

Minutes of the Montpelier Special City Council Meeting
April 16, 2014
Montpelier City Hall Council Chambers

In attendance: Mayor John Hollar (presiding), City Councilors Thierry Guerlain, Jessica Edgerly Walsh, Tom Golonka, Justin Turcotte, Dona Bate, Anne Watson and City Manager Bill Fraser. City Clerk John Odum acted as Secretary of the meeting.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

14-104. Councilor Bate moved approval of the consent agenda. Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded. The motion carried unanimously. Page Guertin rose with questions about item f.

14-106. Finance Director Sandy Gallup came forward to present the Water/Sewer Rate Ordinance proposal, described as a “substantial” proposed change. Councilor Golonka further detailed the new approach and reviewed the supporting documents. Councilor Edgerly Walsh had questions, expressing concerns about the impacts on renters. A discussion of the impacts and the process going forward followed. Councilor Watson had questions about how condos will be approached.

Councilor Golonka moved the council accept the proposal and instruct finance staff to move forward with an anticipated implementation date of July 1. Councilor Guerlain seconded. The motion carried unanimously at 7:19.

14-107. Department of Public Works staffers Kurt Motyka and Zack Blodgett, along with consultant John Little, came forward to discuss the State Street Reconstruction Project, offering a power point presentation detailing possible changes in front of the statehouse regarding parking, bike lanes, and pavement marking. Councilor Edgerly Walsh expressed concern about implementation of any reverse angle parking. A discussion of the idea followed, including the possibility of changing current angle parking at the post office to match any reverse angle parking.

The mayor wondered whether the parking changes are worth pursuing anymore, given other proposals on the table for expanded city parking. The mayor further asked about the cost differential between standard crosswalks and decorative crosswalks.

Anthony Mennona from the bike committee rose to discuss the committee’s recommendation for a bike lane (DPW recommended against the lane for safety reasons). He added that the bike committee was opposed to adding any more parking along State Street.

Councilor Watson asked about the timeframe for a decision. Councilor Edgerly Walsh asked about test locations in the city for reverse angle parking, and expressed concerns about short bike lanes that create merging challenges with car traffic.

Mr. Mennona expressed the bike committee's desire to have a bike lane running the extent of State Street. Mr. Motyka explained why DPW did not deem it as a viable option.

Councilor Turcotte moved the Council request the Parking and Traffic Committees to make separate recommendations to present to the Council as to their preferred method of parking on State Street, and to include costs. Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded.

The Mayor wanted to find out if the state would be willing to put the money they've agreed to put into angle parking into a garage instead. Councilor Bate felt that any commitment to adopt the reverse angle model should include the conversion of the city's greater angle parking supply to reverse angle.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh asked if a State Street path was necessary given the nearby off-road bike path. Mr. Mennona felt it was needed, as a State Street bike lane would serve a different need. Councilor Watson liked the idea of a bike path in front of the statehouse, and preferred the reverse angle parking. Councilor Golonka was not comfortable with the reverse angle model.

Councilor Guerlain felt the Council should rule immediately on whether to proceed with decorative street markings (adding that he was not in favor of them). He also felt uncomfortable with the reverse angle parking.

Councilor Turcotte explained that his motion was offered to respect the role of the committees and get their input.

Voting aye were Councilors Turcotte and Edgerly Walsh. Voting nay were Councilors Watson, Golonka, Bate and Guerlain. The motion failed at 8:21.

Councilor Guerlain moved the project should not include decorative markings or reverse angle parking. Councilor Golonka seconded. The motion carried on a 4-2 vote at 8:26, with Councilors Bate and Edgerly Walsh opposed.

Councilor Guerlain moved the Council approve bike lane scenario number two (as presented). Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded. Councilor Turcotte had questions about the bike committee's vision. The motion carried 5-1, with Councilor Turcotte opposed.

14-105.

Melissa Perley spoke to the Council regarding the Citizens to Protect Berlin Pond's petition to the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) asking that rules regarding public access to Berlin Pond revert to their previous complete ban. She reviewed the history of the issue and the importance, and ecological fragility of the pond, asking the council to formally join in the process.

Councilor Guerlain indicated he felt the council had limited options, before moving that the City Council write a letter to ANR as requested in support of the petition. Councilor Watson seconded.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh asked about other institutions the group had approached for support.

Bob Hynes addressed the council in opposition to the motion on the table. He cited the petition the city already has before ANR which was specifically focused on gas-powered vehicles/engines, feeling that the city should not push for further restrictions. He also took issue with the suggestion that kayakers and canoers would create greater contamination. He added that Montpelier should respect Berlin's desire for access. Councilor Edgerly Walsh had follow-up questions for Mr. Hynes.

Councilor Turcotte asked if pond turbidity had changed. The City Manager indicated it had gone up slightly.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh asked the City Manager about enforcement on non-motorized access. Mr. Fraser indicated it would be a state responsibility.

The Mayor expressed his support for the motion.

Jay White spoke in favor of the motion, noting the additional scientific information brought to the discussion.

Ann Burcroff addressed the council in response to Mr. Hynes as a canoer and kayaker, suggesting alternative locations for these activities.

Paul Burley rose in support of the motion, noting that pathogens from human bacteria are uniquely dangerous to human health. He also suggested that the statement made by approving the motion would resonate in the rest of the state.

Geoff Beyer, addressing the Council as a member of the Conservation Commission, said the Commission hopes the Council will make a strong statement. He reported that the Conservation Commission has specific concerns about Berlin Pond's particular vulnerabilities.

Barbara White related her conversation with an engineer that designed the treatment plant, relating his desire that the Pond be closed, and that he was willing to write letters to that effect.

The motion carried unanimously at 9:01. The Council took a 5 minute recess.

- 14-108. The Council began its examination of Montpelier Alive's Vision for Downtown Improvement District (DID) Funds. Andrew Brewer and Claire Benedict came forward to respond to questions regarding the proposal.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh had questions regarding DID ideas around branding and website utility. Councilor Guerlain asked about the proposed website budget in the documentation and the related timeframe. The Mayor asked if an RFP for the website had gone out, suggesting that the budget allotted might be excessive. Councilor Bate agreed, while Councilor Guerlain defended the budget line.

Councilor Bate expressed concerns about DID priorities. Councilor Golonka expressed concerns about moving forward too quickly and the potential to lose control of the program once. Mr. Golonka disagreed with the Mayor and Councilor Guerlain about the specific degree of control the council originally envisioned. Councilor Watson felt comfortable going forward, but shared Mr. Golonka's concerns.

The Mayor asked for clarification on what the Montpelier Alive representatives needed from the Council immediately. Councilor Edgerly Walsh helped orient the Montpelier Alive council to the guidelines already on the table, and how the process should proceed. Mayor Hollar presented the needs going forward as a timeline, and other councilors added specifics.

Councilor Guerlain moved the council reaffirm that Montpelier Alive will administer the Downtown Improvement District funds, and that Montpelier Alive should proceed with the public hearing and the budget building as discussed. Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded. The motion carried unanimously at 9:44.

- 14-111. Fire Chief Bob Gowans was joined by Ann Burcroff to review the proposed fireworks ordinance as part of the first public hearing on the ordinance. Ms. Burcroff shared her experiences with fireworks that have landed on her roof (bringing in examples).

Councilor Watson moved that the second hearing be set for the next meeting. Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded. The motion carried unanimously at 9:55, and the Mayor closed the 1st public hearing.

- 14-109. Larry Williams of Redstone explained the Carr Lot development public process going forward, and was met with concerns from the Mayor about the schedule. Elizabeth Robeck of the Carr Lot committee offered her input, noting that the first public meeting was particularly important.

The City Manager suggested an April 30th initial meeting date would be adequate time to get the word out.

Jocelyn Wilschek had questions about the roles/relationships between the different parties involved. The City Manager responded, referencing his memo on the topic. She followed up with a question on the council's timeline.

Councilor Bate suggested the Council stop referring to "Carr Lot" and stick with "1 Taylor Street."

Councilor Edgerly Walsh wondered how the city's development partner would manage the public conversations and keep them on topic. She also suggested incorporating examples of comparable design proposals during discussions. It was noted that others specifically asked that design-specifics not be part of the initial discussions.

- 14-110. Councilor Guerlain introduced a pair of conceptual proposals for a possible parking and/or housing project in the rear of the Blanchard Lot, and handed it over to Duane

Wells, who originated the parking-only proposal. Councilor Guerlain followed with a review of his additional vision of a full parking structure in the space that would include housing. He and Hollar disagreed about the potential interaction/synergy with different developing parking ideas in the city.

Councilor Watson expressed concern about the impact on traffic patterns for Mr. Guerlain's proposal. City Manager Fraser noted that there were many details to be looked at, but the question was whether the Council wanted to examine the idea further.

Councilor Golonka asked about potential restrictions on the park deed that would preclude either project. Parks Director Geoff Beyer believed there were options, so long as the greater park stays intact.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh appreciated the energy and creativity behind the proposals.

Councilor Turcotte addressed questions to Mr. Wells about the parking lot proposal, expressing an appreciation of the overall idea.

Councilor Bate redirected the conversation to one focused on what directions the City Manager needed. A discussion of how to proceed, particularly given the two distinct proposals on the table, followed. Councilors Guerlain and Edgerly Walsh noted that multiple new parking options could clear the streets for pedestrians and bikes. The City Manager noted that such a Blanchard Lot development could begin as a parking lot and develop further later.

Councilor Watson moved that city staff start to look into possibility of a parking lot and a housing structure on the site, exploring costs, feasibility, and limitations relating to the park. Councilor Bate seconded. The motion carried unanimously at 11:02.

14-112. Councilor Bate suggested councilors could be less repetitive in their discussions.

Councilor Watson noted that the Energy Committee was close to a decision on the solar project RFP.

Councilor Guerlain suggested the microphone for public comment be looked at for improvement.

Councilor Golonka noted that March promotional banners were still up.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh noted that the double yellow line down Route 2 near Duncan donuts is misleading, possibly dangerously so.

Councilor Turcotte thanked Guerlain for his Blanchard Lot development idea. He noted the Cherry Blossom festival planned for the weekend of 25th at Montpelier High School.

14-114. The City Clerk advised the Councilors to expect to be contacted on several last minute liquor license renewal applications.

14-115. The City Manager noted that he had received an email from the city engineer cited by a previous speaker regarding Berlin Pond, noting that he had not been accurately quoted.

Mr. Fraser also referenced notices from the state on upcoming paving, the upcoming Planning Commission meetings upcoming, and the agreement to hire a new Planning Director, subject to the background check.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh moved the Council adjourn. Councilor Guerlain seconded. The motion carried unanimously at 11:10 PM.