

CITY OF VERGENNES, VERMONT
REGULAR MEETING of the CITY COUNCIL
October 13, 2020
Meeting Held Remotely via Zoom
Minutes

1. Call to Order:

Mayor Lynn Donnelly called meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

In attendance:

- Mayor Lynn Donnelly
- Alderman David Austin
- Alderman Lowell Bertrand
- Alderman Dickie Austin
- Alderman Ian Huizenga
- Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon
- City Manager Daniel Hofman
- City Clerk Britney Aube
- Jim Larrow
- Mel Hawley
- Cheryl Brinkman
- Peter Garon
- Matt White
- Zoe Kaslow
- Alicia Grangent
- Jeremy Holm
- Elise Schanbacker
- Nial Rele
- Mark Koenig
- Susan Rakowski
- Stacy Raphael
- Jon Kidde
- Dider Murat
- Darren Donovan
- Brent Rakowski
- Adam Lougee
- Others

Amendments to the Agenda:

Mayor Lynn Donnelly asked for a motion to amend the agenda to appoint a new person to the Vergennes Planning Commission and enter executive session at the end of the meeting. Motion to approve the amendments to the agenda made by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, seconded by Alderman Ian Huizinga. VOTE - All members voted in favor.

Motion made by Alderman David Austin, seconded by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, to amend the agenda to add discussion regarding the Armory Lane Senior Housing, Addison County Community Trust Subordination agreement. VOTE - 2 in favor; 4 opposed.

Mayor Lynn Donnelly suggested that the topic be added to the agenda of the October 27th meeting.

2. Visitors

Mayor Lynn Donnelly asked visitors if they had any additional comments related to items not listed on the agenda. Cheryl Brinkman asked about the possibility of starting council meetings later than 5: 30 p.m. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that it would be a topic of discussion once the final council member was elected.

Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that she was not comfortable addressing a few items listed on the agenda without the full council. Those agenda items included: implementation of city council rules, appointment of the Deputy Mayor, and appointment to the Ray Davidson Committee. Mayor Lynn Donnelly asked the council members if they objected to extending those items until a full council was in place. There were no objections.

3. Approval of Minutes and Warrants

Mayor Lynn Donnelly suggested posting the past minutes that involved the prior council members in draft form, that way the new council members were not approving meeting minutes for meetings that they had not attended. Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon stated that she felt that the minutes should be finalized. Alderman Dickie Austin asked if video could be reviewed and minutes be finalized at the next meeting. All council members agreed that they could review the videos and finalize the meeting minutes. Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon asked if the July 16th minutes could be cut down from the narrative form. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that the July 16th meetings could be amended at the next council meeting. City Manager Daniel Hofman stated that he would email the warrants for signature. Motion by Lynn Donnelly, seconded by Lowell Bertrand, to approve the warrants, as written. VOTE- All members voted in favor.

4. Citizen comments (issues not otherwise on the agenda)

No comments from citizens.

5. Business:

a. Discussion regarding Rules and Procedures for the City Council

Tabled until the next meeting.

b. Appointment of Deputy Mayor

Tabled until the next meeting

c. Appointment of Council Member to the Ray Davison Committee

Tabled until the next meeting

d. Approval for purchase of new Public Works Truck

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that Jim Larrow was in a minor accident with his personal truck and the city insurance would not cover the incident. City Manager Daniel Hofman stated that public works has money budgeted for a new truck purchase. Public Works Supervisor Jim Larrow explained that the truck they had originally wanted to purchase was no longer available. In order to purchase a truck now, it would have to be custom ordered. Jim Larrow explained that the truck with all the required features would be approximately 40k. Motion by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, seconded by Alderman Dickie Austin, to approve the purchase a new public works truck, VOTE- All members voted in favor.

e. Appointment of Council Member to Engineer Request for Qualifications selection team*

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained to the council that there are currently several deficiencies with the City's sewer treatment plant and the Macdonough Drive pump station. He also explained that the City needs a long-term stormwater management plan. Daniel explained that he has concerns regarding the existing engineer. An RFQ was issued on October 5, 2020 and the deadline for submissions will be October 27, 2020. Mayor Lynn Donnelly asked the council members if they would like to be on the Engineer Request for Qualifications Team. Alderman Dickie Austin stated that he would be on the team. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that she would also ask the member elected in the Runoff if they would like to join the team.

f. Discussion regarding municipal boundary with neighboring towns.

Mayor Lynn Donnelly explained that there had been some work with Ferrisburgh regarding the boundary discrepancy. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that there was previously a task force that had planned to sit down with the Ferrisburgh Selectboard to discuss and come to an agreement on the boundaries. If an agreement cannot be reached, and a formal survey of the boundaries ends up being required, it will be very expensive. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the charter boundaries and taxation boundaries are conflicting. City Manager Daniel Hofman recommended continuing to proceed with meeting with the Ferrisburgh Selectboard. Alderman Ian Huizenga, Alderman Lowell Bertrand, and Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killion stated that they were willing to be on the committee to tackle the boundary issue. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that she would offer the same opportunity to the final council member.

g. Resolution for VCDP Grant Application Authority for Boys & Girls Club of Greater Vergennes*

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the VCDP Grant would cover COVID relief for the Boys & Girls Club. The grant would flow through the City if Vergennes to the Boys & Girls Club. City Manager Daniel Hofman stated that the Boys and Girls Club have approximately \$9,300 in expenses related to COVID that the grant would cover. The VCDP grant must be applied for by the City. Motion made by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, seconded by Alderman Ian Huizenga to approve the resolution for the VCDP Grant for the Boys and Girls Club. VOTE - 4 voted in favor, 1 abstention (Alderman David Austin).

h. Resolution for Municipal Planning Grant*

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the municipal grant application would be for \$22,000 and would pay for an asset inventory for the City's assets such as, land, buildings, and infrastructure. An asset inventory is needed to bring the City up accounting standards and would improve budgeting. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that he was able to find an accounting firm willing to complete the inventory and apply for the grant but needs a council resolution to complete the process. Motion made by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, seconded by Alderman David Austin to approve the resolution for the Municipal Planning Grant. VOTE - All members voted in favor.

i. Appointment to the Planning Commission

The Chair of the Vergennes Planning Commission, Shannon Haggett, recommend that Kimberly Trombly be appointed to the Planning Commission for a two-year term expiring March July 31, 2022. Motion made by Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killion, Seconded by Alderman Lowell Bertrand to appoint Kimberly Trombly to the Planning Commission for a two-year term expiring Jul 31, 2022. VOTE - All members voted in favor.

j. Approval of VCDP, Evernorth, ACCT subordination of Mortgage agreement*

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the VCDP grant was a 400k block grant that went through the City for the housing project on Armory Lane. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that since the council approved the grant in 2019, they now need to approve the subordination agreement. City Manager Daniel Hofman stated that the City Attorney has reviewed the subordination agreement. Alderman David Austin expressed concern that the original grant documents were not reviewed by the City's attorney prior to their approval and that financials have not yet been provided to the City for the project. Elise Shanbacker stated that she would provide the financials. Motion made by Alderman Dickie Austin, seconded by Alderman Ian Huizenga to approve the signing of the subordination agreement. VOTE - 4 members voted in favor, 1 abstention (Alderman David Austin).

k. Discussion regarding the VTrans Sidewalk Grant

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the City was awarded a grant in 2019 for \$250,000 with a 20% match to install a sidewalk from the Bixby Library to the stairway on the north side of the falls. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that he found several concerning items with sidewalk grant. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the biggest issue he discovered was the cost estimate should have been \$150,000 when the sidewalk was applied for and instead it was put in for \$250,000, which is a direct relation to the administration and engineering cost affiliated with the sidewalk grant. The foundation for which the sidewalk grant was applied for was a 2007 study which is no longer relevant. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that he received an in-house estimate of \$21,000, which is a fraction of the original 20% match. Mayor Lynn Donnelly asked if the errors in the original grant application can be corrected. City Manager Daniel Hofman stated that a new grant application could be submitted to correct the errors. Alderman Dickie Austin asked if it would be possible to have Jim Larrow submit an estimate that includes the green belt, so that the Council could do an apples-to-apples comparison between the VTrans grant estimate and the in-house proposal. Alderman Dickie Austin stated that he would like to see that comparison presented to the Council at the next meeting.

l. Discussion regarding Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee status and report

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee requested more time to complete their study and final report. Alicia Grangent expressed concerned that the request for proposal for the race equity study was issued prior to the committee completing their report. Mayor Lynn Donnelly asked how many members were needed to bring the committee back up to eight members. Alicia Grangent stated that 3-4 more members were needed. Alderman Dickie Austin

recommended that the City issue a revised RFP for the race equity study with a scope of work that includes input from the Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that anyone interested in joining the committee should contact her or City Manager Daniel Hofman by Monday (10/19). Alderman Dickie Austin recommended that the City Council allow more time for the Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee to complete the study, reinstate the size of the committee to eight members, and to allow the committee to have more direct involvement with the request for proposal process for the race equity study. David Small asked if the committee would have enough time to complete the report when they still need additional members. Alderman Dickie Austin suggested extending the deadline to the first week in December. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that she would review applicants who are interested in joining the committee and make recommendations of appointment to the committee. Matt White asked for clarification as to the relationship between the race equity RFP and the charge of the Citizen Review Board Exploratory Committee. Zoe Kaslow asked how the open positions for the committee would be posted. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that positions would be posted on the City website and Front Porch Forum.

m. Discussion regarding RFP for Assessor Services**

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained to the council that the city's contract with NEMRC had expired and he is now looking for an assessor service with an hourly rate. A request for RFP for assessor services has been issued but the City has not received any bids. City Manager Daniel Hofman stated that he would reach out to vendors again.

n. Discussion regarding Rooster Ordinance

Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that she would like the council to form a committee that will receive public input and draft an ordinance that could be reviewed by the full city council. Alderman David Austin and Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon volunteered to be on the Roster/Chicken Committee. They agreed to report back to council at the first meeting in November.

o. Discussion regarding Leash Ordinance

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that there has been a request to have leashes required in the city parks. The current ordinance calls for dogs to be under the control of their owners but does not clearly state that the dog needs to be leashed. Alderman Dickie Austin stated that a reasonable solution would be to work with recreation to spearhead an effort to have a dog park in the city. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that the Recreation Coordinator, Kim Buckley is working on a dog park.

p. Appointment of Amy Yuen and reappointment Jason Mullin to the Development Review Board.

Motion made by Alderman David Austin, seconded by Alderman Dickie Austin, to appoint Amy Yuen and reappoint Jason Mullin to the Development Review Board. VOTE – all members voted in favor.

q. Discussion regarding in-person Council Meetings**

Mayor Lynn Donnelly asked each council member how they feel about meeting in-person with council members only. Alderman Lowell Bertrand stated that he is in favor of in-person meetings and recommended that they take place in the Opera House. Alderman David Austin stated that he is in favor of in-person meetings but would like the to see Zoom used for those who cannot be there in person. Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon stated that she supports a hybrid model that allows in-person and virtual attendance. Alderman Dickie Austin stated that he is supportive of in-person meetings if they are conducted according to COVID guidelines and believes that a hybrid model that includes Zoom is essential. Alderman Ian Huizenga stated that he would like to see a plan in place first prior to beginning in-person meetings. Mayor Lynn Donnelly stated that council members will meet in-person first and public will be able to attend via Zoom, then, perhaps by December, the meetings could also be open for public attendance. Mayor Lynn Donnelly suggest that the decision for full in-person meetings should be made with a full council. Alderman Dickie Austin suggested that the City investigate the Webinar platform to replace Zoom. Zoe Kaslow suggested a trial run to work out any technical issues that could happen with a hybrid meeting model.

r. Payment-in-lieu of health insurance policy*

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that he would like to implement a payment-in-lieu of health insurance policy that would allow City employees to opt out health coverage and instead receive extra pay, Employees opting out would still receive the HRA card. City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that this could save the City a lot of money in health insurance costs and could be used by employees who can obtain coverage through a spouse or parent. Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon asked if the City has considered allowing employees to choose a less expensive health plan rather than the Platinum plan that is current the standard. Mel Hawley asked if the payment in-lieu-of health insurance would require an amendment to the police union contract. Alderman David Austin suggested tabling the subject until the City Manager contacts the City Attorney to discuss any potential contract conflicts.

s. Approval of Listers errors and omissions*

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that there were two errors into the grand list that involved changes in assessments that were not captured on the grand list. One involved Green Mountain Power and one involved Consolidated Communications. The Board of Listers met and approved the omissions. Motion made by Alderman David Austin, seconded by Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon to approve the errors and omissions to the grand list. VOTE – All members voted in favor.

6. Manager Report

City Manager Daniel Hofman explained that he would like to do a budget amendment to capture changes in the pool budget and other changes that have occurred since COVID. The City Manager also explained that he had budgeted for a 20% increase to health insurance rates, rates go up January 1st, and the rates are only going up 4%, which leaves the City with approximately \$24,000 in extra budgeted money. Mel Hawley stated that City should be

cautious because changes to marital status or a birth could increase the City's health insurance cost, so there should be a buffer kept in the budget.

7. Mayor Report

Mayor Lynn Donnelly explained that starting in November, she would like all committee chairs to give reports at the Council meetings to update the Council on what all the committees are accomplishing.

8. Executive Session

Motion made Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon to enter executive session to discuss a personnel issue, seconded by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, VOTE – All members voted in favor. The council entered executive session at 7:31 p.m.

The City Council came out of executive session at 8:21 p.m.

Motion by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, seconded by Alderman Dickie Austin to explore the current employment of the City Manager, the exploration will be headed off by Mayor Lynn Donnelly and Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killion. VOTE – All members voted in favor.

9. Adjournment

Motion made by Alderman Lowell Bertrand, seconded by Alderman Dickie Austin to adjourn the meeting. VOTE – All members voted in favor.

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by:
Britney Aube, Vergennes City Clerk