

Clavelle & The Change in Administration

Walter I. Zeichner

I thought it would be interesting, especially for Burlington residents, to hear from outgoing Mayor Peter Clavelle and Mayor-elect Peter Brownell. It seemed appropriate to wonder how the change in administrations would effect the lesbians and gay men in Burlington, especially since the new Mayor is a Republican and the outgoing Mayor a Progressive.

OITM: How do you see the Mayors office in relation to the gay and lesbian Community, and how has your relationship been?

Clavelle: I think that I've had an excellent relationship with the Gay and Lesbian Community. I certainly have attempted to be open and to provide political leadership necessary for the creation of an inclusive community. I've had, on a regular basis, discussions with friends and residents that are Gay and Lesbian. I've done what I could both to provide political leadership as well as to create a model workplace here within city government.

OITM: What role do you think homophobia plays in the controversy over the domestic partners benefit package?

Clavelle: I think it's a complex issue, and certainly homophobia is one piece of it. There are many other pieces though. The need for universal and affordable health care is a piece. I heard from many residents that they didn't understand why, as they would characterize it, girlfriends and boyfriends [of city employees] would be getting insurance coverage when they themselves did not have insurance coverage or could not afford insurance coverage. It's also an issue that was difficult to bring forth in tough financial times, and certainly there were some financial considerations. But, to suggest that homophobia was not part of the very emotional opposition to this proposal would not be real either.

OITM: One of the questions people are asking is how much was the outcome of the election effected by the domestic partners issue. Obviously it's a factor and it's impossible to know, and how much of it had to do with other things too.

Clavelle: I think that there were many issues effecting the outcome of this election. Economic conditions across the country, my support for a tax rate increase. I think it was my support for the domestic partners proposal coupled with the support for a tax rate increase that really galvanized the opposition and brought to their campaign a motion and an energy that, frankly, my campaign lacked.

OITM: One of the things that I'm hearing from people is that it's easy to conclude that the domestic partners issue and homophobia were a main player. There's a fear that the new administration will come in and not be supportive, that there will in fact develop a more hostile climate in Burlington towards the Gay and Lesbian Community. I'm wondering what you think about that.

Clavelle: Well, I think that in some ways I share that fear, and I think that partly we saw a backlash. I'm just hoping that Mayor-elect Brownell can demonstrate that he will not discriminate, that he will speak out against violence and hate crimes, and that he will work towards creating an inclusive community. Hopefully those who supported him will follow his political leadership. Burlington, with leadership flowing from City Hall, will continue to be a community that is tolerant and respectful of its citizens.

OITM: I'm sure you're aware of violence that has occurred and occurs in Burlington against minority people, and specifically against gays and lesbians. Is there anything that you think the city can do that would be more effective than

what's happening?

Clavelle: We have within the city created the Community Violence Prevention Project which I think is a good model, a good educational program. The success of that program has been somewhat limited by the interests of the broader community. Clearly to deal with issues of violence, there's no simple solution. Education is a significant piece of the solution. It's not going to happen overnight. There needs to be an ongoing commitment towards providing education, training, nonviolence models for dispute resolution. I think also that political leadership's an important piece as well. I think it's important for community leaders, whether they're business leaders, chiefs of police, Mayors and city council members, to speak out when there is an incident of violence, to make it unacceptable. Burlington is part of a much larger violent society. Knowing and understanding that, I would hope that we'd continue our efforts towards creating a community that's inclusive and is free of racism, sexism, homophobia. We've made some progress but we've also got a long way to go.

OITM: Is there anything that you want to bequeath to Peter Brownell specifically about that issue, a plan or an idea?

Clavelle: There are a number of programs in place. We're kicking off an initiative dealing with racism in the community. I think that's important. Continued support of such projects as the Violence Prevention Project are important. Promoting and nurturing the Community Police Program is important, but we cannot, though, sit back and say that's a police problem. It's a community problem. Again, education is the answer, and needs to be the response. I would hope that during difficult financial times Burlington's city government will remain caring and compassionate. I would hope that there will be

Josie Juhasz, MA CCMHC

Specializing in Feminist Psychotherapy

Montpelier
802-229-5220

Some insurance
accepted

Janet K. Brown, M.A., C.A.C.
Licensed Psychologist
Certified Alcohol Counselor

Jean Townsend, M.A.
Certified Mental
Health Counselor

- ACOA • IDENTITY ISSUES
 - TRAUMA AND LOSS
 - DEPRESSION
- Individuals Couples Families

Milton, VT
(802) 893-4816

Burlington, VT
(802) 863-8162