

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
JUNE 9, 2015  
MINUTES

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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  
Senior Alderman Renny Perry  
Alderman Jeffrey Fritz  
Alderman Lynn Donnelly  
Alderman Michael Daniels

Alderman Lowell Bertrand  
Alderman Joseph Klopfenstein  
City Manager Mel Hawley  
City Clerk Joan Devine  
See List of Visitors

PUBLIC HEARING: Mayor Benton read the public notice for the duly warned and posted public hearing regarding an application to the State for a planning grant under the Vermont Community Development Program. The proposal is to apply for \$30,000 in VCDP Funds, through the City, which will be used for predevelopment activities including preliminary design and engineering for the proposed Vergennes Children's Center to be located on Armory Lane Extension. Mayor Benton opened the floor to comments or questions from those in attendance. Martha DeGraaf, a registered home child care provider, questioned the numbers listed in the minutes from the last meeting that totaled \$130,000 when the estimated project costs were listed to be \$100,000. She also wanted to know where the statistics came from that were used to determine there was a need for child care for 18-month olds to 5-year olds stressing that infant space is what is needed. She advised there are four pre-school facilities in town already and if this center was to go in, it would have an impact on the home child care providers in the area. Manager Hawley advised he had the same question when he did the math and contacted Barbara Saunders, co-director of Mary Johnson Children's Center, who explained that the pre-application submitted at the last City Council meeting was an older version of the pre-application. She immediately emailed him an updated pre-application that the City Council is looking at this evening, advised Manager Hawley. The current version says they are looking for a planning grant in the amount of \$30,000 for an estimated project cost of \$37,500; the remaining \$7,500 will be contributed by Mary Johnson Children's Center. Barbara Saunders advised the study that was used for their numbers in the application was performed by Landworks in January 2013. Sarah Cowan reported she has been working with Mary Johnson Children's Center for five years now on this. Her interest in having a public children's center is to offer another option for parents. She has found that fifty percent of Vergennes' daycare is provided for outside of the City meaning children are being transported to Middlebury and surrounding towns. Some parents do not want home-based day care for a variety of reasons but another option is not available here. This is a critical issue for employers and for new families moving into the area. Quality daycare and choices about daycare is needed, she advised. Morgan Kittredge, another registered home child care provider, stated that parents who take their children with them to work in the morning and leave them in daycare outside of the City do so because they can not get back to town by 5:30 p.m. Julie Cousino announced that Cornerstone pre-school opened after that study was done and felt perhaps a more updated study should be obtained. Mayor Benton was curious whether the need continues to exist and suggested another study should be done incorporating information we have learned this evening. Sarah advised they looked for a consultant that was specifically qualified in this area and they also had limited resources. The planning grant, if successful, will have updated information which will recognize new facilities. They will not go forward with a new children's center if it does not work economically, she stated.

Barbara Saunders reported the pre-application will be submitted in August with an October decision. They will have a year from then to do the study. Manager Hawley pointed out that this is a pre-application and can be amended before the application is submitted. Sarah Cowan feels an amendment is

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not needed because the business plan will look at the need, the market, and the age groups. As there was no further comment, Mayor Benton closed the public hearing at 6:25 p.m.

NORTHERN GATEWAY TASK FORCE: Greg Edwards reported VTrans grant funds are available and they would like to try their hand at acquiring some funds to do sidewalk extension into the north end of the City. The grant application deadline is July 17<sup>th</sup>, he advised, and we would need to provide a local match of approximately \$25,000 - \$30,000 (10% of project) if we are successful. City Manager Hawley responded that we have tried this “sculpting” before but were unsuccessful; it is very competitive. He felt with an improved application we may have some luck; this is a good project. The Northern Gateway Task Force will update information with City Manager Hawley and ACRPC. They will come back to the City Council again prior to July 17<sup>th</sup> to obtain authorization to submit the grant application.

VERGENNES SWIM TEAM REQUEST FOR FUNDING: City Manager Hawley explained the reconciliation exercise that he does every year at the end of the pool season with the Vergennes Swim Team. The swim team reimburses the City for all wages for the coaches from team fees and fundraising activities, he stated. Their expenses do not go down even when the number of members on the swim team decrease; therefore they have to do more fundraising. Susan Rakowski reported they have 72 kids signed up for the team so far compared to 86 members last year. Senior Alderman Perry advised he considers this an economic development activity for the City and would not be opposed to helping them financially if needed. He moved to provide up to \$2,000 from the Watershed Recreation Facilities Maintenance Fund at the year-end reconciliation if needed. Alderman Lowell Bertrand seconded the motion. Tara Brooks, mother of three girls on the swim team, stated she did not feel the swim team should have to pay to maintain pool lines, equipment, and maintenance of the pool. Kevin Rooney questioned why the swim team's members need to purchase a pool pass at all and wondered what happens to any cash carry-over. Manager Hawley explained that in 2009 all members of the swim team were required to have a pool pass and we inherited the pool in 2010 and continued that practice. He advised members of the Middlebury Swim Team also purchase pool passes in addition to their team fees. As for any cash carry-over, he advised, the pool is its own enterprise fund. A vote on the motion showed all to be in favor.

TAXI CAB LICENSE RENEWAL: Rick Loyer, d/b/a Small City Taxi, filed an application to renew his taxi license for another year. City Clerk Devine reported she has a copy of his current Vermont Operator’s License and his Certificate of Insurance. Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to approve the application as submitted, seconded by Alderman Mike Daniels, with all voting in favor.

RECESS: At 7:00 p.m. Mayor Benton recessed the meeting so the City Council, acting as the Board of Civil Authority, could count ballots for the Vergennes Union High School budget re-vote that just concluded. The City Council meeting was called back to order at 7:13 p.m.

MINUTES: Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to approve the minutes of May 26, 2015 as presented, seconded by Senior Alderman Renny Perry, with all voting in favor.

WARRANT: The Warrant totaling \$60,411.23 was circulated for review and signatures of approval from the Board.

RESOLUTION – VCDP GRANT APPLICATION: The purpose of the Resolution associated with the children’s center being proposed by Mary Johnson Children’s Center is to clarify in writing that the City of Vergennes will be the applicant and that we have entered into an agreement with the State of Vermont. Senior Alderman Renny Perry moved to support the Resolution that was seconded by Alderman Klopfenstein. Alderman Daniels questioned if participants who had concerns with the survey at the public hearing will have an opportunity to speak again before the application is submitted. Alderman

Donnelly advised that if the study is not updated as part of the planning grant that she would not support the application due to its potential effect on our local businesses. The motion was unanimously approved.

PRE-SCHOOL PLAYGROUND PROJECT: Manager Hawley advised everyone has a print-out of all expenses from the beginning that went into the proposed toddler park adjacent to the pool. All expenses were budgeted for with the exception of \$2,600 that needs to be covered by the Water Tower Fund or the Watershed Fund earnings. Alderman Joe Klopfenstein moved to allocate \$2,600 from the Recreation Facilities Maintenance Fund, seconded by Alderman Bertrand, with all voting in favor.

BUDGET REPORT: City Manager Hawley advised he has run some preliminary numbers looking for our estimated year-end cash on hand. We do have an \$80,000 paving project that will begin the week of June 22<sup>nd</sup> starting at the bridge headed north to the bulb-out by J.W. & D.E. Ryan, he reported. He is expecting about a \$100,000 fund balance as of today which will call for a .08 cent increase in the tax rate on the budget as proposed. He went on to explain that this year's grand list is down for various reasons. The budget proposed is a 10 percent increase; each penny on the tax rate raises \$22,000. Manager Hawley advised he is looking for some direction from the City Council. Senior Alderman Renny Perry suggested working towards a tax rate increase of 3 percent if that is possible. Manager Hawley will review the proposed budget for the Police Department and make a recommendation to the City Council.

L.F. BENTON COMPANY LAND PURCHASE: Manager Hawley reported Attorney Ouimette, surveyor Tim Cowan and himself met and have concluded that there was a strip of land left behind down by the City Dock that belonged to Thomas Mack Coal Company. In 1945 Thomas Cole was deceased and Thomas Jackman purchased all the Thomas Mack Coal Company property. If we can't solve this easily, he advised, we can just let it sit there. Although this could affect our long term goals, Manager Hawley recommended moving forward and purchasing the Benton property. It was consensus to wait a few weeks to see if anything more can be found out about this newly discovered parcel.

ADJOURNMENT: At 8:00 p.m. Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to adjourn the regular meeting. The motion was seconded by Alderman Renny Perry with all voting in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Vergennes City Clerk

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