

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING
JANUARY 14, 2014
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	Alderman Lynn Donnelly
Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette	City Manager Mel Hawley
Alderman Renny Perry	City Clerk Joan Devine
Alderman Clara Comeau	Robert Feuerstein
Alderman Lowell Bertrand	Neil Kamman
Alderman Joe Klopfenstein	Robert and Rena Trepanier

WARRANTS: The warrant totaling \$317,185.64 was circulated for review and signatures of approval from the Board.

MINUTES: Minutes to the December 17th meeting were presented for approval. Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette moved to approve the minutes as written, seconded by Alderman Renny Perry, with all voting in favor except Joe Klopfenstein who abstained due to absence.

TAXI LICENSE: Manager Hawley advised he has spoken with Nicholas Schieldrop of Shelburne who has applied for a license to operate a taxi in the City. He has explained to Mr. Schieldrop that we are currently re-writing some of the outdated ordinances and would appreciate if he could hold off on this application. He went on to advise the ordinance dealing with Licenses and Regulations contains Taxicabs in Section 6 and it refers to sections of Vermont law that have been repealed. Manager Hawley stated he did not want the City Council to approve any licenses until we adopt regulations with expectations. Alderman Renny Perry also suggested capping fees charged for this service so that gouging does not occur.

REVIEW OF ORDINANCES: Mayor Benton went through a list of ordinances that need to be reviewed and assigned different members of the Board to various chapters. Once changes are available for review, the documents will come back to the table he advised. "Model" ordinances are available from Vermont League of Cities and Towns as well as other communities to assist us in this project.

VUHS FY2015 BUDGET: School Board Director Neil Kamman advised their school board meeting held on January 13, 2014 addressed various issues over several hours. He reported they had the perfect budgetary storm this year but there is no malfeasance. He said they ended FY2013r with a \$547,611 deficit due to unexpected special education costs. VUHS received 62.1 percent of those costs but absorbs the difference and that is what caused the deficit. He reported they have chosen to amortize the deficit over a two-year period. Another factor is experiencing declining enrollment so the cost per pupil is increasing which result in a higher education homestead tax rate. He advised the proposed budget will likely be a 2.55 percent increase in expenses but they do not have town tax rates yet. There were no reductions in staff as originally planned but cuts were made in other areas. The capital improvement fund that required voter approval originally hoped for \$100,000 but has been cut back to \$50,000, he advised. Ordering of books will be delayed another year, a part-time position will be eliminated, supplies being cut 20 percent are all areas that were

affected as a result of the budget meeting, he advised. Mr. Kamman also pointed out that the State is also adding another 7 cents to the education tax rate. Alderman Lynn Donnelly pointed out that the 2.55 percent increase in the budget will actually translate into a 13 to 15 percent increase in taxes for Vergennes taxpayers. Mr. Kamman departed at 6:25 p.m.

City Manager Hawley advised he and Mayor Benton went to the Vermont Education Finance Symposium in Burlington that was called by the Governor. The purpose was to exchange ideas on how to fund education in light of the shrinking or stabilized grand lists statewide and how to get school budgets passed. Currently schools that spend 125 percent of the State average per pupil receive a penalty which means they have to raise \$2 for every \$1 they spend over the average, he advised.

LICENSE AGREEMENT – KENNEDY BROTHERS: Robert Feuerstein, co-owner of Kennedy Brothers, was in attendance in regards to the license agreement from the City to use the old Route 22A right-of-way adjacent to his property for parking. City Manager Hawley advised he has met a couple of times with City Attorney James Ouimette who is creating this document. Once completed, the agreement will come to the City Council for consideration.

City Manager Hawley reported he has been working with City Attorney James Ouimette on the unused property that divides Didier Murat's property that the City agreed to sell for \$5,000. Research has found that in 2005 the law changed where cities and towns had the option to identify these corridors and strips of land to make them a part of the city's or town's infrastructure and placed on the town highway maps. If action was not taken during that specific time period, ownership of a so-called unidentified corridor would revert to the owner of the property they crossed effective July 1, 2015. As it turns out, advised Manager Hawley, the strip of land we agreed to sell to Mr. Didier will automatically become his on July 1, 2015 because the City did not make claim to it. Mayor Benton suggested the City could deed the property to him in 2014 at no charge but keep the \$2,000 attorney fees he has already given the City to cover expenses this far. Manager Hawley advised Attorney Ouimette is contacting Mr. Murat to share the discovery and we will await his response.

2014 CERTIFICATE OF HIGHWAY MILEAGE: Manager Hawley advised he wanted to defer action on this item. Scovel Lane extension is a Class 3 highway but is not on the highway map. He advised he wants to make sure with the Public Works Department that we do plow that end of the road before adding it to the map.

BUDGET AND MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Hawley advised he will distribute the trial balance report available at the next meeting. He reported there is nothing new with the budget but remains a little concerned with the revenues. The police station remains on task with less than \$6,000 in change orders at this point. He felt the overall project was progressing nicely. Manager Hawley reported Watershed Fund earnings may not be able to afford the \$6,000 budgeted for the swimming pool so we might have to adjust pool rates. He advised he did a study on rates for residents versus out of town users and determined the City should only be paying \$3,000 if any. All administrative time was not covered in the analysis. The sprinkler system project at City Hall started at \$65,776 for the Opera House in 2010, advised Manager Hawley, and years later ended at \$123,272.61. The City Council decided to add the downstairs to the system at a cost of \$15,000 prior to learning that we needed to obtain a fire pump at which time the City increased its share of the project to \$35,000. Friend of Vergennes Opera House is waiting for \$20,000 from the Vermont

Arts Council that will be turned over to us and eliminating their debt. The \$32,5888 historic tax credit funds were turned over earlier. A 1272 Order has been issued for the Wastewater System, reported Manager Hawley. Stormwater infiltration continues to be a problem at the MacDonough Drive pump station which overflows lagoon #2 into the river. An electronic rain gauge has been put in at Job Corps and equipment to measure overflows at the MacDonough Drive pump station is being required.

ADJOURNMENT: Senior Alderman Randall Ouellette moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:30 p.m. The motion was seconded by Alderman Comeau with all voting in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Joan T. Devine
Vergennes City Clerk