

VERGENNES CITY COUNCIL MEETING
NOVEMBER 24, 2015
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	Andrea Cousino
Alderman Lowell Bertrand	Danelle Birong
Alderman Jeffrey Fritz	Dennis Armell, Boy Scouts of America
Alderman Lynn Donnelly	George Merkel, Chief of Police
Alderman Joe Klopfenstein	Reporter Andy Kirkaldy
Alderman Michael Daniels	
City Manager Mel Hawley	
City Clerk Joan Devine	

MINUTES: The minutes of the November 10th meeting were amended on page two in the second paragraph. The fifth sentence was amended to read, “Alderman Lynn Donnelly moved to keep the current language in Section 1609.F.2.e which prohibits residential uses on the ground floor in the Central Business District and remove entirely the proposed Section 1609.F.2.f. with a public hearing to be held on December 15, 2015. The motion was seconded by Alderman Daniels to allow for discussion. Following discussion a vote on the motion showed Alderman Donnelly in favor and all other members opposed.” Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to accept the minutes as amended, seconded by Alderman Jeff Fritz, with all voting in favor. Alderman Mike Daniels requested that the record reflect that he was not given the opportunity to speak to that motion but acknowledged that it was a mute point now. Mayor Benton apologized for his oversight in not offering him the opportunity to express his position on the motion.

WARRANT: The warrant presented for approval in the amount of \$738,896.90, which included the 2nd quarterly installment of education taxes for both the union elementary school and union high school, was circulated for review and signatures of approval.

TELEVISION PROGRAM FILMING: Mayor Benton advised he has had a lot of questions from the community regarding the camera crew that was in town last week working with the Police Department so he invited Chief Merkel to come and explain what was going on. Police Chief Merkel stated that he was approached by A & E Networks, a basic cable and satellite television channel, wanting to do a production that focuses on the opiate problem Vermont is experiencing. Hot Snakes Production came to town last week, he stated, to do a so-called “sizzle reel” which is a series of short film clips to be used as a pitch tape for a reality show. This film is not only about Vergennes; it is about Vermont and how the State is handling the opiate addiction problem. Chief Merkel reported that he told them he was interested in being a part of this but that they could not show Vergennes in a negative light because we have done well for ourselves and have accomplished so much keeping opiate dealers out of our town. They have been told they need to say the truth and show it how it truly is, he advised. The clips are supposed to be ready late December so we will see then if it is going to become a film or not. If

it does, he advised, A & E will pay a location fee and make a donation to the City. He felt this was an opportunity to showcase the City and they would not be doing anything with the film without our approval. Danelle Birong expressed some concern with the public's perception and the potential to spin it in the wrong direction based on keywords. She expressed that reality shows have to have some form of drama for them to survive and that is the area that is concerning to her.

BOY SCOUTS BOTTLE COLLECTION BUILDING: Dennis Armell advised he has been in contact with City Manager Hawley regarding the condition of the Boy Scout's bottle collection trailer near the recycling center that has been there since 2005. Mr. Armell agreed the trailer is dilapidated and advised the Boy Scouts would like to replace it with a 6' x 8' building on skids. City Manager Hawley stated that a zoning permit is not necessary because the accessory building is not greater than 80 square feet. Manager Hawley said he does not have the authority to grant permission to the Boy Scouts to put a building on City property so the request was forwarded to the City Council just as was the case in 2005. Mayor Benton acknowledged the efforts that have gone into sprucing up the area of the falls and requested the Boy Scouts keep that in mind and coordinate the painting of their building with the public works building. Alderman Mike Daniels moved to accept the Boy Scouts proposal with the provision that the bottles and cans be emptied on a monthly basis and if the Boy Scouts fail in their responsibility the building reverts to City ownership. The motion was seconded by Alderman Bertrand with all voting in favor.

SEWER DEPARTMENT STAFFING: City Manager Hawley advised they had five people who expressed interest in the assistant wastewater treatment plant operator position that was advertised recently. Of that number, two have withdrawn leaving three candidates. Between the 1272 Order and the combined sewer overflow policy soon to be adopted by the Agency of Natural Resources, the City's responsibilities are going to change and he feels two additional employees are needed primarily for sewer line inspections. The Sewer Department employees are currently responsible for the treatment plant and the pump stations while the Public Works Department is responsible for maintenance of sewer lines. There are over 300 manholes, he advised, and it has been years since some of the covers were lifted for inspections due to the lack of sufficient staff. Manager Hawley advised he is not looking to change the budget but just disclose what he would like to do. FY2015 ended with a \$105,000 fund balance, he advised. Our current budget is using some of that surplus based on budgeted revenues versus expenses. Mayor Benton inquired of the cost for an additional employee per year. Manager Hawley reported that about \$50,000 would cover wages and benefits for one employee. Neither of the potential employees is certified so they would work under a provisional certification until their eventual Grade 2 certification is acquired; treatment plant operator Rick Chaput has a Grade 5 certification. Manager Hawley advised he feels some of the stormwater infiltration at the plant is coming in through the manholes that last had work in 1978 so are not in perfect shape. He is looking to hire two employees now who will have to take a 40-hour certification course. Alderman Lynn Donnelly advised she doesn't want to see a deficit budget but we do need to address these issues. Manager Hawley stated that this is not a forever decision but there is at least 2 to 3 years needed. At the best we will have \$27,000 at year end so any hiring will exceed this number and could put us in a deficit position. We could be looking at about a 20 percent increase in the Sewer Department budget and corresponding rates. It was the consensus of the

Board to allow Manager Hawley to go forward and do what he needs to do in light of the need to address the system.

JOE KLOPFENSTEIN: Alderman Joe Klopfenstein expressed his disappointment with James Ehlers, Executive Director of Lake Champlain International, regarding a post he put on Facebook degrading the City for its wastewater treatment plant overflow into Otter Creek. He advised he has offered on two occasions to meet with Mr. Ehlers who has not made contact with him. Alderman Klopfenstein felt the City agrees with their goals for a clean lake and we are working in good faith to prevent this from happening again. Alderman Daniels suggested City Manager Hawley share this opinion when there is an opportunity while working with the Blue Certification Program through the LCI. Alderman Daniels also noted that the Blue Certification Program is a trade-mark owned by a for-profit business that works through the LCI which is a domestic non-profit corporation. Mayor Benton confirmed that the Blue Certification is a for-profit business but we work with other for-profit businesses so he was not concerned with that.

FRIENDS OF VERGENNES OPERA HOUSE LEASE: Alderman Daniels advised he likes transparency and pointed out that the voters approved FVOH's use of the ticket booth space but not the space beyond (former Police Chief's office) that will be used by the Vergennes Partnership. Now that the wall has come down between the two rooms he inquired if the additional space likely to be shared should also be approved by the voters. Manager Hawley understood the concern as there no longer is a "ticket booth" and questioned whether the lease should have another amendment. Alderman Lynn Donnelly stated that she understands Alderman Daniel's transparency need but sees two great groups supporting the City and did not feel this needed to go back to the voters. City Manager Hawley felt a memorandum of understanding with FVOH might be helpful for clarification when and if the Vergennes Partnership ceased use of the space. The removal of the wall was not contemplated at the time the amendment to the lease was done, he advised, so it should be addressed. Alderman Daniels agreed that a memorandum seemed sufficient.

CITY HALL CONFERENCE ROOM PROJECT: Mayor William Benton suggested putting together a plan for improvements (such as lighting, flooring, etc.) to the conference room at City Hall. This will be looked at closer after the holidays have passed.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT: City Manager Hawley reported he continues to feel good about the budget except for his ongoing concern with the Police Department. As for police coverage in Ferrisburgh, he advised the City Council allowed him and Chief Merkel to meet with the Ferrisburgh Selectboard to discuss what coverage they would be looking for with the understanding that approval to do so would have to go back to the Vergennes City Council. He advised he has calculated that the City should charge the Town of Ferrisburgh \$48.10 per hour. The Ferrisburgh Selectboard is discussing this at their meeting tonight. He advised Ferrisburgh contracted with the Addison County Sheriff's Department in March 2013 for coverage at \$25 per hour plus mileage. If Ferrisburgh wants 10 hours a week of coverage from the Vergennes Police Department we would not need to hire an additional officer, he advised. If 40 hours per week is desired that might involve a Federally funded COPS program grant that gets reimbursed at 75 percent for three years but with the condition that the officer's position is guaranteed for an additional fourth year. He advised he is not sure if this is even available because Vermont State

Police is the primary coverage for Ferrisburgh. Manager Hawley said he would report back once he hears from the Ferrisburgh Selectboard.

ACT 46 STUDY COMMITTEE: City Manager Hawley advised he has been serving on the ACT 46 Study Committee for the Addison Northwest Supervisory District as a representative of Vergennes. The purpose of the Committee is to study unification of school districts to see if it allows us to meet student educational needs while providing taxpayers with tax benefits. Alderman Lynn Donnelly suggested attendance at their meetings by the public to learn that this is not school consolidation and there will be no school choice under this Act. Manager Hawley advised this could very well be an item on our ballot in March 2016.

FAREWELL: Alderman Joe Klopfenstein thanked everyone who went to the community celebration on Sunday in his and his wife Nancy's honor. He went on to read his prepared heartfelt goodbye to a community he will always call home.

ADJOURNMENT: At 7:30 p.m. Alderman Lowell Bertrand moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Alderman Joe Klopfenstein, with all voting in favor. The next regular City Council meeting will be held December 15th at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Vergennes City Clerk