

CITY OF VERGENNES, VERMONT  
REGULAR MEETING of the CITY COUNCIL  
November 22, 2022

COUNCIL MEMBER & STAFF

Mayor Mathew Chabot  
Alderman Dickie Austin  
Alderman Mel Hawley  
Alderwoman Jill Murray-Killon  
Alderwoman Zoe Kaslow  
Alderwoman Sue Rakowski  
Alderman Ian Huizenga  
City Manager Ron Redmond  
City Clerk Penny Austin

City Treasurer Angie Bolduc

VISITORS

Cheryl Brinkman  
Mark Koenig  
\*ANWSD School Board Candidates  
Michael Kane\*  
Eric Reid-St. John\*  
Chrystal Little\*  
Margaret Carrera-Bly\*

- **Call to Order:** Mayor Chabot called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.
- **Amendments to the Agenda:** City Manager, Ron Redmond requested an executive session after the City Manager's report to discuss the candidates for the school board and to consider recommendations to the ANWSD Board.
- **Visitors:** Cheryl Brinkman reminded everyone of the CRBEC presentation in the Vergennes Opera House on November 28 at 7PM. Also, as Energy Committee Chair, she advised that the next event of the Energy Committee is on December 15<sup>th</sup> at 6PM at the Bixby Library. Representatives from Renewal Energy of VT (REV) will be presenting their recommended changes to the state goals for renewal energy to 2030 instead of 2050.
- **Approval of Minutes (11/15/22) and Warrants FY22 & FY23 (11/22/22):** Revisions to the minutes were discussed. Alderman Hawley sent revisions to the City Clerk. Motion was made by Alderman Austin and seconded by Alderwoman Rakowski as revised. Vote:7-0 Approved. There were no warrants.
- **Business:**
- **7a:** Four Vergennes residents expressed interest in being appointed to the ANWSD Board to fill the current vacancy: Eric Reid-St. John, Michael Kane, Margaret Carrera-Bly, and Chrystal Little. Each candidate was asked how long they had lived in Vergennes, if they were registered voters, and why they wanted to join the ANWSD Board.
- **7b:** City Manager Ron Redmond sought the approval of the City Council of his appointment of VFD Captain David DiBiase to be First Deputy Chief of the Vergennes Fire Department effective January 1, 2023. Motion to approve from Alderman Hawley and second from Alderman Austin. Vote: 7-0 Approved.
- **7c: City Manager Redmond and VFD Captain David DiBiase** presented a scope of work for a proposed study to be co-funded by Vergennes and Ferrisburgh and conducted by Municipal Resources, Inc. (MRI) to evaluate opportunities for regional cooperation for fire protection and prevention services and EMS. Request from staff was made to fund Vergennes' share of the \$40,000 study with \$20,000, funded by Vergennes' ARPA funds. There was discussion about the need for the council to have a strategy for spending ARPA dollars before continuing to spend from those monies. A motion by Alderman Austin to approve the staff request was made with a second from Alderman Huizenga. Motion defeated 1-6.
- **7d:** This item, sponsored by Alderman Huizenga, requested amending the Vergennes Revolving

Loan Fund Policies and Procedures regarding the interest rate charged for loans, from the current “Wall Street Journal Prime Rate minus two, but no lower than 1 percent” to “ 1 percent”. Alderman Austin noted that with the current rates of return, the City would be operating at a loss with this change. There was a question as to whether this amendment to the policies and procedures could be done without approval from the Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development, Grants Management Office, which reviews the policies and procedures for the Revolving Loan Fund. No action taken.

- **7e:** Request to accept the unanimous recommendation of the Vergennes Revolving Loan Fund committee to loan Daily Chocolate up to \$50,000 to be paid back over a five-year period, with the first payment to occur one year from the time of closing, with the interest rate based upon the Wall Street Journal Rate minus two. Alderman Austin made a motion to accept with Alderman Rakowski seconding. Alderman Hawley noted that while the VRLF Committee was attempting to support a local business, they did not follow the VRLF policies and procedures as written and approved by the City Council. Alderman Rakowski recommended that both the City Council and the VRLF Committee be educated on the VRLF policy and procedures. The motion was withdrawn by Alderman Austin and restated by him. Alderman Austin moved that the City Council accept the recommendation of the Vergennes Revolving Loan Fund Committee to a loan of up to \$50,000 to Daily Chocolate to be paid back in accordance with the policies as set forth in the Vergennes Revolving Loan Fund. Alderwoman Rakowski seconded. Vote: 7-0 Approved.
- **7f:** The City Council acknowledged the receipt of the proposed amendments of the Zoning and Subdivision Regulations unanimously supported by the Planning Commission on November 7, 2022. Motion by Alderman Austin, seconded by Alderwoman Kaslow Vote: 7-0 Approved
- **7g:** City Council discussed the request to establish two public hearing dates for the proposed amendments to the Zoning and Subdivision regulations. Alderman Hawley stated that only one public hearing is required unless the City Council makes substantive changes in the proposal. The City Council decided that the hearing be scheduled for January 10, 2023.
- **7h: Vergennes Fire Department.** FY2024 budget had not been yet completed for council review. First Deputy Chief Dave DiBiase presented salary updates that compared wages paid by Vergennes, Middlebury, and Bristol, including the total payroll for Middlebury and Bristol. Captain DiBiase discussed pay made by Bristol and Middlebury for members and leadership team members, plus VFD’s recommendations for increases. FY2024 budget will reflect two changes: eliminating the stipend and raising the firefighter rate from \$8/hour to \$15/hour. Alderman Hawley noted that Statute states that the city manager sets the compensation rates of the Fire Department but based on budget approved by the City Council.

- **7i:** Review of FY2022 and FY2023 budget reports and DRAFT Debt Load. Redmond discussed the DRAFT debt load report. Alderman Hawley noted the debt load chart shows status of debt and recommended the city look at the timing of the purchase of the fire trucks so that first payment occurs after the last payment of the current bond is completed. The City Council requested Redmond have the FY2022 and FY2023 budget reports at the next City Council meeting.
- **7j:** Discussion on projections for FY2023 Police Department budget. City Manager Redmond presented two options: one showing an internal candidate being selected for Chief and one showing an external candidate being selected. Redmond said that it is his intention to fill the vacant position should the internal candidate be chosen for Chief, but that because of difficulties other municipalities are having filling police department positions, the projections show the city not being able to find candidates to fill that position by June 30, 2022. Alderman Hawley provided an analysis of the projections presented, reviewing salary and medical insurance costs, and from that indicated that, based on his analysis, it appears the police department budget will be able to absorb the \$30K interest payment on the police station bond in the FY2023 budget. Redmond to make updates to his projections and prepare a more detailed analysis. Redmond said police chief opening had been posted and deadline is December 16, 2022. Alderman Hawley asked about the salary range being promoted for the Chief position. Redmond said \$100K-\$105K/year.
- **7k:** Review of City Manager Project Tracker. Questions were asked and answered. Alderwoman Rakowski asked about plans to repair steel sheet piling of the Macdonough Park docks. City Manager Redmond said he will be seeking a cost estimate to make the repairs; possible funding source are the revenues from the GMP Cooperative Fund, but Redmond will return to inform the council before the project goes forward. Alderwoman Rakowski asked about item mentioning possible land acquisition to move the Macdonough Pump Station from its current location. City Manager Redmond said it was exploratory but was being pursued as it may ultimately reduce the overall cost of the project. Alderman Hawley noted that the Vergennes Panton Water District item can be removed. A copy of the agreement was located, and the Water District is responsible for maintenance and repair of the City-owned water main on Monkton Road in Ferrisburgh. City Manager Redmond noted that the planned \$7,500 drainage repair at the Pool is currently not planned in FY2023.
- **7l:** City Council went into Executive session per 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3): the appointment or employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee, provided that the public body shall make a final decision to hire or appoint a public officer or employee in an open meeting and shall explain the reasons for its final decision during the open meeting. \*\*  
City Council came out of executive session at 7:03 pm. Alderman Hawley made a motion to recommend Michael Kane and Margaret Carrera-Bly to be considered for the current vacancy on the ANWSD Board, to serve until March of 2023. Seconded by Alderwoman Rakowski. Vote: 7-0 Unanimously approved.
- No action taken.
- Adjournment: 7:03 p.m.