

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING
DECEMBER 17, 2013
MINUTES

Mayor William Benton called the regular meeting to order at 6 p.m. at the Vergennes Fire Station on Green Street. Those in attendance were:

Mayor William Benton	City Clerk Joan Devine
Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette	Shannon Haggett, Planning Commission Chair
Alderman Renny Perry	Matt Witten, ACRWC
Alderman Clara Comeau	Jeff Margolis
Alderman Lowell Bertrand	Carrie MacFarlane
City Manager Mel Hawley	Marty Witten

WARRANTS: The warrant totaling \$1,055,881.27, that included the 2nd quarter education tax installments, was circulated for review and signatures of approval from the Board.

MINUTES: Minutes to the November 19th meeting were presented for approval. Alderman Renny Perry suggested “and training” be added to the second sentence. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette moved to approve the minutes as amended, seconded by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, with all voting in favor. Minutes to the Special City Meeting held December 10th will be approved by the voters at the Annual City Meeting.

PLANNING COMMISSION UPDATE: Shannon Haggett, Chair of the Planning Commission, reported that Vergennes is one of two communities the Vermont Council on Rural Development has chosen to offer assistance. Their visits are designed to help communities come together, review major issues, develop priorities and line up for action. The effort builds new volunteerism, people learn about local needs, and it encourages residents to get involved in moving their community forward. Mr. Haggett advised the Planning Commission pledges full support and if a letter to that effect is needed, he would gladly provide it. Manager Hawley stated that this organization does not have an agenda as they act as facilitators; it is the community members that decide what is good for their community. Participants at the visits range in age from the seniors in our community to the seniors in our high school, advised Manager Hawley. He compared the offer to a planning grant with no local match. Mayor Benton reported it is typically a three- to four-month project with various experts as participants. It was the consensus of the Board to send a letter confirming our interest in this offer.

SOUTH MAPLE STREET / SPEED SURVEY: An updated report prepared by Police Chief Merkel of the current speeds seen on South Maple Street was discussed. The recent analysis indicates the average speed is now below 25 mph. Chief Merkel recommends that this area be monitored frequently.

ACRWC FUNDING REQUEST: Matt Witten and Marty Illick, two of many volunteers at Addison County River Watch Collaborative, reported results they found from June through September 2012 while monitoring water quality of Otter Creek and in particular just downstream of the discharge from the wastewater treatment plant. Water samples are taken during the summer months and sent to the state lab for testing of phosphorus, turbidity, nitrogen and E. coli. Due to budget cuts the number of sampling locations in this watershed has been reduced to two sentinel stations; Belden

Falls in New Haven and Vergennes Falls. Manager Hawley advised, in the past, the City has funded them \$300 annually from the sewer fund but somewhere along that was discontinued. He welcomes this group's testing as a third set of eyes monitoring our highly regulated discharge into the river from our wastewater system. Alderman Clara Comeau moved to fund the ACRWC with \$400 annually from the sewer fund. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette seconded the motion with all voting in favor. Matt and Marty departed at 6:30 p.m.

VERMONT GAS SYSTEMS: Jeff Margolis, resident and petitioner of the Vermont Gas System referendum, thanked the City Council for the easy and fulfilling process he went through. He felt the referendum vote started conversation and thinking in the community regarding alternate energy sources available and their impact on the environment. A very positive experience, he advised, and he also learned about the economic engine. He again thanked the Board for their time, consideration given at the Special City Meeting, and guidance and characterized it as "awesome".

VERGENNES PARTNERSHIP FUNDING: City Manager Mel Hawley reported the Vergennes Partnership is requesting release of the final \$2,500 allocation. They have raised \$5,675 and are expecting two more corporate gifts to come in. They have also discussed having a fundraiser in February or March with the Friends of Vergennes Opera House. Alderman Renny Perry reported the Partnership has elected new officers: President – Shannon Atkins; Vice President – Renny Perry; Treasurer – Jennifer Russell; and Secretary – Linda Cook. He advised he felt very strongly that they were on the right road. Alderman Perry also questioned the Board whether they felt there was a conflict of interest for him to serve on the City Council and be an officer for Vergennes Partnership. City Manager Hawley explained that a conflict of interest policy is more about personal gain. He spoke of a similar situation when Peter Garon sat on the City Council and was also the President of Vergennes Area Rescue Squad. Manager Hawley advised the disclosure is good but no apparent conflict of interest exists. He went on to say that the City budgeted \$7,500 this year of which \$5,000 was paid in July. It was the Council's desire at that time to hold back the remaining \$2,500 until such time as they have raised at least \$10,000 before it would be released. Alderman Perry said the \$2,500 was held back as the Council was looking for good effort and he feels that is there. Alderman Perry moved to release the remaining \$2,500, seconded by Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette, with all voting in favor. Manager Hawley stated the expectation that they raise \$10,000 by the end of the fiscal year remains.

TODDLER PLAYGROUND: Mayor Benton reported the proposed toddler playground on East Street would be on the agenda for the next meeting in light of Alderman Klopfenstein's absence. He shared that he has received several emails concerning the communication surrounding this project. In the future an agenda for all Recreation Committee meetings will be prepared and minutes to all meetings will be taken. City Manager Hawley explained the role of the advisory committee. Once a committee gets a handle on a project they would go to the City Council for funding approval and then on to the Development Review Board for consideration. Senior Alderman Ouellette stated he was concerned with potential vandalism at that site. Alderman Comeau felt the Committee should be dealing with the elementary school regarding the parking and the school's future need for parking spaces.

ORDINANCES: Mayor Benton said we will table working on the ordinances until our next meeting when a full Board is present. That will also allow more time to get "model" ordinances from Vermont League of Cities and Towns and other communities.

BUDGET AND MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Hawley advised we are 50 percent into the year and the budget does have a few problems already. The 25 percent down payment on the \$46,750 public works vehicle had to come out of this year's budget even though it was budgeted for last year, he advised. Workers' compensation insurance with VLCT-PACIF had a 14.8% increase and our audit with them has seen credits of \$6,000 in the past but this year's credit is only \$2,200. It is still early in the budget, he advised, but feels we are in a little bit of trouble at this point. The police station project is on schedule with some sheetrock up now, he advised. There have been only a couple change orders and the project is under budget by \$49,000.

Manager Hawley reported that Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator, Marty Williams, will be retiring on Friday. He was hired by the City in October 1995. He advised Marty's replacement will need at least a Grade 2 operators' license for that position.

MAYOR'S COMMENTS: Mayor Benton advised he went to a Mayor's coalition recently and will be going to another one in Barre on Thursday. There are seven mayors in Vermont who get together once a month to discuss challenges their cities see compared to towns who are not affected. They did speak of soliciting \$500 from each city to hire a lobbyist but that has not been put in motion yet.

ADJOURNMENT: Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 p.m. The motion was seconded by Alderman Comeau with all voting in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan T. Devine
Vergennes City Clerk