

Councilors Bushor, Mason and Paul,

It has been very interesting hearing testimony over the last few ordinance committee meetings from the City Attorney, Jesse Bridges, Doug Hoffer and Gene Richards. We also found the discussion at the last meeting enlightening. As you may know the Peace & Justice Center was the lead organization that mobilized a livable wage movement throughout Vermont. There is massive community support for this campaign and the continued success is due to the efforts of our membership, community in general and the coalition of organizations including a huge amount of work contributed by the Vermont Workers' Center. We are all extremely concerned with the City Attorney's report of lack of compliance and enforcement of this law. While we applaud your dedication to finding a solution to this issue we also have concerns about the process and several items mentioned at the ordinance committee last week as well as in previous meetings. It seems that as a governing body you three have not taken ownership of the concept or philosophy of livable wage. The conversation seems to revolve around trying to understand what was the original intent of the city councilors that passed this ordinance rather than how to make sure that the city supports all workers ability to meet their basic needs. It seems clear that you would benefit from asking for testimony from any of the past directors of the Vermont Livable Wage Campaign (VLWC) in the same way that you requested testimony from the directors of Parks and Rec, the Airport and Doug Hoffer. Three of our former VLWC directors are Ellen Kahler, Emma Mulvaney-Stanak and Colin Robinson.

In tonight's meeting as well as future meetings we urge you to focus on how to implement this ordinance rather than finding ways to make it more manageable by weakening the language and cutting out workers who were originally part of the law. Hopefully after hearing testimony from workers in the public comments portion of the meeting you will have a better sense of the importance of this ordinance in the community. We think that as representatives of the people of Burlington you have an equal obligation to hear from working people just as you seek advice from directors of departments and policy people rather than from those whose lives are drastically affected by this law.

We have heard at nearly all of your meetings that you are not sure why the language around the airport is different than other city leased property. We think in order for the ordinance to hold true to the principles of livable wage the language in the airport part of the ordinance should be expanded to all city leased property. We also think that all workers -including seasonal workers- should fall under the Livable Wage Ordinance rather than only year-round employees. We challenge the Parks department to substantiate their claims about the cost this would represent by showing actual data about seasonal workers and the impacts of increased wages.

If businesses can genuinely not survive and pay their workers a livable wage they should apply for an exemption. This process can also be improved. We would like all exemptions to go before the entire City Council even if the finance committee is unanimously in agreement of issuing an exemption. Businesses asking for an exemption should also be asked to open up their books and prove that they will not survive if they pay a livable wage to their staff. Additionally they should be required to give the city a plan for being able to pay a livable wage to all their employees. Any issued exemptions should be short term -no longer than two (2) years- so that the city can re-evaluate the business once established and have the ability to require them to pay a livable wage if the numbers show that they have the ability to.

We think that this is a great opportunity to bring the Burlington School District employees and contractors under the LWO as well. While it may take a period of time for these contracts to become compliant, this would mean that all Burlington employees were paid a livable wage. We feel it is reasonable for both the District and the Unions to embrace this basic needs standard.

These are just a few of the thoughts that the Peace & Justice Center feels are important for you to know. After watching the process unfold in front of us we realize that it is time to speak up and let you know where we stand. We look forward to hearing your thoughts tonight and being able to continue to support this process to insure that the City of Burlington supports it's workers ability to meet their basic needs.

Sincerely,

The Peace & Justice Center

Livable Wage testimony

Brittany Nevins

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My name is Brittany Nevins and I just graduated from the University of Vermont with a degree in political science and community development. As a Vermonter I have always been proud of our political system in our state and the concern for our fellow neighbors and community, but the conversation surrounding whether or not to pay college students a livable wage on behalf of our representatives is shameful. Everyone should be paid a livable wage.

Few of my fellow graduates receive a wage that amounts to what the city has declared through research to be "livable." I have worked at the Greater Burlington YMCA for over three years now, as a trained lifeguard and swim lesson instructor, often working seasonally. The "socially responsible" organization strategically keeps their workers part-time, where we cannot receive benefits. I get paid about \$9/hour and am only allotted 35 hours per week maximum. I have one of the cheaper apartments in the old north end, with simple means. I prioritize my health eating local, organic foods when I can. My wage is simply unlivable without a supplement from my parents.

We often forget the burden that college students bear in today's world. We can't live off of the wages we are given on a day to day basis, not to mention the thousands of dollars we must pay for college loans with interest. As students often are seasonal workers, we are dispensable in the working world. I struggle every day and I am one of the few college students without loans. My mother chose to work at the university rather than becoming an artist to give my brother and I the gift of free tuition, a gift which I have grown to feel guilty of.

Please realize the impact of your decisions regarding the livable wage. The quality of life and happiness of your constituents and fellow community members is compromised as you exclude groupings of vulnerable people from receiving a livable wage. The livable wage ordinance should strive for universality rather than exclusion.

July 22, 2013, South Burlington, VT

My name is Julia Behrens and am employed at the airport. My company (Hudson News) is in compliance with the Livable Wage Ordinance.

I've read the LWO report and its recommendations, of which one was to amend the ordinance to treat the airport like other City departments. Recently, however, I've learned that there's a real possibility of completely exempting the Airport from the ordinance.

The report says that the LWO is based on a model of 2 adults living in a 2 bedroom unit in an urban area, with moderate food spending plan. That describes us: my husband and I. He also works at the airport, and although the LWO does not apply to him (he is a government employee), he does make what amounts to its equivalent. I work approximately 37 hours a week, my husband works 40.

So let me tell you about us. Every month we make mortgage payments, pay an association fee for the condo, take care of all the utility bills, cable, phone, car insurance and a car loan. What we are left with has to cover food (for us and our pets), gas, medical bills, credit card payments, and other occasional non-monthly expenses, like house insurance, for example (paid once a year). Then, there are other unexpected monthly spendings that need to be taken into consideration, like when something brakes, or needs to be replaced, or a dryer vent needs to be inspected and cleaned, or there's an emergency dentist visit, etc.

All in all, the money disappears quickly, some months we are actually forced to dip into our savings account. On the months we don't, we are still unable to put any money aside. As they say, we just get by.

Now, we don't have any children but some of the airport employees do. That usually means more expenses, and I will have to assume they either frequently reach into their savings, get some financial support from their families or, alternatively become more indebted.

And then you have the ones that don't even make the Livable Wage at the airport - if they are on their own, their situation is probably even more dire.

The Livable Wage is not making anybody rich, it merely allows an employee who makes it to get by. The cost of living is on a constant increase - gas, food, utilities go up every year. If the LWO is rolled back from the airport, many employees who already struggle (remember, their partners/spouses don't necessarily make the LW), might have to look for a job elsewhere, or take on a second or perhaps a third job.

The truth is, none of us demand to earn extraordinary amounts of money, we just want to live with dignity and a peace of mind that we can pay off our bills and debts in our lifetime.

Vermont is not a cheap place to live. My husband and I try to eat locally and support local businesses and charities (like humane societies, for example) whenever we can, but - it is often a challenge. If the LW is taken away, people like us will likely be forced to spend their money at a Walmart or a fast food chain, instead of a farmers market or a local restaurant. When people can't make the livable wage, the state's economy suffers accordingly.

Just like we want to promote local food and products, we want Vermonters to be able to afford them. At the very least, their monthly paychecks should cover their necessary monthly expenses. Therefore, I think, upholding the Livable Wage Ordinance, enforcing it and penalizing those not in compliance, is a step in the right direction -- rolling back the ordinance would be an unfortunate turn of events for many people who already struggle to make ends meet.

Sincerely,

Julia Behrens

At Liz Lovely, we believe that every person is entitled to the opportunity to earn a livable wage. In some cases our entry-level positions are paid at a training wage, but there is a clear, direct, guaranteed path to livable wage within 1 year of service. Our employment culture is based on growth and value creation. We help our people grow and take on more, which creates more value for Liz Lovely. This, in turn, delivers more value back to the employee through increased pay, more paid time off, and more of the three tenants of employee satisfaction: Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose. On a related note, I'd like to also mention that we currently employ only on a Full-Time basis, with a guaranteed 40 hours of pay plus benefits for every person on staff. And, we publish the salary scale in our manual, including pay increase paths for each level. It's our goal to remain fortunate enough as a business to continue with this strategy. Thank you so much for your time and concern for this important issue.

***Cowboy Dan* Holtz**

Maverick CEO

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As someone who gets paid the livable wage; First I like to say that I'm grateful for my job. But I also struggle to pay all my bills especially rent and my college loans every month. I can only imagine how difficult it must be on those who commute and have families who don't get paid the livable wage.

I feel that if all employees got paid a livable wage at the airport, in return the airport would gainfully employ motivated people and there would be a more positive atmosphere for travelers and workers.

Davon Martin

Airport Ambassador

Elmwood Ave., Burlington