

AFT Vermont 2021 Burlington Mayoral 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?

Will Emmons: I will be fully involved in any process under law. I have advocated for patients and stuck up for nurses and doctors whenever necessary in life, at Fletcher Allen and MGH health (Harvard circa JFK school/ Gov't).

Max Tracy: UVM and UVMMC, though nonprofits, behave like large corporations that value their bottom line over front line workers. This was clear to me when I first arrived in Burlington and remains so to this day. I have spent much of the last 15 years standing in solidarity with UVM and UVMMC workers in their fight for dignity and justice. As a UVM student, I led one of the largest movements in university history first to ensure that all campus workers were paid a livable wage and then against layoffs when the 2008 economic crisis hit. Later, as a UVM employee, I was deeply involved with several staff union drives. Similarly, I stood with nurses and techs at UVMMC across numerous contract fights and their drive to organize LNAs. This connection has only grown in the past year as I have served as a Field Organizer for VFNHP, fighting alongside nurses and techs to ensure that their collective bargaining rights were upheld amidst the unprecedented

strain of the pandemic. These experiences will directly inform how I plan to govern.

Instead of prioritizing hospital and university executives to the exclusion of staff, I will directly engage with organized labor and prioritize their needs. If you need me to write to these institutions in support of your efforts, I will. If you need me to stand with you bargaining your next contract or even on the picket line, I will. If you need me to support you at press conferences, I will. If you need me to support efforts to organize a staff union at UVM and fight union busting efforts, I will. We need a Mayor who is not afraid to take on these big institutions. I am prepared to be that Mayor.

Miro Weinberger: I have built strong relationships with the leadership of both UVM and the UVM Medical Center and through collaboration and, at times, public debate, have secured substantial benefits from these institutions for the people of Burlington.

In 2018, I negotiated with UVM and Champlain College for those institutions to collectively make \$8.6 million payments to the City to support the City's 10-Year Sustainable Infrastructure plan to pay for new investments in Burlington's streets, sidewalks and other core infrastructure. I also secured major contributions from the UVMMC Foundation for the rebuilding of the Burlington Bike Path.

This past summer, when residents raised concerns about UVM's plan to bring back students during the pandemic, I shared those concerns with UVM and worked with their Administration team to ensure a safe re-opening of on campus learning and a plan that did not lead to a surge in Covid-19 cases in Burlington.

Haik Bedrosian: By the power of example, and through continuous engagement.

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>

Haik Bedrosian-Signed

Will Emmons-Pledged

Max Tracy-Signed

Miro Weinberger-left blank



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?

Miro Weinberger: One of my top campaign commitments is that local government will work closely with the Biden Administration to bring this pandemic to an end and then lead the economic recovery in the months and years to come. We will reorganize local government to make sure that we secure as much assistance for Burlington and Chittenden County as possible, and deploy it in the highest impact ways. This focus on public health -- which has made Burlington one of the safest cities in the country since the Covid crisis began -- and economic recovery will keep this region and its institutions from further economic pain and help them bounce back quickly.

Haik Bedrosian: Look for ways to support bottom up decision making, unions, and transparency.

Will Emmons: I will be at the administration during my first cup of coffee in the morning. No trickle down economics, no white collar economics, blue collar workforce economics just as Burlington workforce is and will improve to be further.

Max Tracy: As someone who was laid off by UVM in the midst of an organizing drive, I know firsthand the deep pain that these cuts cause to community members. I will certainly stand in solidarity with UVM faculty, staff, and students as they battle the current layoffs focused on gutting the College of Arts and Sciences. It is not enough, however, to fight these layoffs because, even if we are suc-

cessful in getting them to concede this round, ongoing challenges within higher education mean that others are sure to follow. In this context, the most important thing that we can do is to strengthen existing bargaining units and to create new ones. I will leverage the power of my office to put pressure on the UVM Administration to withdraw their current layoff proposal and to remain neutral with regards to ongoing staff organizing efforts. As I indicated in the prior question, I am committed to participating in a wide variety of actions to counter these trends and will prioritize the asks for support made by faculty and staff.

What steps would you take to improve community health?

Max Tracy. The pandemic has made abundantly clear the crucial role that cities and towns play in public health. I will continue to prioritize evidence-based, data-driven strategies for containing the virus, ensuring that testing resources are readily available in every part of the City. I will also work closely with State officials and community organizations to ensure that we equitably distribute vaccines across our communities, ensuring that low income folks and communities of color that have been hardest hit by the pandemic are not left behind. This will be part of a larger approach to addressing health disparities across class and racial lines by properly resourcing the new Public Health Equity manager position created by the City.

As part of our transformation of public safety, we must better address dire community

needs around substance use disorder, trauma informed mental health support, and outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness. This will mean creating new positions staffed by professionals specialized in delivering these services directly to community members in need.

With the opioid epidemic reaching its worst point in years, it is also past time to implement new harm reduction strategies. I support the creation of an overdose prevention site in downtown Burlington to ensure that people who use drugs do not continue to die and have better access to treatment resources. Part of increasing access to treatment also means supporting efforts to decriminalize Buprenorphine specifically, and the move away from enforcement based policies that criminalize users more broadly. We must treat this epidemic like the public health crisis that it is.

Finally, our City must do more to encourage healthy activities and exercise for people of all ability levels. Part of this will include restoring and building on existing Parks programming coming out of the pandemic. I also believe that we can and should do more to get people to use accessible, active modes of transportation, building a comprehensive network of protected bike lanes and better maintained sidewalks. People will be able to safely engage with healthier activities if the City plays a leading role in creating accessible opportunities for these activities and expands infrastructure for safe walking and biking.



Miro Weinberger: Public and community health has been a priority for my administration, especially throughout the past year during the pandemic.

We confronted the opioid crisis head on in 2016 by creating CommunityStat – a monthly stakeholder meeting focused on real time data, listening to the nation’s top public health experts, and relentless follow up. Supported by this focus, our community’s incredible nurses and doctors, syringe exchange workers and other treatment professionals, defense attorneys, prosecutors, parents, police officers and others – the thousands of community members who work on some element of this huge challenge – were able to come together to reduce opioid overdose deaths by 50% in Chittenden County from 2017 through 2019.

And in the early months of 2020, as we saw COVID-19 coming at us from the other side of the globe, we concluded based on history that in a global pandemic local actions matter and we launched the City’s biggest data and science effort yet.

In early March we created a 10-person Analytics Team that has kept the City on top of the quickly evolving knowledge about the virus and enabled us to add value to the broader community’s remarkable sacrifice, service, and vigilance.

This past week, the City hired its first Public Health Equity manager to lead these initiatives. Now, the next step for our City is to lay out a plan to join more than 2,000 small jurisdictions with a local public health department to ensure that going forward we combat racism as a public health emergency and future crises with the same kind of approach, urgency, and focus on measurable results as we have brought to the Opioid Crisis and pandemic.

Haik Bedrosian: Create a large indoor greenhouse and botanical gardens. Public toilets and baths.

Will Emmons: I would make sure that the community is sanitized and that all businesses are maintained through inspection on a recurring basis and that masks are readily available. I also intend for there to be local garlic readily available. I will make sure that the air quality and water quality are monitored. I will make sure that businesses have standards that they understand, and that the police have standards that they can understand. This way there is no confusion, and citizens feel safe which is healthy.

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

Will Emmons: I will make it more affordable. I plan to design infrastructure whereby students are able to obtain education and learn business startups through knowledge. I intend for this to bolster the economy in the city of Burlington, 3 colleges, at least one law school, and a foundation I am going to start in the name of my cousin who was slain, to help underprivileged, and/or battered women (&men). I intend for this to be welcome to Burlingtonians as well as international and national travelers. I can show single parents who to talk to as well. I intend to raise money and make sure that people have opportunity.

Max Tracy: Public higher education is under tremendous pressure in Vermont with continued threats of consolidation of the State Colleges system and faculty/staff cuts at UVM. It is crucial that our next Mayor be willing to forcefully stand up to this austerity budgeting that will directly impact access to higher education across our state. In this sense, I would use the power of the office to lobby on behalf of the faculty and staff at these institutions to ensure that they are able to continue to provide high quality education to so many students. It will, however, not be enough to just prevent consolidation or stop a round of layoffs.

We need to set the goal of making all public

colleges/universities in our state free. The current tuition driven funding model combined with demographic declines in high school age populations across the region will only continue to exacerbate the challenges that our higher education landscape faces. I will work in coalition with leaders across the state to push for fundamental reforms to education funding that create long term viability while also removing these cost based barriers to attending our public colleges and universities.

Miro Weinberger: In my time as mayor, I have worked collaboratively with our higher education institutions and have been a strong supporter of our Burlington Schools. The success and strength of our City relies on a strong and supportive education system and school district.

Currently the School District and the City are enjoying a period of close collaboration and good communication. The City and District have been tightly coordinated during the pandemic and have worked hard together to ensure that the schools operate in person learning safely. I have also been in regular communication with leadership at UVM and Champlain College to ensure safety for our whole community during the pandemic.

Haik Bedrosian: Support college credit for HS students, welcome new learning institutions to BTU.



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

Haik Bedrosian: District energy from McNeil plant in ONE. Walkable neighborhoods. Efficiency.

Will Emmons: I will inspect the green new deal thoroughly. I will note the amount of fraud waste and abuse in this city and misrepresentation of the citizens that own it. I note lack of ownership of citizens. I note many fraud lawsuits that have been filed against me and the negative impact that has on the environment. I am from a family of Gardeners whom cared for the environment dating back about 100 years plus. I note caring for the environment is the most important things for my heart, just like working people. Burlington will truly be green once elections take place, at the will of the voters. Currently stats in the city are fixed and I intend to expose and change that from "cooked" status to "law abiding" status.

Max Tracy: I've been a longtime advocate for investing in and creating green infrastructure since joining the Council. We know that we need to do so much more to bring down emissions related to heating and cooling as well as transportation. On the heating and cooling side, I support mandating weatherization of rental units (paired with rent stabilization to prevent cost shifts to tenants), banning new fossil fuel infrastructure, and creating a district energy system to capture the waste heat from the McNeil plant. On transportation, I support moving to fare free public transit, exploring more micro transit options to access underserved areas, upgrading sidewalks and crosswalks, and building a comprehensive network of protected bike lanes. I also know that we must do more to address lake health, as Lake Champlain is our most precious natural resource. We know that the climate crisis is creating storm events that our current system cannot handle. In addition to continuing/expanding work to upgrade the existing system to prevent com-

bined sewer overflows, we have to do more to slow down and absorb storm-water through nature based solutions like substantial tree planting programs as well as building rain gardens in every neighborhood. These combined efforts will not only reduce our carbon emissions and build resiliency, but will also create well paying jobs that will be crucial to our economic recovery.

Miro Weinberger: Addressing the climate emergency has been a top priority of our Administration.

In my time as Mayor, in 2014, Burlington became the first city in America to source 100% of its electricity from renewables, and we are now aiming to be a Net Zero Energy City by 2030.

We continued to make progress towards that goal even amidst the pandemic, by launching the Green Stimulus Package redirected hundreds of thousands of dollars in existing efficiency funds to initiatives like lowering energy bills for renters and supporting weatherization, and we had another encouraging year of progress toward our ambitious Net Zero Energy goal. We passed critical policy reforms designed to make housing in Burlington more affordable and available, and continued work on others.

Last week, I announced with the Burlington Electric Department that our Green Stimulus program is working and that program incentives have been extended into 2021 and will remain available through year's end or until funding is exhausted.

Strategic electrification – powering our homes, cars, and businesses with 100 percent renewably-sourced energy – is the answer to the climate emergency. This is how we save the planet while preserving and even improving our 21st century standard of living. Burlingtonians forged tremendous progress in 2020 and, if all of us get involved, we can show the world that this kind of structural change is possible.

In 2018, I called on state lawmakers to put a price on carbon and proposed a revenue neutral carbon pollution fee on fossil fuels from heating and transportation sectors to curb greenhouse gas emissions: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/Press/mayor-miro-weinberger-announces-support-for-a-revenue-neutral-vermont-carbon-pollution-fee>

What steps would you take to enact racial justice?

Haik Bedrosian: Hire a diverse city workforce. Confront any institutional and implicit biases I find.

Will Emmons: I have thus far participate in many issues involving many disparities where equitable enforcement has been non-existent. Racial profiling was brought to Burlington on purpose by the current mayor and I am having none of this. Del Pozo used "Trooper Riggins" in his report. Backward words like that are going to change immediately. Diversity will be immediate to the ex-



Healthcare & Public Higher Education For All

SOLIDARITY

VERMONT'S HEALTHCARE & HIGHER EDUCATION UNION

tent of my human ability. I testified in a racial profiling case that I would be happy to explain to your membership vocally. I learned that from Nina Turner and years of Arbitration experience. Currently I am my own lawyer, helping others whenever needed.

Max Tracy: Racial justice is not optional. Our BIPOC neighbors deserve to feel safe, respected, and at home in their own communities. Yet I believe we must go further than preventing harm. We must also proactively and meaningfully engage with improving the material conditions of people's lives, focusing on cultural and economic empowerment for BIPOC folks. I have dedicated my nine years of service on the City Council toward racial, economic, and environmental justice. I commend the students and activists that have invested their whole selves in the work of fighting for racial justice in Burlington despite numerous and deeply painful moves by the current administration to delay and deny necessary transformation. As Mayor, I will convene a Racial Equity Commission focused on the eradication of systemic racism across city government and prominent institutions - one that has real authority and is held accountable to the needs of our most vulnerable. Our largest racial justice priority as a city will be to bridge the racial wealth gap by expanding BIPOC business, land, and home ownership. I will also resource and implement city-wide interpretation and translation services so that all of us can be involved in the political process.

My racial justice record speaks for itself: I knocked on every door at Riverside Apartments to prevent an Amtrak train from being parked overnight next to one of our largest predominantly BIPOC housing complexes. I co-sponsored a resolution creating a Reparations Task Force developed in collaboration with the Racial Justice Alliance and Councilor Freeman. I introduced a progressive stack to the City Council, centering BIPOC voices. I ran the longest public forum in City Council history, centered on racial justice. Consistently, I have also led opposition to the F-35s, which create disproportionate environmental

and economic impacts for parts of the city and beyond that are predominantly New American and BIPOC neighborhoods. We have so much more work to do. As your next Mayor, I will continue to make racial justice a fundamental priority. After all, the health, safety, and wellbeing of BIPOC folks in Burlington is non-negotiable.

Miro Weinberger: In 2019 I worked with the City Council to create a new Racial Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging Department (REIB), and in April of 2020 I was proud to appoint Tyeastia Green as the City's first REIB Director to create new capacity in the City to break down barriers of institutional racism and implicit bias. Then, at the end of May, the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police sparked a national movement and crystallized how much work remains for our country and our city to truly achieve racial justice.

Since then, the City has taken a number of actions. This includes writing and securing passage of a budget that – created a new, \$1 million fund to invest in racial justice and an additional \$250,000 for police transformation. We were able to do all this amidst a tremendously challenging budget year because of our longstanding, successful effort to restore the City's fiscal health and create substantial emergency reserves. In July, the City worked with 30-plus Chittenden County organizations to declare racism a public health emergency, and we have hired the City's first Public Health Equity Manager to coordinate action to eliminate race-based health disparities. In September, I hired YMCA CEO Kyle Dodson to take the new, temporary position of Director of Police Transformation. In October I was honored to be at the first meeting of a new Task Force on Slavery Reparations -- one of the very first municipal efforts of its type in the country. And in just a few months Burlington will officially celebrate Juneteenth as a major community event for the first time.

We have much more to do, and I look forward to continuing this work in 2021.

How will you relate to organized labor in Burlington?

Miro Weinberger: Strong labor relations has been a priority for my administration. In my time as Mayor -- in stark contrast to the failed bargaining rounds in the years prior to my administration -- I have twice successfully negotiated contracts with all four of our municipal labor unions (AFSCME, IBEW, BPOA, and BFFA) without going to arbitration. We have succeeded in these negotiations because I listened to the input the labor unions gave me when I was first elected. I took the negotiations in house instead of using consultants as negotiators. I recruited and put in charge of the negotiations a CAO and City Attorney who had backgrounds organizing and advocating for workers, and I put in the time personally to achieve bargaining breakthroughs when we hit impasses.

Similarly, though the mayor has no formal role in Burlington School District teacher negotiations, after the 2017 Burlington teacher's strike began, I invited leaders of the union and the school district to an informal meeting in my kitchen, and then personally participated in the formal mediation to help bring the strike to a quick, negotiated resolution.

When Covid-19 hit in mid-March 2020, we immediately implemented a well-received Emergency Leave Policy to provide additional paid time off in the event city employees get sick or need to care for family members who are sick or home due to school or busi-



ness closures. We have worked closely with our unions to ensure safe working conditions for employees who continue to work from the office, and we made arrangements so that employees can work from home if they are able.

Haik Bedrosian: In a positive and honest way.

Will Emmons: I was a Local Union President for 3 consecutive terms, as well as State President for Vermont for 1 term, and approximately 10 years consecutive stewardship under oath. I have negotiated about 800 solid settlements and filed over a thousand cases in filemaker pro grievance format as well as many unfair labor charges, including but not limited to an election tampering case. Lets discuss this before your membership.

Max Tracy: I see Burlington's organized labor community as being an integral part of a more just and sustainable economy. To this end, I will maintain strong relationships with the various bargaining units throughout our City and will stand in solidarity with their members to ensure their rights are upheld and to fight for better contracts. I will continue to build on existing relationships with union leadership and rank and file members, maintaining open lines of communication. Finally, I will support efforts to expand union membership by calling out and opposing any and all union busting efforts that arise.

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

Max Tracy: HOUSING: My administration will work to end the trend of working people and families being priced out of Burlington by getting sky-high property taxes, rent, and utility costs under control. Home ownership must become a more possible option for working people and families in Burlington. Property taxes need to be manageable, even

for folks on fixed incomes. Monthly housing costs, from rent to utilities, should be more sustainable. Renters following their lease deserve protections from unjust evictions, which is why my administration will work to carry the decades long fight for Just Cause Evictions over the finish line. We must provide our homeless neighbors with basic sanitation services. Workers should make wages that allow them to live in the community they work in. Our goal is safe, affordable, and quality housing options for all.

COVID-19 & SMALL BUSINESS RELIEF: We know that the economic impacts of the pandemic will be felt long after it's over. Our city must be prepared to help our most vulnerable residents weather the impacts that will go on for years to come. I believe that we need a Mayor who will help us decide what we want Burlington to be like on the other side of this pandemic, but we must get our community safely through this first. Universal mask distribution and essential worker hazard pay are necessary measures for right now. Small businesses will receive the technical support they need to weather this storm. We must implement an eviction moratorium and prohibit rent payment late fees for small businesses under commercial leases. I support exploring delays/reductions/deferrals of taxes and fee collections for small businesses with reduced cash flows (deferring collection of local sales tax, delaying or reducing payment of other business fees and taxes). I am committed to implementing low/no interest loans using a combination of federal Small Business Association, state agency, and municipal funds to provide much needed

relief for small businesses. We need to partner with state and federal entities to help small businesses access economic development grants and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans. We must facilitate the growth of district-specific business associations to share expertise and offer mutual support. People are hurting, and we need hunger relief, individual stimulus funds, and livable wage jobs for Burlingtonians.

Miro Weinberger: If given the opportunity to continue to lead this great city, I will build on what we have learned during the pandemic and opioid crisis and create structural changes within local government to prioritize public health as never before. I would welcome the opportunity to work with AFT Vermont to make that transformative change a reality for the good of the people of this region.

Haik Bedrosian: I support education, and collective bargaining rights. Thanks.

Will Emmons: I am overqualified for the position of mayor but also I am extremely humble and came from a rough background. I have many experiences with hospital workforce that make my experience ideal to serve your membership and fully understand how to make your membership whole walking in the door. Always eager to learn as well, never acting like the smartest person in the room.



Healthcare & Public Higher Education For All

SOLIDARITY

VERMONT'S HEALTHCARE & HIGHER EDUCATION UNION