



29 Church Street, Suite 3-5
Burlington, Vermont 05401
802-863-1175

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 20, 2021

Safety Escort Program formed by Burlington Businesses & Community Organizations in Response to Increased Incidents of Violent Attacks

The Burlington Business Association, founded in 1978, is a non-profit, non-political membership organization with over 200 business and non-profit members.

Board of Directors:

Shirin Hart, Chair
Leslee MacKenzie, Vice Chair
Russ Scully, Secretary
Chelsea Condos, Treasurer
Afi Ahmadi
Donna Austin-Hawley
Kyle Bostwick
John Caulo
Richard Deane
Justin Heilenbach
Christian Kuzia
Kevin Owens
Jeff Schulman
Stephanie Wernhoff
Zandy Wheeler

Staff:

Kelly Devine
Executive Director

Colin Hilliard
Director of Programming,
Advocacy & Member
Engagement

Alex Bunten
Special Projects Manager

In response to increased incidents of violence and threatening behavior in the Downtown, a group of businesses and community stakeholders have come together to establish the Safety Escort Program.

With organizational support from the Burlington Business Association (BBA), the Safety Escort Program will provide on-call Safety Escorts in the general downtown area. By phone or text, anyone can request a Safety Escort and a friendly Ambassador will walk them to or from their vehicle, building, hotel, or workplace. The service will have a special focus on supporting retail and nightlife employees.

According to the 2021 Downtown Safety Survey, conducted by the City of Burlington's Church Street Marketplace, 53% of survey respondents say they feel unsafe or very unsafe in the Downtown at night. Further, 66% of respondents reported there being a "regular exchange about safety related issues" between staff and ownership. Most concerning, the Survey reported that 51% of respondents say they have been a "victim of crime or harassment during, coming from, or leaving work Downtown."

In the past week, the Burlington Police Department (BPD) has responded to incidents of disorderly conduct, domestic assault, a stabbing, an assault with brass knuckles, and an assault with a hammer on a restaurant worker.

Mark Bouchett, owner of Downtown business Homeport has lent his support to the Program: "For years, members of the Homeport staff have consistently shared their concerns of how they do not feel safe. Concern has only grown with recent attacks on Downtown workers, and this is why I will be supporting the Safety Escort Program until a more permanent solution can be found."



29 Church Street, Suite 3-5
Burlington, Vermont 05401
802-863-1175

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 20, 2021

Kristin Halvorson, co-owner of EB Strong's and Halvoron's Upstreet Cafe, spoke to what the program would mean to her staff. "This service is welcome news to my staff and our whole downtown. The safety of our employees is a top priority for us and they don't feel safe right now. This program will bring peace of mind just knowing it's available and demonstrates how our community is looking out for one another."

Kelly Devine, Director of the Burlington Business Association, said, "The level of uncertainty and fear my membership has expressed to me over the past year has reached a level higher than I've seen in my 10+ years serving as the Director of the BBA. Above all else, they are afraid for their staff, especially women employees. After hearing from a number of my members, we have decided to support this idea while continuing to work to find a sustainable model for public safety in Burlington."

Additional Program Details

- Initial Program hours will be Thursday, Friday, Saturday from 10PM - 3AM.
- The Program will be staffed by a reputable community-focused security service and local volunteers. These details are currently being worked through.
- The Safety Escort Program is privately organized and is not a program of the City of Burlington or the Burlington Police Department (BPD).

Press Contact

Kelly Devine
Executive Director, Burlington Business Association
director@bbavt.org