

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING
OCTOBER 8, 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
Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette
Alderman Lynn Donnelly
Alderman Clara Comeau
Alderman Lowell Bertrand
Alderman Joe Klopfenstein
City Manager Mel Hawley

City Clerk Joan Devine
Shannon Haggett, PC Chair
Jeff Margolis
Carrie MacFarlane
Didier Murat
Julianne Jones
Reporter Andy Kirkaldy (In at 6:30 pm)

WARRANTS: The warrant, totaling \$212,246.47, was presented for review and signatures of approval from the Board.

EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS TO PUBLIC SLIP: Didier Murat put in a request to acquire exclusive rights to a “public slip” located south of his property at 104 South Water Street that connects South Water Street to Otter Creek, advised Manager Hawley. A definition of the “public slip” is needed as to whether it is a separate parcel or whether it is considered a town highway. He advised that Mr. Murat is trying to build a garage on his property and the definition will determine the setbacks needed for a zoning permit. Copies of an 1850’s map showed the “public slip” to be an extension of Victory Street and the 1968 survey of the Albert Frost property (now Didier Murat) refers to the “slip” as Ferry Street. There are two different procedures that must be followed to disperse land; one involves a public vote if it is public land and the other is the discontinuance of a public highway which does not require a vote of the citizens. It was the consensus of the Board that they would be willing to release the property to Mr. Murat. Mayor Benton advised we will determine if it is a public highway or a piece of land and go from there. Mr. Murat advised he is interested in acquiring the property for its market value.

MINUTES: Minutes to the September 17th meeting were presented for approval. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette moved to accept the minutes as written, seconded by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, with all voting in favor.

VERMONT GAS SYSTEMS / REQUEST TO RESCIND ENDORSEMENT: Residents Jeff Margolis and Carrie MacFarlane were at the meeting to follow up on their request to have the City Council rescind their Vermont Gas pipeline endorsement. Mayor Benton inquired from the Board whether they received any feedback from the public regarding natural gas coming to the City. Alderman Donnelly reported she spoke to one who was opposed and two who were not aware that natural gas was to be available. Alderman Comeau reported she spoke to two people that were opposed, one who wasn’t aware of it, and two who thought it was not going to be available in the mobile home park. Alderman Klopfenstein spoke with two people that were in favor and Alderman Ouellette spoke with several people with the majority in favor due to the savings involved. Mayor Benton reported he spoke with two people that were opposed and four that were in favor. He advised it may be possible to do a referendum in November when the school district holds their bond vote. If the City Council does not want to offer a referendum, he advised, Mr. Margolis has

the option of petitioning for a referendum. Alderman Joe Klopfenstein advised he is opposed to the City Council offering a referendum on this after we made a decision based on information and support at that time. Mr. Margolis stated that he was worried that once natural gas was here that it would squeeze out greener energy options in the future because it will be an easier decision to get natural gas. He would love to at least have the vote, he advised. Manager Hawley reported Vermont Gas is a regulated utility under the Public Service Board's jurisdiction and the City cannot withhold an agreement unnecessarily for them to work in the right-of-way, he advised. If you want to go to a vote of the people, he advised, the question needs to be straightforward and ask if they want to rescind the Council's support. Mayor Benton went around the table for a consensus on whether they wanted to sponsor the referendum requested. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette and Aldermen Joe Klopfenstein and Lowell Bertrand were opposed to the Council doing that. Alderman Comeau was unsure while Alderman Lynn Donnelly felt that Mr. Margolis should petition for the vote and it would also give him an idea on how the public felt. Mayor Benton agreed with Alderman Donnelly. Mr. Margolis advised he would like to do that and would stop into the office to get help creating a question for the referendum. He and Carrie MacFarlane departed at 7:45 p.m.

PROPOSED TODDLER PARK: Recreation Committee Chair Joe Klopfenstein advised there were about a dozen people at the informational meeting that was held at the elementary school regarding the proposed toddler park adjacent to the swimming pool bathhouse. He said quite a bit of concern was expressed regarding the parking situation down there as well as the location of the park. The elementary school uses that area for their overflow parking so they questioned where the new vehicles with toddlers would park. The Committee also found out that their projected project costs went from \$32,000 to \$50,000. He advised they have applied for a \$25,000 recreation grant from the State so the Recreation Committee is waiting to hear back on that. If it is not approved, he advised they will hold off on the project for now. Manager Hawley advised Tara Brooks told him the grant applications will be reviewed in the next two to three weeks. He also stated comments were made about why they would build that park when they had a school playground in the back. They were not aware that the general public cannot use school facilities while school is in session.

MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Hawley reported the Board of Listers, who are Karen Quigley, Chris Bearor and Bill Poquette, have met and are requesting six changes in the 2013 Grand List. Errors and omissions in the Grand List by the Listers can be corrected through December 31st with approval from the City Council. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette moved to allow the adjustments to the six parcels as presented, seconded by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, with all voting in favor except Clara Comeau abstained on two parcels that she recently sold.

CITY ORDINANCE PRIORITIES: Mayor Benton advised he and Manager Hawley have gone through the ordinances and have prioritized which ones need attention the most. They feel the following sections should be looked at first: Motor Vehicle and Traffic, Licenses and Regulations, Public Nuisances, Streets Sidewalks & Parks, Bikes & Skateboards, Domestic Pets, Public Assemblage, Lay-out for Public Improvements, Indecency and Noise Control. Different people were suggested for the various areas.

BUDGET REPORT: Manager Hawley reported it is still early in the budget year to make any assumptions of the report. He did explain the \$30,000 shortfall in the property tax revenue that was the result of a recent download from the State that went to the wrong line item in the budget. A journal entry will be made to correct that. He went on to advise that the Federal Government shut-

down is affecting one of our part-time officers who works a grant for WomenSafe but the commitment for the COPS grant which reimburses employment costs for Officer O'Neill is fine because the grant was committed in prior years. An update on the progress of the new police station was given. He reported the plans at the Vergennes-Panton Water District showed there were two 1" lines serving that property. They have discovered that one of the 1" lines is not connected to the water system so a surge tank (costing \$4,400) or a new 2" line needs to be installed. The State has also advised us that the armory room and the weapon storage area both need double thick 5/8" sheetrock for proper fire-rating. We still have a cushion of \$37,000 along with a \$50,000 contingency so this is not a problem at this point, he advised.

Mayor Benton reported he has received complaints that there are lots of kids hanging out on the library steps that are being noisy, disruptive and throwing litter around. He suggested the police officers stroll down that way on occasion. Apparently it is having some impact on the restaurant across the street.

PLANNING COMMISSION UPDATE: Shannon Haggett, Chair of the Planning Commission, reported their Board has focused on improvements they would like to see implemented in the City. Some of the categories are pedestrian safety based while others are assessing and future planning. Promoting pedestrian awareness was prevalent around the table. He advised further detail could be obtained in the minutes of their August 19th meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: Alderman Clara Comeau moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m. The motion was seconded by Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette with all voting in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan T. Devine
Vergennes City Clerk