

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
OCTOBER 22, 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	City Manager Mel Hawley
Alderman Lynn Donnelly	Didier Murat
Alderman Clara Comeau	Gerianne Smart - FVOH
Alderman Lowell Bertrand	Bill Brim – Turning Point Center
Alderman Joe Klopfenstein	Reporter Andy Kirkaldy
Alderman Renny Perry	

WARRANTS: The warrant, totaling \$808,181.43, was presented for review and signatures of approval from the Board. The first quarter installments for the school assessments were included in this warrant.

FVOH – STREETSCAPE PROJECT: Gerianne Smart, President of Friends of Vergennes Opera House, reported they have been working on their organizational infrastructure and appear to be making progress. A rundown of activities coming to the opera house in the next two months was also given. She then moved on to a presentation of their proposed streetscape project in front of City Hall/Opera House. She advised that Green Mountain Power has given them \$10,000 towards the cost of restoring the marquee. The proposal involved creating a crescent bulb-out on the other side of the sidewalk using the three parking spaces in front of the building. This area would be lined with bricks and the present cement platform from the sidewalk to the steps would also be replaced with bricks. The marquee, once restored, would then be moved to the bulb-out area for more visibility. It is their intention to sell inscribed bricks to the public to sustain the cost of the project. A diagram of the proposed project also showed the possibility for two parking spaces in the alley between City Hall and the church. Mayor Benton went around the table to get reactions from the Board. Alderman Lynne Donnelly reported she loved the idea; the marquee cannot be seen in its present location. Alderman Klopfenstein reserved a brick for himself but said the parking was of concern to him. Alderman Comeau reported she has received complaints from the elderly that the police usually use the parking spaces in front of City Hall and they would like to use them. She did not support eliminating the parking spaces. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette likes the concept but the parking was a concern for him. To have the marquee located further out would be nice, he advised. Alderman Lowell Bertrand likes the plan and stated that parking was never available before. Alderman Renny Perry felt a drop-off area needs to be created. He also suggested the two trees in front of City Hall could be spaded out and moved to the City Green and replaced with low-growth vegetation; this would increase visibility to all of City Hall. He also suggested, once the Police Department has moved, to give the ticket booth area and the police chief's office to the Opera House and convert their main room into a Council/meeting room. The proposed plaza would really dress things up, he advised. Mayor Benton thanked Green Mountain Power for their donation. He advised he would like a more thought out plan as it relates to parking and would like to see a cost for the project. Overall, permission was granted to move forward in that direction. Gerianne encouraged everyone to share their ideas. Alderman Donnelly advised that more lighting needs to be added in front of City Hall. City Manager Mel Hawley stated that the alley between

City Hall and St. Paul's Church is a deeded shared driveway communications must be held with them. Also, he stated that the marquee is a sign so you need to look at zoning and also determine if it will create an obstruction in vision for those using the driveway on the east side of the building. A common complaint he receives is the 14-inch curb in front of the post office. If the proposed bulb-out is going out flat it will be similarly high. He said that curbs generally do not have more than 7 inches of reveal for safety reasons. He pointed out that he is the one who shovels in front of City Hall several times during the day and it currently is relatively easy with the cement surface. If bricks are going in those areas, he stated, he would like to see top-shelf quality with flawless installation work. Mayor Benton said that the City Council can discuss this further as more details are developed.

VISITOR: Bill Brim, Director of Turning Point Center that is located at Marbleworks in Middlebury, requested support from the City Council. He advised they are trying to bring awareness to the heroin problem in Addison County and the need to have doctors prescribe suboxone or methadone to those seeking treatment; it is crucial step to long-term recovery. He reported there are no doctors in Addison County that will do that at the present time. He is requesting a proclamation from the City declaring November 15<sup>th</sup> as "Recovery Day" in Vergennes. That day is linked to the "Hungry Heart" movie that will be playing in the Opera House that evening and the movie does an excellent job exposing prescription drug addiction and addresses addicts in recovery. It was the consensus of the Board to provide this request.

COMPENSATION/VICTORY STREET EXTENSION: Didier Murat, who is attempting to purchase property from the City, was present to determine the market value of the land located south of his property at 104 South Water Street that connects South Water Street to Otter Creek. Manager Hawley advised he found three references in the land records and it clearly was a roadway so the legal procedures for discontinuance of a highway apply. The closest comparison for a transaction like this was the Kandzior property on Meigs Road where a City right-of-way went through an existing building. In that instance the Administrator of the estate paid all legal fees for the City, surveying costs and compensation. A public notice and public meeting will have to be held; someone may say we should not be giving up land. Mr. Murat was agreeable with the process and with a land value of \$10,000 to \$15,000 an acre resulting in a range of \$3,000 to \$6,000 in compensation. Alderman Comeau inquired if the public could stop this transaction so they could have access to the land. Alderman Donnelly advised she hoped common sense would prevail; this is his front yard. Manager Hawley advised legal fees should not be more than \$2,000 and the City Council needs to set compensation for the .249-acre strip. Values between \$2,000 and \$2,500 were heard before Alderman Donnelly stated that she felt the land value was more because it made his parcel complete. She did not feel those were fair prices to the City looking at it from a realtor's point of view. After more debate Mayor Benton advised it sounds like a compromised value of the land will be \$5,000. Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved that upon receipt of two checks, one for \$2,000 to cover estimated legal fees (any excess to be refunded) and the other for \$5,000 for the purchase, to direct the City Manager to proceed with the process with the City Attorney. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette seconded the motion with all voting in favor. Mr. Murat was in agreement and advised he would stop at the office in the morning with the checks.

MINUTES: Minutes to the October 8th 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 /PETITION: Manager Hawley reported Jeff Margolis will not be presenting a petition this evening regarding natural gas being available in the City so that the referendum vote can occur at the same time as the Vergennes Union High School bond vote. A special City Council meeting was scheduled for October 29<sup>th</sup> at 6 p.m. in the City Manager's office for the purpose of receiving the petition.

ORDINANCES: Mayor Benton advised everyone should be working on the ordinance they were assigned. Alderman Perry suggested getting templates of other town ordinances for comparison.

BUDGET REPORT: Manager Hawley reported he created a new line item in the revenue budget for late homestead filing penalties. He also advised he has some concern with many revenue line items at this point. He advised interest earnings were budgeted at \$20,000 and we have recognized only around \$500 as a result of market values of our certificates of deposit. Police fines were budgeted at \$80,000 and we have received \$13,500 to date. The Lighting of the Falls has an expenditure of \$2,084 versus revenue of \$175; this was not a budgeted expense so something will have to occur down the line to absorb this shortfall.

MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Hawley reported the waterline issue at the site of the new police station is not settled yet. He has met with Vergennes-Panton Water District employees and the \$4,400 surge tank option is still on the table or the \$11,000 installation of a new 2" waterline. We could also run a 2" line across the road and connect to another 2" line. Inside the station, he advised, they have added three data ports but eliminated some outlets. Dealing with the solar panel project at the wastewater treatment plant, Manager Hawley advised that was in motion and the pole relocation has progressed. The agreement for the train station being connected to the City sewer system is also in progress. He reported it should be ready in November.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: Recreation Chair Joe Klopfenstein reported they have met with the Vergennes Union Elementary School Board of Directors who expressed their future concern with the appearance and maintenance of the proposed toddler park. David Raphael has reported that six parking spaces are sufficient for the toddler park visitors.

ADJOURNMENT: Alderman Clara Comeau moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:25 p.m. The motion was seconded by Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette with all voting in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan T. Devine  
Vergennes City Clerk