

A COMMUNITY MEETING OF THE CITY OF BURLINGTON COMMON COUNCIL, COUNTY OF BURLINGTON, STATE OF NEW JERSEY, WAS HELD ON THURSDAY, JULY 24, 2025, AT 6:30 PM, AT LYCEUUNM HALL, 432 HIGH STREET, BURLINGTON, NJ, PURSUANT TO THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT.

This meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Law. This Community Meeting of July 24, 2025, was advertised with the Burlington County Times and the Trenton Times, posted on the City of Burlington Municipal Building bulletin boards (3) on July 16, 2025, and posted to the City of Burlington Website. Said Notices have remained continuously posted.

Gabrielle Hodgson, Deputy Municipal Clerk

Governing Body Members present: Dave Ballard, Dawn Bergner-Thompson, George Chachis, Timothy Hutton (6:34pm), Richard Spaulding.

Absent: Geneva Rijs, Suzanne Woodard.

Also present: Mayor Barry Conaway, Administrator Johanna Conyer, Municipal Attorney Stuart Platt, Police Chief Ryan Elbertson.

SALUTE TO FLAG

Upon the motion of Councilman Ballard, seconded by Councilman Chachis, the Public Comments 5-minute time limit rule was suspended. All were in favor.

PRESENTATION

Councilman Spaulding thanked the public for attending and stated the goal of the Community Meeting: Stimulate communication; Learn about what is going on in the City; Address questions/concerns; Councilman Spaulding then introduced the City Officials in attendance reviewed the City's Organizational Chart.

Remarks were made by Mayor Conaway, Business Administrator Johanna Conyer, Council President Dawn Bergner-Thompson, and Deputy Municipal Clerk Gabrielle Hodgson to educate the public on their role in public office.

Councilman Spaulding continued his presentation highlighting features of the City of Burlington's updated website including the public's access to pay utility and tax bills online; housing of documents e.g., City Ordinances, Meeting Minutes, Budgets, etc., Event + Meeting Schedules and as access to the City Directory.

Upon the conclusion of the presentation, Councilman Spaulding moved into a focus group exercise in which provided a directive for the public to use Post-It notes to share thoughts/feedback specific to the various neighborhoods around the City and stick the notes to their corresponding poster boards. At a later point in the meeting, Councilman Spaulding explained that all the notes/feedback would be combined into one document and made available to the public.

The focus group exercise lasted approximately 9 minutes.

Mayor Conaway presented a project map to the public and highlighted big ticket items: Sewer Plant repair of Belcrest (\$3 million); Jake's Playground @ Kennedy Park (\$1 million); Sixth Street/Walnut Street Park (\$1 million) – noting that most of the projects are infrastructure projects. Total projected project cost between now and Spring 2026 is \$8.5-8.75 million of taxpayer, State and County money.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

(30:38) Michael Muench, 1 E. Pearl Street – Mr. Muench read parts of Chapter 237 of City's Noise Ordinance before complaining about the noise level of bands/entertainment during events; He expressed that there are instances, due to the high volume, when he leaves his residence and questioned if there are any circumstances under which the levels of noise produced would violate the City's Noise Ordinance (Comment: All use of the bandstand and Promenade areas require City approval beforehand; encouraged resident to call if the noise is out of control, per Mayor) Resident asked if performers could be made aware of ordinance and asked to keep levels within reason (Comment: Yes, per Mayor).

(37:23) Phil Augustyn, 307 High Street – Mr. Augustyn thanked Councilman Spaulding for organizing the Community Meeting; Thanked Director of Public Works Bill Curry; Complimented the Garden Club for their efforts beautifying High Street with flowers; Discussed weather challenges surrounding the Boardwalk Events; Upset about lack of traffic laws enforcement on High Street, directing comments to the Chief of Police (Comment: Reiterated presentation points from last Council Meeting, noting that some figures are omitted from the BCPD Newsletter, such as the # of citations issued – 1,351 YTD; things are happening even if the public doesn't see it, per Chief of Police.) (Comment: BCPD monthly Newsletter is on City's FB page and keeps residents/City informed on what is happening, per Council President Bergner-Thompson.)

(40:00) Frank McDonnell, 41 Pinewald Lane, Burlington Twp. – Mr. McDonnell thanked Council, the Mayor and the Administrator for attending; Outlined issues with building inspector for 112 W. Broad Street, including arbitration – stating that the building inspector needs to work with folks in town and not harass them; Raised issue that a month has passed and he is still waiting on a Mercantile License and CO to be issued for the property located at 112 W. Broad Street; Suggested the idea of allowing people to occupy a space/obtain CO and allow them time to satisfy any outstanding matters; Encouraged collaboration to make the City a better place (Comment: Addressed the Board of Appeals process/arbitration and the right of any citizen who feels that a violation is inappropriate to take similar action – planned to find out the delay in receipt of the CO; Reminded all that the UCC code does not take into consideration the City or the age of a home, and the code has to be enforced as is, per the BA); Mr. McDonnell referenced the Maintenance Code in contrast to application of the UCC code (Comment: Discussed application of both and differences in application in being a landlord versus owner-occupied, per BA); (Comment: Temporary Mercantile License is ready for 112 W. Broad Street, there were several unsuccessful attempts to contact the business owner; Business owner was in attendance, license matter was resolved – official license pending Council approval, per Deputy Clerk.)

(51:16) Pamela Dennis, 423 York Street – Ms. Dennis questioned how the compliance with code regulations would be applied in the case of changing property from owner-occupied to rental (Comment: Process was explained, starting with applying for a license to become a landlord, per BA); spoke about city tree branches hanging in her yard, someone went out to inspect issue, but there was zero follow up; Spoke on missing pavement that has resulted in tree growth; Complained about an abandoned home in view; Spoke on the need for all-way stop signs at the intersection and/or speed check sign of Clarkson Street and York Street – concerned about safety of pedestrians, particularly the youth.

(58: 24) Andre Kutyshev, 21 W. Broad Street – Mr. Kutyshev is representing the property 21 W. Broad, on behalf of a potential tenant to occupy the commercial space – James Wood; Explained the lack of progress with a zoning application submitted seven (7) months ago to occupy the space; Provided the background on the space including previous commercial use, an attempt to convert the space for residential only, a denial, and then a return to mixed-use approvals; Was told that a Land Use Site Plan/approval is need; However, after research and a conversation with City engineering firm, Environmental Resolution, Inc. (ERI), Mr. Kutyshev was informed of an optional Administrative Site Plan – zoning, construction, or BA can sign off; Noted how business seemingly stops in departments when one person is out of the office; shared experience submitting a Land use application, followed up via email to confirm completeness, but how there has been no response (Comment: Aware of particular circumstance, explained that Land Use is a separate entity from the City – informed that Land Use has free screening and recommended using screening to speak with Land Use professionals, per BA); Mr. Kutyshev expressed that he did have a free screening, which is where he spoke with the City’s engineer, followed by the submission of an application and general follow up questions to which he has received no response; Asked the process to be simplified (Comment: Land Use is governed by the statutes from the State of New Jersey and City; the process itself is complicated, per BA).

(1: 09: 33) George Davis, 22 Fawn Hallow Road – Mr. Davis outlined a permit pulled back in June, along with the submission of required documentation and subsequent denial three (3) weeks later by Zoning Official, Damian Gil, who later suggested Land Use Board review; However, after attending a Land Use screening (July 9th) the City’s Engineering Firm, ERI, provided a write up and was confused why Mr. Davis was attending the meeting – by ERI’s calculations, his project did not need Land Use review/approval; Land Use Solicitor suggested he reach back to out to zoning, which Mr. Davis did; He was told by Zoning Official, that he would re-review, but as of the Community Meeting date there has been no further communication with zoning – even after several email follow ups. The permit is in connection with a deck being installed by a licensed and insured contractor; While addressing the new parking ordinance for oversized vehicles (8,000lbs), recommended that the ordinance be updated to specify commercial vehicles – as most pickup trucks and SUVs weighing that much would no longer be allowed to park at their residence, including his personal vehicle; Graduated in 1978 with Director of Public Works, Bill Curry and remembers Mr. Ballard from high school.

(1:14:21) Claudine Conaway, 110 James Street – Ms. Conaway, Land Use Board Chair, confirmed that previous speaker, Mr. Kutyshev, did attend a Land Use screening, but that he was evasive with details in some of his responses, including answering “yes or no” to whether the business was

in operation; It was later discovered that a person could call to book a barber appointment with the business owner and that signage was installed on the outside of the building, though later taken down after screening was made aware; Claimed all statements provided by Mr. Kutyshev were untrue.

(1:15:44) Eli Eytan, 208 E. Union Street – Mr. Eytan focused his remarks on quality of life and the impact it has on current residents, future residents, patrons, and business owners, specific to crime and unfortunate events on various, surrounding streets, namely homicides; Questioned what preventive measures could be taken, adding that crime statistics are impacting outside perspective of the City and interest in moving here (Comment: Did YTD comparison of crime statistics, this year to last, only one homicide this year, which is the first in two (2) years; Other categories were down (robberies, assaults, vehicle thefts), while burglaries were even – crime perceptions aren't always crime reality; All here to make the City safer, stronger, better, per Chief of Police); stated that the BCPD do a great job; (Comment: Speaking on his background from Bloomfield and neighboring communities like Montclair, questioned the differences between cities with similar crime, but a more positive public appeal – the greater visibility of the positive community happenings that dominate headlines over crime, per Councilman Spaulding).

(1:23:35) Alex Vigh, 112 W. Broad Street – Business owner of 112 W. Broad – speaking as a general contractor, expressed that in dealing with the City's construction office they may be overwhelmed and that communication is difficult; Mr. Vigh pulled a permit on June 30th, sent five (5) follow up emails that were met with single response, but no answers to specific questions; He further detailed the position that those challenges place him as a contractor with his clients; Questioned plans to get more staffing in construction department; Permits pulled in PA and NJ, but never ran into this level of challenge (Comment: Construction is overwhelmed, there are a lot of people coming into the City; A developer conducted analysis and the City is exploding with interest/growth; Two (2) people were hired in that office this week; City is also playing catch up with tasks it was behind on, e.g., rental inspections; Can look into permit applications, per BA); Mr. Vigh acknowledged the staffing update, but doubled down on his concerns with the construction department while suggesting the City consider outsourcing a percentage of permit applications to neighboring municipalities (Comment: Spoke on the previous Shared Service Agreement with Burlington Township and how the output may not be at the same level as provided in-house for the same services; elaborated on additional challenges of those types of arrangements, per BA); Reiterated points and discussed how easily he is able to rectify permit omissions or issues, on more complex submissions, with other municipalities; The delays are negatively impacting his business; Added that he was informed that it was inappropriate for him to stop in the permit office to check on his permits (Comment: Thanked Mr. Vigh for suggestions – and informed the public that if three (3) emails are sent, met with no response within 72 hours, to include both Mayor and the BA on the email, per Mayor.)

(1:34:55) Donna Guzman, 350 High Street, Apt 3 – The Guzman's no longer able to occupy their residence, per an order from the City's Fire Marshal deeming the property uninhabitable after landlord turned off the fire alarm system; The Guzmans are now trying to find a place to live while the landlord and B-Unos sort everything out – however, they have been given no information about how long they will be unable to occupy their current home; Because they were in the middle of house hunting before this occurred, they are unsure of where to allocate their current financial

resources, to a temporary living situation or for the home they've been saving up for (Comment: Aware of situation, because of the personal nature would prefer to discuss in private; Landlord is responsible for temporary relocation of the Guzmans, per BA).

(1:37:34) Rose Dawkins, 505 Mitchell Avenue – The City-owned park at The Mill was drug-infested, trashed, overgrown with bushes and despite various efforts/calls to have the City take care of the problem; walked to the Public Works building and spoke with Director, Bill Curry, that the space was cleaned up. Mr. Curry had his team come out the same day to address the issue, which, according to Ms. Dawkins, looks like a new space; Ms. Dawkins has requested increased police presence in that area due to its isolation and tendency to attract unwanted activity.

(1:39:11) Stan Janson, 31 E. Union Street – Mr. Janson addressed comments to the Chief of Police, questioning the actions being taken by the BCPD as it pertains to speeding along Riverbank and E. Pearl Street; There is concern about cars running through the stop signs located at the intersection of E. Union and Stacy Streets; Concern about the angled parking that may result in an accident should a car speed through the intersection while someone is backing up; questioned the last time the City playgrounds were inspected; Expressed concerns about playgrounds being redone, while the existing ones are not being maintained and he pointed out the lack of fencing around the York + Clarkson Street park as well as the Linden + Jones Avenue park; agreed that free money is great, but questioned the reporting to the State about the condition of current parks (Comment: Spoke on past traffic and traffic flow studies on the City, as well as awarding grant funding for traffic pattern improvements, per BA); Criticized the lack of respect for pedestrians and questioned the slashed yellow lines on Stacy Street for passing of cars (Comment: Discussed the rollout for park improvements over the next few years, stating that current equipment doesn't meet safety standards so replacing them as is isn't an option, per BA) Mr. Janson, closed out his comments by doubling down on concern for children safety at the playgrounds in their current conditions and encouraged the installation of signage.

(1:46: 22) Trina Peters, 556 York Street – Ms. Peters is a third year resident, district teacher and worshipper who thinks the City is a beautiful place to live, but is concerned about the area that was formerly Fitzgerald's, now the Food Pantry, and the pockets of bad, loitering, smoking, and guns, but happy to see more police presence around York Street; Complained about neighboring property on Green Street that has young people there all hours and questioned the enforcement for the City's juvenile curfew; Ms. Peters detailed an incident in which a bebe gun was shot through her living room window, but is encouraged by the change being discussed and positive things happening within the City.

(1:50:50) Harry Heck, 116 E. Union – Mr. Heck, addressing the downtown business district, expressed the need to be more friendly with potential future business owners; Enforce the two-hour parking on High Street – add parking meters if needed, deal with empty storefronts, deal with U-turns on High Street; Help the City move forward and volunteer even as a poor City; Mr. Heck complimented the great efforts of the BCPD with only 30 officers as well as the efforts of Public Works with an even smaller force. (Comment: Takes a village and people taking ownership and talking to neighbors, per Councilman Spaulding) Mr. Heck added criticism of the \$2,000 fine that Villa Rosa received for doing work on their building, believing such high penalties are hurting businesses.

(1:54:11) Mary Wirth, 460 Locust Avenue – Ms. Wirth noted how rare it is to have citizens speak at a Council Meeting and have concerns addressed by Council (Comment: The Council Meeting format is more regulated, that's why Town Hall/Community Meetings are needed, per Councilman Spaulding)(Comment: In agreement with Ms. Wirth, as a new Councilmember was unaware of the restrictions of Council interactions during meeting; However, the governance of the Faulkner Act restricts Council interactions during public comment at Council Meetings; Citizens may think concerns/comments are not heard, but acknowledged that he hears the public loud and clear, per Councilman Hutton)

(1:58:49) Thomas Swan, 305 E. Union Street – Mr. Swan echoed Ms. Wirth's sentiments regarding Council; Noted that the success of these meetings could lead to reduced conversations around minut issues and more discussion around larger City matters.

Council Comments

Councilman Spaulding – suggested he would like to make more of an effort to organize community meetings throughout the year; Looking ahead to forward progress for the City; Came to the City of Burlington, from North Jersey, and fell in love with it and is focused on collaborative efforts to make the town better. Thanked the Lyceum Hall staff (Barbara Fisher & Patty Howard), gave background on their start, and encouraged attendees to patronage the events Lyceum hosts throughout the year. Will be combining all the data from the Post-it notes to combine on a spreadsheet and share with the public via email, social media and/or the website.

Council President Bergner-Thompson – Thanked attendees for coming, encouraged all to stay cool.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon the motion of Councilman Chachis, seconded by Councilman Ballard, this Community Meeting of July 24, 2025, was adjourned.

Gabrielle Hodgson
Deputy Municipal Clerk

Dawn Bergner-Thompson, President
Common Council