

Burton urged to meet with board protesters

Wednesday, 19 November 2008

The flap over controversial Burton snowboards made it to the halls of city government Monday night.

The Burlington City Council voted 12 to 1 to pass a resolution asking the snowboard company to meet with community organizations angered by the "Primo" and "Love" model boards that feature images of self-mutilation and Playboy bunnies, respectively.

The resolution, a softer version of the one originally proposed, doesn't force Burton to take any action, but rather encourages the Burlington-based company to listen to the concerns of community organizations that say that the boards promote self-harm and misogyny.

The original resolution, sponsored by councilors Kurt Wright, R-Ward 4; Joan Shannon, D-Ward 5; Clarence Davis, P-Ward 3; and Jane Knodell, P-Ward 2, asked that Burton withdraw the boards from the market, a request that city councilor Ed Adrian, D-Ward 1, thought was unnecessary.

"My personal opinion is that people should be allowed to make choices, whatever they are," Adrian said.

Russ Ellis, D-Ward 4 said he wasn't interested in having the council censor any business and likened the Burton issue to Burlington Telecom's decision to carry the Al-Jazeera network.

"I don't think we want to get into the issue of being a censoring board. It's really not appropriate for the City Council to be dealing with," Ellis said.

Adrian did recognize that the community groups, including the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, the Girl Scout Council of Vermont and the White Ribbon Campaign of Vermont, deserve to be heard and he said he hoped that Burton leadership would engage in a dialogue with these organizations.

Wright, council president, sponsored the initial resolution based on the concerns he heard voiced in the community about the boards. It is the council's right to be able to weigh in on community issues, Wright said, and the council has a responsibility to put pressure on business to do the right thing.

“In a time of increased domestic violence, I think it is incumbent on leaders to speak out on this,” Wright said.

The discussion on the resolution lasted for about half an hour and in the end, the council passed the amended resolution. Paul Decelles, R-Ward 7, was the lone dissenting vote, citing a reluctance to restrict business.

Wright said he understands that Burton is a valuable member of the business community in Burlington, but added that he hoped the company listened to the community on this matter.

“They don’t have to answer to us, to me, to anyone. But again, my response to that is I hope they would take the high road,” Wright said.

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source: Burlington Free Press