

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING
SEPTEMBER 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	Police Chief George Merkel
Alderman Lynn Donnelly	Jeff Margolis
Alderman Clara Comeau	Carrie MacFarlane
Alderman Lowell Bertrand	Bill and Cheryl Herrington (6:45 pm)
Alderman Renny Perry	Matt Chabot (7 pm)
Alderman Joe Klopfenstein (6:50 pm)	Karen Caldwell (7 pm)
City Manager Mel Hawley	

VERMONT GAS SYSTEMS / REQUEST TO RESCIND ENDORSEMENT: Residents Jeff Margolis and Carrie MacFarlane were at the meeting to ask the City Council to rescind their Vermont Gas pipeline endorsement. Mr. Margolis advised he felt it was a rushed decision on the first alternative presented that offered no guarantee that prices will stay as low as they were when presented. He also felt it wasn't very neighborly to Canada whose property values will decrease as a result of fracking by committing to the infrastructure. He stated he personally was looking for clean and efficient energy for the future and felt money was clouding our decision. He said that whatever greener energy we consider should have at least a 100-year impact. He did commend usage of the solar grid at the wastewater treatment plant that the City is in the process of installing. Manager Hawley gave the history to the City's support for Vermont Gas. He pointed out that the City is an intervener but we were not allowed to testify at the Public Service Board's public meeting held in Middlebury on September 4th. Mayor Benton advised he has only received one email that was opposed to Vermont Gas in the City but everyone else he has talked to was anxious for it to be available. Mayor Benton suggested that members discuss this more with residents to get their feelings before reacting to the request.

WARRANTS: The warrant, totaling \$145,228.36, was presented for review and signatures of approval. Manager Hawley advised he paid for the donation boxes for the City docks out of the Water Tower Fund and would like the first \$2,100 in donations to repay that fund. It was the consensus of the Board to allow that as the donation boxes were not a budgeted expense.

MINUTES: Minutes to the August 20th meeting were presented for approval. Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to accept the minutes as written, seconded by Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette, with all voting in favor.

SOUTH MAPLE STREET - SPEED: Police Chief George Merkel reported that a speed survey was done on South Maple Street by the Police Explorers who used a LIDAR speed enforcement device to record the vehicle speeds. A total of 663 vehicles were recorded during the survey that was done on two different days at different time periods. The posted speed limit for that street is 25 mph. Chief Merkel advised on August 17th between 1:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. there were 229 vehicles with the average speed at 25.5 miles per hour; the highest recorded speed was one vehicle at 39 miles per

hour. There were 41 vehicles traveling in excess of 30 mph and 5 vehicles were traveling in excess of 35 mph. On August 27th there were 434 vehicles between 5:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. The average speed was 22.6 mph with the highest recorded speed at 39 mph. There were 59 vehicles traveling in excess of 30 mph.

Chief Merkel advised he is not a supporter of speed bumps and felt the best way to curtail speeders is enforcement. He said he would have an officer at that site once or twice a week to issue tickets for speeding and after two or three weeks conduct another survey in hopes of seeing a drop in the number of speeders.

EMPLOYEE MEDICAL COVERAGE: City Manager Hawley gave the history to the City's employees' medical insurance back to 1998 and provided copies of the City Personnel Policy relating to medical insurance. He advised in the fall of 2010 the City was looking at a huge increase in medical premiums when Alderman Quелlette moved to authorize the City Manager to do what he could do to stay within budget. He advised in 2011 he shifted the City to Cigna Insurance with an allocation of \$6,000 per employee in a health reimbursement account administered by Choice StrategiesCare to cover out of pocket expenses and then Cigna was not an option for employers with 50 or more employees effective 2012. So, in 2012 we enrolled in Blue Cross Blue Shield with a \$5,000 per employee health reimbursement account. Now with Obama Care and a new state system for 2014, totally different from the past, an employee has the right to select their own medical plan with Vermont Health Connect and the employer simply sets the amount of money they are willing to contribute towards the cost. Manager Hawley stated that he hopes the City Council continues to feel as they did in 2010 and will authorize him to again do what he can within the budget limitation. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette moved to authorize the City Manager to work within the budget for employee medical coverage. The motion was seconded by Alderman Lowell Bertrand with all voting in favor. Alderman Joe Klopfenstein arrived at this time.

RECAP – SPEED SURVEY ON SOUTH MAPLE STREET: Due to the late arrival of visitors interested in the speed survey on South Maple Street, Mayor Benton repeated information that was provided by Police Chief George Merkel and gave them an opportunity to comment or ask questions. Bill Herrington reported he sees the same cars speeding every day and between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. the street turns into a race track. He advised he realizes the problem will not be solved overnight but felt it was time to take dollars out of their pockets in the form of speeding tickets. Manager Hawley commented that it certainly is not an acceptable rate to have 1 in 5 vehicles going over 30 mph in a 25 mph zone. Mayor Benton felt we needed to increase enforcement measures for a few weeks and then reassess. Matt Chabot stated that it was not a perception issue and appreciates the City Council taking action on this and supporting their concern.

CITY ORDINANCE REVIEW: Mayor Benton advised he will prepare a list of ordinances in most need of attention to bring before the Board at the next meeting.

PROPOSED TODDLER PARK: Recreation Committee Chairman Joe Klopfenstein advised there will be an informational meeting on Thursday, at 7 p.m., at the elementary school regarding the proposed toddler park adjacent to the pool house. He said that neighbors have been notified by mail and it has been put out on Front Porch Forum and FaceBook.

MANAGER'S REPORT: City Manager Hawley reported the audit is complete and the \$187,000 fund balance for the general fund has been confirmed. Delinquent taxes as of August 30th went

backwards \$14,300 compared to last year, he advised. He went on to explain that they purchased and paid for the Public Works' Caterpillar prior to its arrival and then it didn't arrive until July so he had to reverse that expense from last year and put it into this year's budget. He pointed out that the Public Works Department's budget will now reflect that \$11,750 expense that was not budgeted for in this year. He mentioned that the police station project is a hardhat area so if anyone wants to stop in at the site they will need to go to Bread Loaf's office to pick up a hardhat. As for the solar array at the wastewater treatment plant, Manager Hawley advised Chad Farrell is having a problem with relocating a utility pole. He advised he wished we were under construction at this point and that it was not going as fast as he had hoped. The sewer main that will ultimately serve the train station in Ferrisburgh was completed today, he advised, but we still need an agreement with the state.

ADJOURNMENT: As there was no more business, Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 p.m. The motion was seconded by Alderman Clara Comeau with all voting in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan T. Devine
Vergennes City Clerk