

**Church Street Marketplace Commission Meeting, Wednesday, August 17, 2011**  
**Minutes from Safety and Security Meeting Hearing**  
*City Hall, Conference Room 12 - Open to the Public*

A meeting was held to gain perspectives from downtown stakeholders (non-profit, public and private sectors, employees, employers, business and property owners, shoppers, diners, residents, etc.) about safety and security in the downtown. 35 people attended the meeting; nearly all provided comments to the Commission:

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS:**

- **DOWNTOWN OUT OF BALANCE:**
  - Burlington has outgrown many of its systems i.e. its criminal justice system. Need more effective and efficient ways to do business. Need to find meaningful and cost-effective ways to make system changes.
  - Burlington experiencing the unintended consequences of robust services in the Downtown. Those services need to be delivered in a more meaningful way i.e. are the services being provided in the right location?
  - Downtown stakeholders – business owners, non-profits, employees, residents -- need to speak directly to the City Council about their experiences, hopes and vision. Public/private/non-profit sectors need to unify their message.
  - The City needs an enforcement system in place that delivers predictable consequences for those who demonstrate negative behavior. The State needs to help through enforcement at the judicial level. Violations & consequences (responses) to those violations are out of balance – rebalancing needed
  - Burlington needs to lead a county-wide conversation about other communities shouldering a portion of the responsibility that Burlington has carried for many years. Locating future social service agencies in other cities and towns in Chittenden County, versus downtown Burlington, needs to be discussed.
  - Downtown non-profits are at capacity; new non-profit agencies and organizations wanting to open new offices in our downtown need to understand they cannot rely on our downtown services as a fall back when their clients fail. Locating recovery houses in or adjacent to the downtown puts clients in close proximity with negative influences: drug dealers, former enemies, bad behavior. Maple Leaf Farm is located in Underhill for a reason.
- **COMMUNITY POLICING:**
  - Chief Michael Schirling: best way to enforce any of the rules or laws on the street is to have the enforcement come from other pedestrians on the street. Community policing is essential to keeping our downtown safe.
  - Social service agencies and non-profits in the downtown core need to embrace the downtown's community policing program, provide more skills and training to their clients on how to manage their frustrations and anger when they step onto the public streets of our downtown (so that we can reduce fighting, use profanity in front of children, threatening behavior).

- **VERMONT’S LARGEST MUNICIPALITIES ARE EXPERIENCING COMMON CHALLENGES; WE ALL NEED TO JOIN FORCES AND MEET WITH THE VERMONT LEGISLATURE IN 2012:**
  - Vermont Legislature needs to hear the “urban” message from Burlington, Saint Albans, Rutland, Brattleboro, Barre, etc. The urban message is not resonating with the Vermont legislature.
  - Burlington needs to join forces with other large Vermont municipalities experiencing common challenges (Rutland, Brattleboro, Barre, St. Albans, Bennington) and communicate: local systems have exceeded capacity. Large municipalities (like Burlington) need training, resources, capacity from the State of Vermont to address the increase of people using our City’s robust social service system.
  - Locate subsidies, incentives from feds, States, City to fund CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) initiatives.
- **PANHANDLING:**
  - More equity and balance are needed in how the City uses its aggressive panhandling ordinance. Recognition that panhandling is protected by the US Supreme Court (under the first amendment), but the community wants the same standards of behavior for everyone enjoying our downtown. Panhandlers are being held to a lesser standard than all others in the community.
  - Include a provision to the City’s current panhandling ordinance that requires “truth in advertising” so that panhandlers are not permitted to misrepresent their life circumstances in order to earn more money from the general public.
  - Public, private and non-profit stakeholders need to inform and educate the community about our collective experiences of who our downtown panhandlers are:
    - service resistant
    - using what they collect from the public to pay for alcohol, drugs;
    - victimizing each other and being victimized
- **UNIFYING DOWNTOWN STAKEHOLDERS**
  - The number of people who speak out on behalf of downtown stakeholder concerns needs to be better leveraged.
  - Continue demanding accountability from those who have a proclivity for negative behavior.
- **PROTECTING THE CITY’S TAX REVENUES**
  - Communicate to policy makers that collectively we all want to work together to protect and grow 1% sales tax and the gross receipts taxes collected in Burlington – those taxes are becoming increasingly important to help balance the city’s operating budget. A safe and secure downtown is key.
- Focus on what we can control. Time, place, and manner; vulgarity; provide input for any new social service agency wanting to establish an office in the downtown.

**COMMENTS FROM MEETING ATENDEES GERMAINE TO THE OVERALL DISCUSSION**

- People are defecating and urinating in private alleyways in the downtown. Daughter of a downtown employee assaulted in the downtown. Mother will no longer come to downtown.
- Panhandlers are looking for the same dollar that everyone else is looking for; but panhandlers do not have to pay fees like street entertainers, cart vendors, store owners. Panhandlers should pay a fee to be on the street.
- Concern that many businesses will be driven out if no changes are made.
- Employees scared to go to work. Often witness vulgar language and terrible behavior.
- Employee offered panhandling woman and young child nice coat; later thrown in trash.
- Need to raise the bar so we can address the bad behavior. We need to go after this before it gets worse. Need to be proactive.
- People need to go to the city council and tell these stories because this could change the dynamics of how this has been happening.
- There is a lack of available services. COTS has begun turning people away. Their overflow is strained far beyond its capacity.
- There is a new group of people who are homeless who are extremely resistant to services and won't comply to the minimum COTS expectations. COTS does not have the training, ability, or resources to accommodate the needs and demands of this service-resistant group. They don't want to make improvements to their lives; they want to be left alone, but do not want to comply with our city's ordinances or the State's laws.
- Downtown churches adjacent to the Marketplace are common locations for selling drugs. Staff often calls police when this behavior is witnessed; it's over by the time Police arrive. Staff are spending 25% of time managing people congregating on the lawn during the day; camping (urinating and defecating) at night. They are installing surveillance systems and lights.
- When new non-profits want to establish a base in the downtown core, people need to turn out for City Council meetings.
- Re: charity meters, could more money be raised that way so that this could replace panhandling instead of permitting panhandling.
- Howard Center and Street Outreach Team doing an outstanding job to reset the bar of bad behavior.
- Bad behavior (aggressive panhandling, fighting, swearing, threatening behavior) in front of sidewalk cafes is resulting in bad reviews on Yelp and Trip Advisor. This has a direct effect on business and can be very damaging.
- When the Police are called when there are disturbances, ordinance violations, those causing the disturbances scurry away; however, come back once the Police leave.
- Property owner searched for quality tenant for a vacant space for almost two years.
- Property and business owners encouraged to install cameras on their building aimed out at the public right-of-way so that they could even see the footage from home.
- Everyone needs to challenge the behavior so that the behavior will be uncomfortable to take part in. Speak directly to people who are causing the problems. Encourages others to confront and address the issues while they are happening. MATT YOUNG: Warning that if more people speak out directly about the bad behavior they witness, the problem could

worsen in the beginning before it gets better. That's simply everyone's reactions to the initial resistance.