NPA will operate in a manner that models respectful, inclusive, culturally, and economically aware practices.

The NPA will be a fun, creative, and vital organizations that values & benefits through the multitude of perspectives shared by those who participate.

With these goals and principles in mind, and in accordance with the City Council resolution establishing the Neighborhood Planning Assemblies, we, the residents of Ward 5, hereby adopt the following structure and By-laws.

#### **ARTICLE I: NAME**

This Neighborhood Planning Assembly will be known as the  
**Ward 5 Neighborhood Planning Assembly**

#### **ARTICLE II: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Ward 5 Neighborhood Planning Assembly will be to provide a forum for the exchange of information between the residents of the ward and the Burlington City Government. The NPA will obtain information from the appropriate commission, department, or elected official with respect to City policies, activities, and other issues of concern to the members of the Assembly.

The NPA will provide a voice for the residents of the ward to express their opinions to the appropriate parties in City government.

The Assembly will be non-partisan and will make no endorsement of political candidates.

### **ARTICLE III: MEMBERSHIP**

All Ward 5 residents who are 14 years or older have a voting membership in our Neighborhood Planning Assembly (NPA). To facilitate attendance at NPA meetings, meeting places are handicapped accessible. Upon request, steering committee members will seek to accommodate special needs (e.g., child care, transportation) that will allow a Ward 5 resident to attend NPA meetings.

PARTICIPATION. Every eligible member may

- a. Participate in meetings of the Ward 5 NPA;
- b. Cast one vote on all matters properly put before the membership for consideration;
- c. Nominate and participate in the election of the Steering Committee;
- d. Serve on the Steering Committee if chosen; and
- e. Receive notices and minutes of all meetings of the Ward 5 NPA.

PARTICIPATION BY NON-MEMBERS.

Non-members may attend and participate in NPA Meetings, but may not vote.

## **ARTICLE IV: STEERING COMMITTEE OFFICERS**

The Assembly will elect no less than three and no more than 5 steering committee members to serve at any one time. They will be elected at the first regularly scheduled meeting following March 1<sup>st</sup> of each calendar year.

TERMS. Terms will begin May 1<sup>st</sup> of that year and end April 30<sup>th</sup> of the next year. Steering Committee members will serve for one-year terms. After a Steering Committee member serves for five consecutive one-year terms she or he must step down from the Steering Committee for at least one full year, before becoming eligible to serve on the Steering Committee again.

QUORUM. A majority of the members of the NPA Steering Committee shall constitute a quorum for any meeting of the Steering Committee, provided that all members of the NPA Steering Committee have been notified at least 48 hours in advance of any scheduled meeting. Absent such prior notification, a quorum shall not be possible unless all Steering Committee members attend.

VOTING. All decisions of the Steering Committee shall be decided by a simple majority of members present at a meeting of the Steering Committee, a quorum having been established.

DUTIES OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE. The Steering Committee shall be responsible for the general management of the affairs of the NPA in accordance with these By-laws, including carrying out the following duties:

a. Meeting Management: arranging, advertising, convening, coordinating, and facilitating regular and special meetings of the NPA, including the setting of the meeting agendas, the booking of meeting space, and the scheduling of meeting guests and speakers.

- b. Neighborhood Outreach: sharing of information, meeting schedules and NPA activities with NPA members, Ward residents, and the general public.
- c. Municipal Monitoring and Oversight: paying regular attention to actions and plans of City Departments, Commissions, City Council and the Department of Planning and Zoning for the purpose of keeping Ward 5 informed of events, investments, and proposed projects that might affect the lives of people living there.
- d. Proper Recording: taking of meeting minutes, recording of all Votes and Resolutions, proper distribution of all Resolutions, coordination with the Community and Economic Development Office on recording of meeting minutes

#### KEY POSITIONS WITHIN THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Members of the Steering Committee shall appoint from among themselves one person to each of the following positions: Moderator, Neighborhood Liaison, and Representative to the Neighborhood Coordinating Council. No person may be appointed to more than one of these positions at the same time. Any member of the Steering Committee may be appointed to any one of these three positions, except that a current member of the Burlington City Council may not be appointed as Moderator.

TERM. These persons shall serve for one-year terms.

## DUTIES.

- Moderator. Facilitate most regular and special meetings of the NPA. Attend at least one training a year and meet with the Moderators from the other NPA's two other times a year to improve skills and share experiences.
- b. Neighborhood Liaison. Receive and review agendas of the City Council, Commissions, and Boards. Attend meetings of these municipal bodies, as necessary. Keep NPA members and Steering Committee members informed on municipal issues and actions affecting the Ward. Keep the Community and Economic Office and other city departments informed about projects, decisions, and concerns of the NPA.
- c. Representative to the Neighborhood Coordinating Council. Regularly attend Council Meetings; stay informed of all issues taken up by the Council. Keep NPA members and Steering Committee members informed of actions and decisions of the Council. Vote on behalf of the NPA, representing the NPA's interests and the Ward's interests before the Council.

## **ARTICLE V: RECALL OF OFFICERS &**

### **FILLING VACANCIES**

Any elected officer will be subject to recall proceedings on the written petition often (10) members of the Assembly, explicitly stating the nature of the complaints. This petition will be presented to the Steering Committee for consideration of the membership at least three weeks prior to a warned meeting. It will require a majority vote to affect a recall. Should an officer be recalled, a replacement can be elected at the same Assembly meeting.

Positions vacated by death, resignation or other reasons, not by the process of recall, will be filled by election no sooner than 30 days and no later than 60 days from official notification to the Assembly of said vacancy.

## **ARTICLE VI: MEETINGS**

Regular Meetings will be held no less than four times a year for the purpose of discussing and acting on the Agenda, making decisions, hearing assigned reports, discussing new business, and conducting the general business of the Ward 5 Neighborhood and Planning Assembly according to its By-Laws.

Annual Meetings will be held in March for the purpose of: accepting the Annual Report of the Ward 5 NPA, electing a new steering committee, and conducting regular NPA business.

Steering Committee Meetings will be held monthly, or as needed, for the purpose of setting the next month's agenda, planning future NPA meetings or activities, and carrying out other duties of the steering committee.

Combined Steering Committee Meetings are composed of Steering Committee members from Ward 5 and any or all other wards. They may be called by a majority vote of the Steering Committee when cooperative efforts between or among wards are needed.

All Meetings will be open to the public and minutes will be recorded and made available at the monthly meeting immediately following. City officials, department heads, commissioners, and other resource people may be called as required to aid NPA deliberations at any meeting.

Warnings will be given at least ten (10) days in advance of any meeting and the warning will be widely advertised.

A Quorum of voting members must be present at annual or regular meetings for decisions on Ward 5 business to be made. A quorum is achieved when voting members who are not on the steering committee outnumber Steering committee members present. For example, if two steering committee members are present, there must be at least three voting members present who are not on the Steering Committee.

If the Moderator finds that a quorum is not present, he or she may take measures to obtain a quorum. A motion to contact absent members to ask them to attend would represent such a measure.

Agenda. The agenda for a NPA meeting is created by the Steering Committee prior to the NPA meeting. The agenda for a meeting is made up of items proposed by:

The Steering Committee, based upon input from NPA members and the community;

Items requested by the Mayor, City Officials, department heads, commissioners, and/or resource people;

Petition of a least fifteen (15) Ward 5 NPA members;

A majority vote of the City Council; and

Any member of the WARD 5 NPA community, provided such a proposal receives a majority vote at an NPA meeting that has a quorum.

A reasonable period of time will be provided on the agenda as an open forum to encourage members to frankly express their Views and concerns on the management of the Assembly and on topics of public interest and need.

The agenda is published as part of a meeting's warning. It must be given at least five days before the meeting.

The Order of Business for meetings will be:

- Overview of the Agenda
- Implementing the Agenda [including Open Forum]

Voting on all financial matters will require a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote. All other votes, except by-laws' changes, will require a simple majority. Voting will be done by a show of hands. However, voting can be by ballot if requested and approved by a majority hand vote. Proxy Voting will not be permitted.

#### **ARTICLE VII: AMENDMENT**

These By-Laws may be amended at an annual or regular meeting. Written notice setting forth the proposed changes must be warned at least 20 days before the meeting.

A vote of two-thirds of the members of the Ward 5 Neighborhood Planning Assembly present and voting will be necessary for amendment to these By-Laws.

## **ARTICLE VIII: MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS**

**NON-DISCRIMINATION.** In accordance with the guiding principles of these NPA By-laws, the Ward 5 NPA will promote and work to sustain an inclusive participatory environment that does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, religion, age or disability.

### **COMPLIANCE WITH PUBLIC MEETING**

**REQUIREMENTS.** The Ward 5 NPA must act in compliance with all public meeting requirements. See the City Attorney's Office for a listing of these requirements.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST.** Members of the Ward 5 NPA have a responsibility to their NPA to fairly review and vote on matters directly affecting their Ward without prejudice or bias. If a NPA member believes that a conflict of interest could exist with any agenda or voting item, that member should take the responsibility to disclose this conflict, and address the issue with the NPA. If upon disclosure, the quorum wants to include this member in the discussion and/or voting process, the NPA has concluded that no conflict of interest exists. Failure of a member to disclose a potential conflict of interest could result in a null/void vote or cause the need for further discussion or re-vote on a particular issue affected.

## **WARD 5 STEERING COMMITTEES**

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