

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
FEBRUARY 9, 2016  
MINUTES

Mayor William Benton called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. at the Vergennes Fire Station meeting room located at 50 Green Street. Those in attendance were:

Mayor William Benton	Mike Winslow, OCBTF
Senior Alderman Renny Perry	Christine Bradford, OCBTF
Alderman Lowell Bertrand	Betsey Benton, OCBTF
Alderman Michael Daniels	Jeff Glassberg, ANwSU
Alderman Lynn Donnelly	Cheryl Brinkman, VUES
Alderman Jeffrey Fritz	Karen Kotecki, Vermont Gas Systems
Alderman Mark Koenig	Ned Farquhar, Vermont Gas Systems
City Manager Mel Hawley	Tim Vachereau, Vermont Gas Systems
City Clerk Joan Devine	Shannon Haggett
Tim Cook, OCBTF	Andy Kirkaldy, Reporter

PROPOSED UNIFIED UNION SCHOOL DISTRICT: Jeff Glassberg, Chair of Addison Northwest Supervisory Union Board of Directors, delivered a presentation supporting our five-town district forming a unified union school district. He reported statistics from prior attempts to unify in the past 10 years and advised, due to Act 46, it is the law that they try again. This attempt, he reported, has a few more “carrots” yet comes with a “stick.” If the five towns take the step for unification now there are enhanced financial incentives, he advised, which will decrease overtime. If the voters do not approve the proposal, the State will likely mandate unification in the near future and there will be no financial incentives involved. Charts showing enrollment trends from 2006 projected through 2020 showed a decrease of 374 students. The vision for the new unified district includes benefits for the students, the taxpayers and the communities with improved accountability, he advised. If approved by the voters, the unified district would go into effect in July 2017.

Cheryl Brinkman, a member on the Vergennes Union Elementary School Board of Directors, reported unification will end the inequity of education that is going on now. It is their goal to have the same curriculum at all schools and not have to play catch-up with some of the students when they arrive at VUHS. Transparency is very important, she advised, as is efficiency. She pointed out our voluntary unification will give us protection from the State mandating our unification with possibly another district. The incentives being offered, she advised, have to be paid by someone and that will be us if we are not unified. In the past, individual debt and building maintenance were issues that hung us up so she was hopeful that was not going to be a problem this time. Jeff Glassberg reported Ferrisburgh did some major capital improvements 3 or 4 years ago so they will not need improvements for a while. He went on to say that VUES has the lowest cost per pupil versus Addison who has the least amount of debt and the highest homestead property tax rate. City Manager Hawley said the 5-year accelerated merger annual tax incentives of \$.10/.08/.06/.04/.02 beginning in FY2018 should be referred to as discounts that decrease over the years as opposed to being called reductions. He pointed out the tax rates listed on Appendix B are really a worse case scenario. He advised as a member of the Act 46 Study Committee, he felt they were rushed to put the Committee’s Unified Union School District Report together for the March election and had no time for financial models to be done. To reduce education costs will require bold moves to be taken such as repurposing Addison Central

or sending all sixth grade students to the high school and that can only be done with a unified district, he advised. Cheryl Brinkman agreed and advised unification is the foundation for those changes.

VERMONT GAS SYSTEMS UPDATE: Representatives from Vermont Gas Systems were present to update the status of their project to bring natural gas service to the entire city. Tim Vachereau reported they hoped to have their contractor in place by March 1<sup>st</sup> and the project completed late this calendar year. A color-coded construction phase map was distributed that indicated the sequence for installation in various areas. Senior Alderman Perry advised he has heard of lots of problems with old installations in other states and inquired on what changes have been made to prevent them reoccurring. Tim reported the older systems were built with cast iron and had low pressure. They provide state of the art plastic which, in theory, can last forever. Should there be any leaks they are fixed immediately, he advised. Manager Hawley reported the City will end up with good sewer line identification by the end of this project. He went on to advise that the City will use Middlebury's agreement for our model and he will get a draft to the City Council. He reported the City Council will likely have this on our agenda for two or three meetings.

OTTER CREEK BASIN TASK FORCE: Mike Winslow, Chair of the Otter Creek Basin Task Force (OCBTF), advised his volunteer force has worked hard for the last two years improving the Vergennes Falls Park and Macdonough Park by clearing brush, planting flowers, painting picnic tables, etc. They do not feel they can maintain the park with volunteer labor and that a long-term maintenance plan needs to be put in place that will address stump removal, annual brush hogging, land leveling, keeping weeds from returning and invasive shrub removal. A work crew that visits the area six to seven times a year between April and November is what is needed, he advised. A letter to the City Council from the committee acknowledges the demands on the Public Works Department during the summer but also pointed out that the basin brings in extensive tourist revenue. The letter states that the basin was identified as one of the highest priorities for improvement during Rural Vermont's 2014 community visit. City Manager Hawley reported he met with Mike Shannon regarding work that is needed on the dock that was put in during 1985. He advised he sees this dilemma in two parts; capital improvements and on-going maintenance. If it is the City Council's desire to have maintenance similar to the City Green it will require two or three part-time employees in the summer. It would be helpful to know the preference for leaving it natural or being maintained with mulch around the trees. He suggested that clarity is needed prior to the development of the budget. Alderman Mike Daniels, who also sits on the OCBTF reported there is no expectation for golf-course-like maintenance but will need someone to run heavy equipment to remove boulders, stumps, etc. as well as flattening out the land a bit. Senior Alderman Perry stated that the maintenance of the park belongs to the City but has seen in other towns where businesses adopt a specific park once the capital improvements are done and they pay to have it maintained or do it themselves. Tim Cook advised he has learned a lot about the history of Vergennes and the basin has always been the heart of the City; that is important to remember as we move forward.

MINUTES: The minutes to the January 26, 2016 meeting had a slight change. In the third paragraph "City" was added to 'Attorney Ouimette'. Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to accept the minutes as corrected, seconded by Senior Alderman Perry, with all voting in favor.

WARRANT: The warrant presented for approval in the amount of \$82,367.06 was circulated for review and signatures of approval.

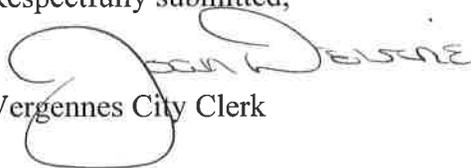
SIDEWALK EXTENSION – SOUTH MAPLE STREET: City Manager Hawley advised he recently had an informal discussion with a Selectboard member of Waltham about the sidewalk extending into the town of Waltham associated with the re-development of Gevry Trailer Park. He also reported that the National Realtors Association has applied for a \$15,000 grant for the installation of sidewalk from Thomas Circle on South Maple Street to the former trailer park just across the City line. He inquired if the City Council was still willing for the Public Works Department to maintain the portion of sidewalk that is located in the town of Waltham. He reported the length of sidewalk to be installed is approximately 300' in Vergennes and 65' in Waltham. Alderman Daniels questioned whether the City would be taking work away from a private entity by doing this. City Manager Hawley advised the Town of Waltham and the City could enter into an agreement for this service at no charge. Senior Alderman Perry felt the area was too small to do anything else and that it was not a big issue. Mayor Benton advised the City should also get an easement from the Town of Waltham.

COMMENTS: Shannon Haggett reminded everyone that there will be an open house at the Vergennes Opera House on Thursday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 p.m. to see the latest concepts for improving and connecting the downtown with the basin area. This forum is related to the grant awarded to the City from the Strong Communities, Better Connections program. Its purpose is to encourage communities to proactively coordinate land use decisions and transportation investments. The draft plan will be discussed and shared at this meeting.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Hawley reported there were not many bills for this meeting and that we are approaching the two-thirds mark of our year. He will begin forecasting year-end results soon. The Public Works Department expenses are way down due to the mild winter. As for the Police Department providing police services in the town of Ferrisburgh, their Selectboard voted to stay with the Addison County Sheriff's Department for contracted services. Reporting on our solar array at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, City Manager Hawley reported our savings fell short of expectation due to sun rays being blocked by trees mostly located on Steve Miller's (Auto Creek) property. Mr. Miller has agreed to allow Encore Vergennes Solar I, LLC, the owner of the solar generation facility, to remove those trees with the wood being left for Mr. Miller. The City anticipated saving \$4,100 a year but only saving only saw \$3,389. Acting in his capacity of Delinquent Tax Collector, City Manager Hawley reported the balance of delinquent taxes at \$7,726.57. A fund balance report for the Water Tower Fund and the Water Tower Continuation Fund was available as prepared by City Manager Hawley. The report includes the projected balance at June 30, 2016. He advised our auditors combine the two funds in our financial statements.

ADJOURNMENT: At 7:20 p.m. Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Alderman Mark Koenig, with all voting in favor. The next regular City Council meeting will be held February 23, 2016 at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Vergennes City Clerk