

State of the City

April 6, 2009

Good evening and welcome. I would like to extend a special welcome to the new City Council members, Emma Mulvaney-Stanak from Ward 2, Marissa Caldwell from Ward 3, Nancy Kaplan from Ward 4, Mary Kehoe from Ward 6 and Vince Dober from Ward 7. Tonight you join nine veteran members of the City Council. I would also like to congratulate Sharon Bushor from Ward 1 and Joan Shannon from Ward 5 on their reelection.

This year, I joined the seven of you on the campaign trail. I had the opportunity to meet with hundreds of Burlington residents at 20 public forums, 20 house parties, on radio, TV, and person to person. While many common issues were discussed, not all constituencies have the same interests and concerns. The Burlington Business Association forum addressed questions not raised at the Vermont Worker's Center forum. The forum hosted by RU12 addressed concerns with a

different focus from those raised by Vermont Interfaith Action. The election process covers a lot of ground. I'm always impressed at the level of interest and understanding that Burlington residents bring to the discussion about Burlington's past and present and their determination to participate in shaping its future.

Over the next year many important issues will come before this council. Our common goal should be efficient and effective government that meets the needs of people. We must make decisions based on the merit of the plans and proposals that we consider, not on personal or party politics. I am confident that in the future we'll work closely together to serve the people of Burlington and their interests. While there are always challenges, our community has the resources and vitality to meet them along with the optimism and goodwill to move forward and to build better lives and a better City.

I'd like to begin tonight by acknowledging some of the work and several of the projects that we accomplished over the past year.

2008 began with the completion of a comprehensive rewrite of the City's zoning ordinances. The new ordinance provides for appropriate economic growth and density downtown while preserving the character of city neighborhoods. We must

ensure that Burlington's downtown continues to provide incentives for both commercial and residential growth. Downtown is a good place for economic development. And, in general, density is good for the environment. The City does not have readily available sites for new businesses. New development downtown could provide this capacity with its resulting jobs. We cannot afford to lose ground on these issues, especially in the current economic climate. When the issue of density and building height comes up before the council again, I hope you will support the compromise offered at the last council meeting.

During the past year, the city began producing cleaner electric power. The McNeil Generating Station recently installed a nitrogen oxide reduction unit to improve local air quality and qualify the station for Renewable Energy Credits. This project just completed its first quarter of operation, with NOx levels falling by more than 50 percent of previous levels. Through the sale of energy credits this project will eventually pay for itself, with continued benefits to the city and ratepayers in future years.

Burlington has been working to conserve energy and address climate change for the past twenty years. The City's use of electric power in 2009 is level with the amount of power it used in 1989. We are committed to reducing green house

gasses 20% by 2020 and 80% by 2050. Burlington is one of only two cities in the country recognized by ICLEI – Government for Local Sustainability as a “Milestone 5” city based on our climate action work. As a Milestone City, we must continue to do our share, do more to protect the environment and to reverse climate change.

The health of Lake Champlain is essential to Burlington’s livability and economy. The Mayor’s Storm Water Task Force developed and recommended a comprehensive storm water ordinance which, for the first time, establishes a dedicated storm water regulatory and enforcement program for Burlington. The City Council approved a fee structure for property owners at its last meeting and this fee will be phased in over the first year of the program starting next month. At a modest cost we will realize the benefit of a cleaner Lake now and in future years. Thanks to City employees and citizen-volunteers who worked hard to develop this important resource.

Our relationship with Burlington’s academic community grew stronger over the past year. The City worked closely with UVM and Champlain College to address student issues in Burlington’s neighborhoods. Following on the City’s historic fee-for-services agreement with UVM in 2007, we recently reached constructive

agreements with UVM and Champlain College regarding the number of undergraduate students living off-campus and on campus in Burlington. I want to recognize the work of the City Council and input from residents on these important issues. Our relationship with the City's academic institutions is a partnership, and our willingness to move forward together on issues such as student housing benefits all of us.

For the past year and a half I have convened an interdepartmental permitting group to review the City's permitting process. One of the first recommendations was a major change in how the City processes Certificates of Occupancy. Last month we announced that the City will now issue a Unified Certificate of Occupancy which incorporates both zoning and building requirements. The new procedures improve the permitting process for homeowners and builders, enhance coordination between City departments, and prevent problems that can occur when homeowners try to sell their homes. Applicants will now deal with a single point of contact in the Code Enforcement office as they move through the process supported by software applications that help connect the dots.

The renovation and opening of the Robert Miller Recreation and Community Center at the former Gosse Court Armory brings a multi-use community center to

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the New North End for the enjoyment of everyone in Burlington. The Center is a credit to the commitment and work of many people in the community, including Bobby Miller, Congressman Peter Welch, and Burlington voters who approved a significant municipal investment for this project.

My administration worked closely with the Open Government Committee formed by resolution of the City Council. In response to committee recommendations, we've included more information about public meetings on the City web-site and the Planning Department added a new section about proposed and pending zoning amendments. During the campaign it was clear that people want to know more about the activities of each city department. Over the next year we'll look closely at how to finance and build a more uniform, responsive and user-friendly City website that will keep you better informed about public meetings and how you can participate in the process of government.

We continue to move forward on revitalizing the City's Waterfront. Through funding secured by Senator Patrick Leahy, work has begun on a \$2 million project at the bottom of College Street which will improve public access and provide enhanced amenities on the Waterfront. We will complete this work before the City's July 3rd and Quadricentennial celebrations this summer. Everyone should be

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sure to mark July 2nd through July 14th on their calendars for the “Celebrate Champlain Burlington International Waterfront Festival.” This event will feature music, film, theater, concerts, dancers, waterfront activities and Native American and Franco American showcases. The highlight of the festivities will be a day long celebration on Saturday July 11th with a parade, pageant and international performances. I look forward to seeing you there in July.

Since receiving overwhelming public approval last March, the Moran redevelopment plan has steadily progressed. Pre-development agreements have been executed with project partners, Lake Champlain Sailing Center, Green Mountain Children’s Museum, and Ice Factor International. Sluiceway dams have been constructed to prevent water movement between the building and the Lake. An EPA grant was obtained to study the feasibility of “green building” aspects of the project. A base structural analysis was completed to confirm the building’s structural integrity. Architects, engineers and estimators working with CEDO and Moran partners are moving forward on design and build details which we hope to have within the next six weeks. The Moran Project promises to bring year round activity to the waterfront, revitalize and improve Waterfront-north, and have a substantial ripple effect on the local economy.

Earlier this year the City made a joint announcement with the Burlington Harbor Hotel Group about plans to expand the existing Marriot hotel as well as build a new hotel on the adjoining Cherry Street lot. This will bring 158 new hotel rooms and 52 new jobs to Burlington. Even during these tough times, we are viewed as a good investment for a new hotel downtown. This project will bring economic benefit to Burlington and the greater metropolitan area and completes the final development step in the urban renewal plan set in motion more than 40 years ago.

Substantial renovations to the Hilton Hotel have also brought additional revenues to the city. The Church Street Marketplace continues to be a dynamic commercial and hospitality industry attraction. The expanding appeal of Burlington to visitors from New England and Canada has helped to contribute to the city and region's financial stability. And, we have an easy to navigate international airport with flights to key hubs across the country and a telecommunications system that supports a high level of residential and commercial demand. Good job growth, wages above the state average and national reports confirming that even now Burlington is a safe haven for residential investment, inspire confidence in Burlington's capacity to move forward.

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Burlington's vitality is also reflected in the recognition we receive from others. Last year Burlington was named America's healthiest city; one of five "safe havens" in real estate; one of America's prettiest towns; among the top walking cities in the country; one of the best places to raise your kids. And, the Church Street Marketplace was named one of the 10 "Great Places" in America by the American Planning Association.

Our accomplishments are not the work of any one person or single group. We should all acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of City staff, the contributions of Burlington's for profit and non-profit business community, city residents, the City Council, and numerous City commissions and Boards for their work in shaping a city we can be proud of. The entire community can share in Burlington's successes.

Looking forward, it is still too early to know to what extent the city will benefit from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. We know that the city will receive an additional \$238,000 as an entitlement community through the Community Development Block Grant Program. We will receive \$180,000 in the form of a new Energy Efficiency Block Grant. We will also receive \$521,000 through a Recovery Justice Assistance Grant.

Over the past nine months, we worked with the US Conference of Mayors, the Vermont Congressional delegation and the Burlington state legislative delegation, to develop a list of initiatives that could qualify as Recovery and stimulus proposals. As a result of the city's ongoing planning and development activities, as we are all aware, work was already under way on numerous projects. In the new lexicon of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, many of these projects are "shovel ready" or within reach of being "shovel ready." We hope that Recovery resources will be available as we move forward with this work. I'd like to tell you about some of these projects.

The Aviation Technical Center at the Burlington International Airport will expand the successful post-high school training program that leads to FAA certification as an Airframe and Powerplant technician. Despite the fact that these high-wage jobs are in demand, the capacity of the current facility at the airport only allows for 12 students each semester. The facility will include a hangar, shops, office, and training rooms. The Aviation Tech Center will keep young technicians in Vermont, contribute to the Vermont economy and provide a needed upgrade to the avionics training equipment.

Waterfront North is another stimulus package proposal. This proposal includes a series of phased projects including a realignment of lower Lake Street and the bike path, enhanced pedestrian amenities, street lighting and landscaping, improved storm water and under-ground utilities. Pedestrian connections between Battery and Lake Streets, such as “stairway streets” or a funicular could potentially be included in this project. In addition to the Waterfront North proposal, waterfront related improvements to Depot and Battery Street are also on the list of stimulus initiatives.

The Waterfront Bike Path is an important city resource. A detailed study of the full 7.6 mile path suggests that a significant investment is required to widen, fully resurface and pay for all of the Path’s necessary re-development amenities.

Recovery money could help us do this. The Bike Path was built in 1986 and serves an estimated 150,000 users annually. The Bike Path is an established economic benefit to the city and state.

The City is in the process of completing a draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Champlain Parkway. The Champlain Parkway is a dramatically different roadway solution from the original Southern Connector. The Parkway promises to remove trucks from south end residential streets, provide an alternate north/south

corridor into and out of the city for mass transit as well as personal cars, and spur economic development on Pine Street. This project is closer to being realized than ever before.

Burlington is pursuing the creation of a Clean Energy Assessment District modeled after a pilot program in Berkeley, California called “Berkeley First.” Bills in the Vermont legislature create special districts that would allow the city to finance energy efficiency or renewable energy improvements for homeowners. The loan would be added to the homeowner’s property tax bills and would remain a debt against the property if the property is sold. This will make energy improvements more affordable for a broader spectrum of homeowners and investors. An initial investment is needed to capitalize Burlington’s Clean Energy Assessment District revolving loan fund.

Ever since the City built the McNeil Power Plant there has been a desire to create a district energy system that would use the waste thermal energy of McNeil to heat and cool residences and businesses between McNeil and downtown. A pilot study would explore the feasibility of this project. Using waste thermal energy is a common heating and cooling practice in Europe. With targeted funding, Burlington could pursue this exciting energy conservation and climate action

solution here in Vermont.

The City is a partner in another initiative that anticipates using waste heat from McNeil. The Intervale Food Enterprise Center will promote food-based small business, meet the growing demand for lightly-processed locally-sourced food, and promote value-added products for both local consumption and export to other markets. A 21,000 square foot greenhouse will provide year-round growing potential for existing Intervale farms and new businesses.

Some projects, like The Champlain Parkway, represent years of planning and anticipation. Others, like the Clean Energy Assessment District are new initiatives. While still other projects, like renovation of the Waterfront Bike Path, recognize the need to maintain important existing infrastructure and public amenities.

Without a doubt, all of these projects would benefit from an infusion of Recovery funds. Our goal is to move forward with or without Recovery funding because they will make Burlington more sustainable, livable, environmentally and economically sound.

At times, Burlington can feel like an oasis. Yet, we all know that it's impossible to

ignore the world around us—and we wouldn't want to even if we could. Two significant events occurred over the past year. One brings us hope. The other threatens our economic security. The election of Barack Obama as the 45th President of the United States makes us hopeful for the future of our country. In contrast to the last eight years, we now have a progressive government and ally in the White House. The closing of Guantanamo Bay detention camp in Cuba, an aggressive commitment to government administered universal healthcare, and a new dialogue with Iran, promise real hope for the future.

In contrast, the rapid deterioration of the US housing market and substantial decline in the national and international economy over the past six months concern all of us. The lost value of financial investments at every level is having a negative effect on governments, businesses, institutions and on people in Burlington and around the world. Despite unprecedented steps by the US government to slow the slide, we will face significant challenges. Stimulus and Recovery are the watchwords of economic re-investment that promise to keep us moving forward. I am hopeful that the national and international economy will stabilize and rebound and that the worst fears of a prolonged recession won't be realized.

However, we can not ignore the consequences of funding and fighting two wars.

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After more than 6 years, the US military commitment in Iraq and Afghanistan has not ended. While the new Administration is working hard to shape a responsible exit strategy from Iraq, members of the Vermont National Guard are getting ready for a new deployment in Afghanistan. There may be a distinction between the US military invasion of Iraq and a US police-keeping role in Afghanistan. But, in either case, the end is not yet in sight and we all know that a US presence is only at great cost in human lives, resources, and materials.

As we move forward over the next three years, I am determined to put people first. Last week I met with a visitor from Sweden. He noted that there were no poor people in Sweden but, on the other hand there were few very wealthy people either. Everyone has health care, housing and educational opportunity. Even in Sweden new problems exist. Saab is in trouble and Volvo is feeling the pinch. But many basic protections still uncertain in Vermont are in place there. We need to establish and maintain these basic protections in Vermont and across the country.

As mayor I support the legislature's effort to find new revenues to maintain the state's workforce and critical services. We know that if Montpelier fails to fulfill its responsibilities to the people of Vermont those same responsibilities are already ours to own as they become local problems. Police Chief Michael Schirling was in

Washington earlier this year providing testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee on the shrinking federal and state budgets and the implications of this on the ability of local law enforcement to do its job.

As mayor, I also support passage of S.115, Vermont's Right to Marry law. Civil marriage should be a right available to all Vermonters. I hope that tomorrow the Vermont Legislature will override Governor Douglas' veto and send a clear message that he should not use his veto power to impose his personal view on the majority of Vermonters who support same sex marriage.

Finally, I am here tonight to let you know that the state of the city is good. We have cash reserves. We've been prudent as a city over the past three years. Our local economy is steady and sound. There are known challenges but there are real opportunities with a public and private capacity to act on them. I am always encouraged by the basic optimism of the people of Burlington. Let's look forward together to the Quadricentennial Celebration in July and to a good year ahead.

Thank you.