

AFT Vermont 2021 Burlington City Council Questionnaire

Note: This questionnaire was based on the AFT Vermont legislative platform that was passed by delegates to the 2020 convention. All candidates were invited to respond. We have included all of the responses that we received. **If any other candidate submits responses, we will include them and re-post this document.**

How would you use your position to keep the Administrations and Boards at UVM and UVM Medical Center accountable to their employees and the people of Burlington?

Jack Hanson: While I won't be in a direct decision-making position on this front, I would gladly use my position of City Councilor to publicly and privately pressure key decision-makers.

Grace Ahmed: I would support requiring the UVMMC safe staffing ratios to be published to the Burlington Open Data portal as a step in holding the medical center accountable to patients, nurses, and other workers.

As a former LNA who suffered a back injury on the job, I absolutely support safe lifting policies and would support city policy or Vermont legislation to ban manual lifting.

I will need to hear more about further issues to give specific steps I might take.

Perri Freeman: It is imperative that we hold UVM and UVMMC leadership accountable to the needs of their workers and the larger community. Public education and medical care should not be run as for-profit businesses. Doing so greatly damages the integrity of the services provided and the ability for workers to perform their jobs. I will stand with workers and offer support in any way that I can.

Kienan Christianson: As an attorney, I am an advocate at heart. Even though as a City Councilor I may only have a limited oversight role of UVM, I will stand shoulder to shoulder with UVM employees and the people of Burlington to ensure that UVM is not only treating its employees fairly, it is also doing its part to support the City and help solve some of the more pressing issues faced by the City such as housing affordability. I am also in full support of the organizing efforts currently underway to unionize at UVM and I am happy to stand at picket lines and offer legal advice to ensure that UVM employees are given a voice in decision making. Finally, I am a big believer in having labor on the boards of the companies and institutions they serve. I would advocate for a policy change at the UVM Board level to ensure that there is a seat for organized labor and there is a seat for employees. This will ensure that decision-making is not a top down process, but a bottom up one instead.

Will you join with hundreds of elected, labor and community leaders in signing our open letter calling on UVM to sign a neutrality agreement that would allow the unorganized UVM staff to have a free and fair union election? Link to open letter: <https://bit.ly/3sCaV5D>

Kienan Christianson-Pledged

Jack Hanson-Signed

Grace Ahmed-Pledged

Perri Freeman-Pledged

Given President Biden's commitment to and investment in education and given the negative reputation UVM now has for top-down decision making and unnecessary terminations, what would you do to prevent further layoffs and cuts by the UVM administration?

Perri Freeman: I believe City leadership should continue to put pressure on UVM to halt further layoffs and unnecessary budget cuts. It is imperative that the University stop making needless cuts at the expense of their workers, the students, staff, and broader community.

Kienan Christianson: I would first call on all administrators to give back a portion of their salary to help stabilize the finances of UVM. I think it is outrageous that the President is making around \$700K a year, when the median salary in Burlington is a tenth of that. I am a strong believer that when crises hit, those at the top should be asked to sacrifice first before we ask those at the bottom to cut back. I would also work to help the unionizing efforts of the University so that employees have collective bargaining power to stop these kinds of top-down decisions.



Jack Hanson: While I won't be in a direct decision-making position on this front, I would gladly use my position of City Councilor to publicly and privately pressure key decision-makers.

Grace Ahmed: Requiring UVM to publish all admin compensation is a step I support in holding them accountable for choices in spending.

What steps would you take to improve community health?

Grace Ahmed. The strain the Covid-19 pandemic has had on working people in our community is being seen already, and while Burlington has responded in some good ways, there is plenty of need for improvement. I would like to see a firm commitment by the City to provide a sufficient quantity of well-fitting masks to public school children and teachers for the duration of the CDC's recommendation that people wear face coverings, for a start.

More generally, I support a housing first policy; and, I see human needs like food, housing, and healthcare (including mental health, addiction treatment, and DENTAL care!!) as basic rights that are needed for the health of a community. We need robust systems for building community where we all trust that our basic needs will be taken care of. Beyond this point, we can start to achieve true health.

Perri Freeman: Again, we need to publicly fund healthcare. Neither education nor healthcare should be for-profit businesses. As much as the City can partner in subsidizing the cost to healthcare and contributing to equal access, I am very much in support.

Kienan Christianson First, I would invest in and creating a support network of community mental health providers. We know that when individuals experience mental health crises, they are likely to act erratic and in unpredictable ways. Rather than calling the police, who have limited training and

expertise in managing mental health crises, we should have a dedicated 311 line for folks to call and a mobile mental health crisis team ready to respond to a community member in need.

Second, I would reallocate funding to and support for diversionary programs. For example, providing greater funding to and support of the Howard Center and other local mental health providers to expand coverage and meet actual community needs would ensure that our community members experiencing mental health crises are getting the support they need without requiring involvement from the police. This also includes great support for restorative practices designed to reintegrate and support people leaving the criminal justice system, who are most at risk of recidivism.

Third, we need to do more to stop the criminalization of drug addiction and invest more in treatment and detox. I'm heartened that our City Council is looking into safe injection sites and would like to see further investment into programs that address the root cause of addiction rather than continuing to cycle people struggling with addiction through the criminal justice system where their needs and treatment go unfulfilled.

Finally, I want to build our capacity citywide to quickly and efficiently push out the COVID-19 vaccine, prioritizing our most at risk populations. I would advocate for teachers to be included as priority members for the vaccine given how often they face potential exposure to the virus.

Jack Hanson: One of my greatest pas-

sions in transportation. Our current transportation system is a public health disaster. A system that prioritizes automobiles means worse air quality, greater risk of road injuries and fatalities, and less time exercising. By creating infrastructure and policies that prioritizes public transportation and active transportation, we can address all of those issues, and reduce stormwater runoff that pollutes our lake.

What steps would you take to increase access to public higher education?

Jack Hanson: The cost of higher education is the biggest barrier. The City's role in addressing that is somewhat limited, but that doesn't mean we should do nothing. We need to pressure the state to invest more in higher education in order to reduce tuition. We also need to pressure UVM to reduce executive pay rather than increasing tuition or cutting programs.

Grace Ahmed: The biggest need I can see in increasing access to higher education is making sure more of our Burlington School District students are adequately prepared to enter higher education if they choose.

I support more public funding for State Colleges at the State level & would support the city working with UVM and other area colleges to explore options to offer reduced or free tuition to low-income Burlington graduating seniors.



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Perri Freeman: As much as possible, we need to be putting pressure on the state and national level to fully fund public education. The City should also look at ways to subsidize the cost of higher ed.

Kienan Christianson: As a millennial, I am no stranger to the harm student loan debt has on people and families. I was the first in my family to go to law school, and my parents always pressed me to get a higher education. It is unacceptable that we ask people to incur so much debt to obtain the training, skills, and knowledge for the jobs available today.

As a city councilor, my power on addressing higher education may be limited, but I will stand with anyone willing to challenge the status quo. We must begin by forgiving all student loan debt, and then, we must adequately fund higher education so that anyone who wants to go to college may do so without fear of incurring mountains of debt.

When it comes to UVM in particular, I would like to see less money spent on exorbitant administrator salaries and instead see more of the money invested in making college more affordable for students. I do not support the cuts that were made to UVM's humanities department, and I think that it is outrageous that school chose to cut valuable educational tools while maintaining a \$700K salary for the president of the university.

What steps would you take to implement Green New Deal policies in Burlington?

Kienan Christianson: First, I would aggressively phase out our City's reliance on polluting forms of energy. While the City has made great strides to go green, we need to do more to make public transportation not only an attractive option, but the preferred option for people commuting to and from work. Expanding busing through small shuttles into the side neighborhoods along North

Avenue would be a modest, but important, step towards making public transportation accessible to all NNE residents. Likewise, continuing to support or bike infrastructure is important to ensure that other modes of transportation remain attractive and safe.

Second, I would work to expand the City's teleworking policy. Reducing the number of trips necessary for work will decrease the carbon emitted by cars. While some people may wish to return to office work when it becomes safe to do so, continuing remote work policies already in place will provide necessary flexibility to city workers while reducing overall carbon emissions.

Third, I would prioritizing investing in our infrastructure with a focus on climate resiliency. As we repair and develop, we must ensure that the materials we use take into account the significant temperature fluctuations we are projected to continue seeing. We should be using not only crack-resistant asphalt and concrete when we repair our roads and sidewalks, but also use more flexible materials to ensure that our infrastructure can withstand large scale temperature fluctuations.

Jack Hanson: The transformation to our transportation system described above is major aspect of this. In addition to being healthier and more sustainable, public transportation and active transportation are dramatically more affordable and dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions compared to single occupancy vehicles.

Our next biggest contributor to the climate crisis is thermal energy (primarily heating systems). I have led the way on mandating rental weatherization, which will save tenants money on utility bills and reduce the use of natural gas. I also led the way on upcoming ballot items regarding regulating thermal energy systems to enable an equitable transition to decarbonized buildings in Burlington.

Grace Ahmed: Although I am running as an Independent candidate for the South District City Council seat, I have the endorsement of the Burlington VT Progressives and

will work closely with Progressive councilors to make city decisions to support Green New Deal priorities in Vermont that help reduce our fossil-fuel energy use and create livable-wage jobs.

Perri Freeman: I believe strongly that we need to support a GND framework. This combines the urgent need for infrastructure that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions with the needs of workers who cannot be left behind in this transition. We need to push for public energy utilities and greater public transportation. We need to support those public workers and pay them good wages to do this work. We need to embrace a stronger regional food system and production of local goods-- this should be combined with strong unions and/or cooperative models that do not rely on exploitative labor and extractive production models.

What steps would you take to enact racial justice?

Perri Freeman: We need to look at what racial justice looks like at every level of our society-- in housing, healthcare, food, education. We also need to address the immense systemic violence against Black people by our local police department and bring reform to that system. In the schools, we need to hire multilingual liaisons. We also need to be able to attract and retain educators of color by building cultural competency into the ethos of our school district. We need



a comprehensive anti-oppression and anti-white supremacy school curriculum.

Kienan Christianson: First, I would amplify and support BIPOC and Asian voices in all aspects of city decision-making. We don't know how a policy may impact frontline communities if we don't have their voices at the table and their perspectives interwoven into policy. With the use-of-force policy likely being revamped, it is vitally important that frontline communities have their views and perspectives incorporated into the revised policy. If I am fortunate enough to be on City Council, there will always be a seat at the decision-making and policy-making table for my BIPOC and Asian neighbors.

Second, I will be a strong advocate for common-sense reforms to when police can use force. People suspected of minor crimes shouldn't be forcibly arrested; they should be issued a ticket. If the police have a legal basis to take someone into custody, they should do it through a warning instead of force. The warning could be: "I am placing you under arrest. You must come with me to the station. If you don't come, you're committing a separate crime, for which you may be punished." Force should only be allowed in the most extreme circumstances.

Third, I will work to address the disproportionate use of force against black and brown people. This should be addressed with targeted in-depth implicit bias training and, if necessary, with discipline or even termination if officers continue to disproportionately use force against minority community members. I would also advocate for better publication of and access to each officer's use of force report so that we know which officers are disproportionately using force and can stop that from happening.

Fourth, I will work to pass a Just Cause Eviction ordinance. Evictions are financially and psychologically devastating and disproportionately impact our neighbors of color. Passing a Just Cause Eviction ordinance will prevent unjust or baseless evictions, and allow

tenants who have done nothing wrong to stay in their homes. I am proud to be an early endorser of the Council's current proposal.

Jack Hanson Not only advancing policies that directly focus on racial justice, but incorporating racial justice into a variety of policies. For example, I recently took leadership on advancing a ballot item regarding retail cannabis in Burlington. While the State law asked for a simple opt-in question, we went well beyond this and created a framework for strong racial justice measures within the rollout of retail cannabis in Burlington.

Grace Ahmed: I am committed to racial justice and have organized in the community primarily around educational equity and fair policing. I am a strong proponent of an independent community board to oversee investigation and discipline of police misconduct in accordance with recommendations from the ACLU. I am on the data team of the Racial Justice Alliance of Vermont and support anti-racist organizations and groups working on policy issues in Burlington and beyond, including Justicia Migrate, BLM, the Battery Park Movement, the Black Perspective, and Justice for All VT.

How will you relate to organized labor in Burlington?

Grace Ahmed: I have done both volunteer work and paid work for organized labor, including VFNHP, AFL-CIO, CCTA bus drivers, and the Vermont Workers' Center. I'm a

political newcomer, running for public office at this time not despite my commitment to workers' rights but because of it.

Perri Freeman: I will support organized labor in Burlington. This is a really big issue for me personally. I would like to see more workers being organized to be able to collectively bargain. Only 10% of workers nationally are unionized. This is dismally low and I will continue to do what I can to make sure organized labor has the resources they need and those that are yet to be organized have access to organizing.

Kienan Christianson I believe the assault on collective bargaining rights we have seen over the last forty years has resulted in stagnated wages, poorer health outcomes, a lack of accountability, and a failure to lift up our families. We have seen a massive concentration of wealth into the hands of a few in no small part because courts and conservative lawmakers have sought to erode these valuable protections.

I will invite organized labor into all aspects of policy-making and will work to pass legislation that protects organized labor's rights and that makes it easier to organize. I also understand that there are organizing efforts in place at UVM in response to the unfair budgetary cuts, and I am in full support of these efforts. I would like to see a liveable wage ordinance passed, and would like to see us moving towards a four day work week. Finally, whenever there are opportunities to invite organized labor into the process, I will do so--



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you cannot make change if you don't have a seat at the table, and organized labor will always have a seat if I am fortunate to be elected.

Jack Hanson: Vocally, both publicly and privately, standing with organized labor throughout our community. Standing up for working within the City's budget process. Fighting for liveable wages and fair working conditions for City workers and for all workers in Burlington.

Is there anything else you would like our members to know about your candidacy?

Jack Hanson: The alliance between climate activists and labor gives me hope for the future. As a UVM student pushing for fossil fuel divestment, we stood strongly with the CCTA bus drivers during their strike in 2014. I have consistently stood with labor and I believe that organized labor is one of the most powerful tools in fighting for a just and sustainable economy.

Also, since the questions above did not ask about policy record, I'd like to state that I believe I have a very strong record in my first term on each of the issues asked about above. I would be more than happy to discuss that record if it would be helpful to you all.

Grace Ahmed: I am happy to answer any other questions you have! Please feel free to contact me at grace.ahmed.btv@gmail.com or see more at GraceForBTV.com

Perri Freeman: Thank you

Kienan Christianson: In addition to the above, I regularly volunteer at Steps to End Domestic Violence. I have represented countless survivors of violence in restraining order cases and custody disputes, often at pro bono or low bono rates. I also helped launch a legal clinic in conjunction with Legal Aid that provides free legal advice to incarcerated mothers at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility. I am a member of the Burlington Development Review Board and I sit on the board of the nonprofit Vermont Kin as Parents. I am committed to service and went to law school specifically to give a voice to those who are most impacted by our unjust legal system.

Joan Shannon: I reviewed the survey and it doesn't seem to get at issues that can be addressed by the Burlington City Council. I'm sure your members want more than platitudes. I would love to have an opportunity to speak about how I can help your organization and thereby our teachers and healthcare workers. I am very much in agreement with your legislative agenda. In particular I have deep concerns about working conditions for our healthcare workers and assuring adequate staffing, PPE, and other necessities to support both workers and patients. I am also concerned about recent cuts at UVM that seem to have happened with a lack of engagement from staff. These cuts will affect both workers and the community at large.

