

CITY COUNCIL MEETING
NOVEMBER 15, 2016
MINUTES

Mayor William Benton called the regular meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. at the Vergennes Fire Station meeting room located at 50 Green Street. Those in attendance were:

Mayor William Benton	Adam Lougee
Senior Alderman Renny Perry	Michelle Eckels
Alderman Mathew Chabot	Rebecca Coburn
Alderman Lowell Bertrand	Erin Roche
Alderman Mark Koenig	Jason Farrell
Alderman Lynn Donnelly	Stacy Raphael
City Manager Mel Hawley	Martha DeGraaf
City Clerk Joan Devine	Amy Bodette-Barr
PW Supervisor Jim Larrow	Sarah Hale
Police Chief George Merkel	Kathy Rossier
PC Chair Shannon Haggett	Jen Johnson
Reporter Andy Kirkaldy	Sierra Bertrand
	Chance Koenig

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY DISCUSSION: Mayor Benton advised due to a recent accident in the downtown, resulting from a car stopping for a pedestrian, and reports of pedestrians almost being hit while crossing the street he felt we should gather to see what steps can be taken to provide a safer environment. He stated he has received a few complaints by email as well as emails supporting this action. Stacy Raphael reported she has done a lot of research on pedestrian safety in the last two weeks and found a number of alternatives. She would like to see the City adopt the 'Safe Routes to School' initiative designed by the State. She expressed appreciation for what the City Council has done already with the Downtown-Basin Master Plan which is addressing street design and connectivity. The need for slowing traffic down, safer walking, cycling and ability to connect with various locations are all addressed in the plan. She felt this is a good tool to move forward with and integrate the schools. She suggested partnering with others like the Police Department, Addison County Regional Planning Commission, Vergennes Partnership, etc. to accomplish this plan. She reported the school has only one crossing guard now who is located at the Green Street/King Street/New Haven Road intersection. Depending on after school activities and programs, there are between 80 and 120 students walking or biking to school each day. It was Michelle Eckels' opinion that Main Street and Green Street receives the most use so those streets need the most attention. Jen Johnson advised that allowing her children to ride their bikes on the sidewalk on the bridge scares her; if this problem can be solved within the next two or three years she would be happy. She does feel signage is very important. Kathy Rossier suggested using flags in the meantime like they have in Middlebury. She explained that flags are located at the intersections which the pedestrian picks up and flags a motorist to get their attention and the vehicle then stops so they can cross the street. Mayor Benton advised he did not feel it was the solution but that we could certainly try it. Senior Alderman Perry advised the Downtown Designation renewal application includes flags and flashers for the Green Street/Main Street intersection. Including this in the Downtown

Designation plan provides an opportunity for grants to fund the work. This is all in their preliminary application for renewal; the final version is due in February. Mayor Benton stated he felt pedestrian safety and signage is the City's responsibility. Senior Alderman Perry agreed; it is Vergennes Partnership's responsibility to file the renewal application but the Downtown Designation belongs to the City. Martha DeGraaf stated the bulb-out across from People's United Bank is beautiful but more visibility in that area is needed. Jason Farrell shared his concern and experience with a couple of the intersections. At the Main Street and Green Street intersection, he advised he has seen vehicles stopped at the red light with a blinker on to turn left onto Green Street and the vehicles behind that car continue on and pass the vehicle on the right. He feels that move makes the intersection deadly. Another location with the same problem is the Monkton Road and Main Street intersection, he advised. He has been headed north on Main Street and stopped his vehicle at the traffic light with his blinker on to turn right onto Monkton Road and a vehicle comes up from behind and passes him on the right. He finds these actions most scary.

Police Chief George Merkel agreed that visibility is poor around the bulb-out, drivers are distracted on cell phones, kids need to be educated about crosswalks, cars need to slow down, etc., are all reasons why safety has become an issue. Police visibility and enforcement will help some but more needs to be done. He advised they will start speed enforcement on Main Street and anyone going 5 mph over the limit will be ticketed. Alderman Chabot encouraged more police visibility between 7:30 – 8:00 a.m. and again from 2:45 – 3:30 p.m. Adam Lougee advised a county-wide Bike and Pedestrian Safety Committee came together last summer after several car accidents involved bicyclists. He advised Carrie Macfarlane of Vergennes is on the Committee and may be of some assistance. Erin Roche stated they moved here five years ago because they loved the idea that they would be able to walk almost anywhere they wanted to go. She advised she walks their dog twice a day in the dark wearing reflective clothing and still almost got hit. Kathy Rossier felt this was not just a visibility issue; it needs to become the culture here to slow down for bikers and pedestrians. Michelle Eckels thanked Manager Hawley and Public Works Supervisor Jim Larrow for their quick action putting up signage in the road after she and her daughter experienced a close call. She would like to see that signage in the road at all crosswalks. Public Works Supervisor Jim Larrow did not want to see them in all the crosswalks as they are costly and people run over them to make some of the corners. They cost \$350 to \$400 each. As soon as the snow begins those signs in the road will be picked up for the plowing season. Rebecca Coburn advised she has to get into the roadway in front of her children to make the cars stop so they can cross the road at the intersection of Main Street and South Water Street. Alderman Bertrand stated he is aware of two crosswalks that you cannot step out into the road at; they are deadly. City Manager Hawley advised they now paint the crosswalks differently and have proper signs on all Class 1 roads. He has heard the yellow flashing lights at crosswalks are much more effective but is unaware of the cost. Alderman Lynn Donnelly addressed Alderman Koenig, as a school board member, to try to get the school to put the \$3,000 back in the budget for the second crossing guard position they eliminated. That would make an immediate difference and it gets dark earlier now. Senior Alderman Perry agreed that pedestrian and bicyclist safety need to become our culture. We need to create that and get the message out that we value our bicyclists' and pedestrians' safety. Discussion closed at 6:15 p.m.

WARRANT: The Warrant totaling \$141,175.36 was circulated for review and signatures of approval.

MINUTES: Minutes to the October 25, 2016 meeting were reviewed and a typographical error corrected. Alderman Bertrand moved to accept the minutes as corrected, seconded by Senior Alderman Perry, with all voting in favor.

RESOLUTION – DOWNTOWN DESIGNATION: Senior Alderman Perry, who is also the President of the Vergennes Partnership, advised they are in the process of renewing the City's Downtown Designation for another 5-year term and are in need of documentation that the City Council authorizes and supports this renewal. New to them this year is the submission of a pre-application to include a 5-year capital plan; the final submission is due in February 2017. It is the Partnership's responsibility to administer the plan. He advised they are trying to put as much information about improvements as they can into the plan because it will be beneficial in obtaining grants. Planning Commission Chair Shannon Haggett strongly encouraged adopting the 5-year capital plan as grant decision makers look for this with downtown development. Alderman Mark Koenig moved to adopt the Resolution for Renewal of Downtown Designation, seconded by Alderman Donnelly, with all voting in favor.

POOL INSPECTION: City Manager Hawley advised the pool inspection and evaluation report by Aquatic Development Group (ADG) has arrived. He noted that there was an error on the first page as it relates to the depth of the pool at the location of the starting blocks. The depth of the water is actually 4'-4" to 5'-1" and meets USA swimming standards, he advised. He reported he agrees that safety signage needs improvement along with a good lightning detector. The chemical storage and handling also needs addressing. Manager Hawley advised this year he will see that the pool is run at the water level recommended in the report. Mayor Benton stated he would like to see Jim Larrow, an officer of the swim team, and an interested City Council member create a plan based on the report for implementation before next summer. Manager Hawley advised he has spoken with Roland Guyette and Linda Hawley who confirmed that some plastering and drain retro-fitting occurred when the gutters were replaced in the 1990s. Senior Alderman Perry advised we should determine, based on the expert's opinion, what are the immediate concerns that have to be addressed. Michelle Eckels recommended that if Brad Castillo comes back as the Director, that he be sent to certification courses.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT: Manager Hawley reported he feels okay with the budget. He warned the City Council that the \$90,000 estimate for the two new police cruisers may go over budget by \$2,000 or so. The two older cruisers taken out of service have been stripped and are off the street at this time and will be sold.

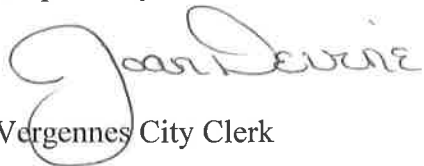
VERGENNES-PANTON WATER DISTRICT: A legal opinion has been received regarding the appointment of a Commissioner when a vacancy occurs on the Vergennes-Panton Water District Board Water Commissioners. Garrett Baxter, a senior staff attorney at VLCT, has confirmed that when there is a vacancy, the legislative body of the municipality that elected the person is to fill the vacancy by appointment. The legal opinion states that if a vacancy is created involving a Vergennes representative, the City Council would fill the vacancy by appointment. Likewise, if

a vacancy is created involving a Panton representative, the Selectboard of the Town of Panton would fill the vacancy by appointment.

VOSHA INSPECTION: City Manager Hawley advised he has received the citations resulting from the recent VOSHA inspections at the wastewater treatment plant and the Public Works garage. The proposed penalties total \$10,920, he stated. He reported that corrective action has been taken for all violations and reported that an informal conference has been scheduled for November 18 with the Chief Compliance Officer at the Vermont Department of Labor. He is in hopes of getting an adjustment in the penalties.

ADJOURNMENT: The regular meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m. by motion of Alderman Bertrand, seconded by Alderman Donnelly, and unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan Devine". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Vergennes City Clerk