

On Wednesday evening, December 14, 2011, the City Council Members met in the Council Chamber.

Present: Mayor Hooper; Council Members, Jarvis, Golonka, Hooper, Timpone, Sherman and Weiss; also City Manager Fraser.

Call to Order by the Mayor:

Mayor Hooper called the meeting to order at 7:00 P.M.

11-308. General Business and Appearances:

Zachary Hughes, a resident of 3 Prospect Street, said he felt the property taxpayers burden and it is more realistic to keep essential services funded as much as possible. There has been a suggestion we could cut a little out of essential services. It is a big deal because if you cut police services you might cause more crime. Without that service safety might be compromised. He is in support of the City Manager to maintain the essential services. If you do not value the police and fire, that is your choice but he does value those services.

Polly Nichol read a letter regarding the Housing Trust Fund. Last spring the City Council established its major goals for the year and one of those goals was to work on overcoming the barriers to creating more housing in Montpelier. Several of us spent countless hours this summer coming up with possible ways to tackle those barriers. Montpelier currently has some of the important infrastructure in place necessary to implement those recommendations, including a staffed community development department and a small housing trust fund. That infrastructure is now threatened if the Council adopts two of the versions of the proposed city budget. Cutting a community development position along with the Housing Trust Fund will have a direct and negative effect on the city's ability to achieve its goal of overcoming barriers to housing in Montpelier. Creating more housing in our city can serve as a powerful tool to help stabilize our taxes along with our water and sewer charges. We all know that a relatively small number of property owners bear the cost of underutilized infrastructure including our schools and water and sewage systems. Spreading these costs over more properties makes fiscal sense that can only be achieved if we add more housing. If the Council was serious when it set the goal of overcoming barriers to housing it makes no sense to cut funding for the tools necessary to achieve that goal. The last paragraph lists some of the projects that have received Housing Trust Fund money, i.e., River Station Condos, the Bianchi Block on Barre Street and now the Montpelier Senior Center Building. It also helped some households become homeowners. Those residents who weren't

here before are paying taxes, using city services, and many of them have kids in the schools. A community such as Montpelier with excess capacity it makes no sense to cut funding for the infrastructure that is so essential to meeting the city's goal of more housing. We urge you to reject this short sighted approach. It is signed by the Reverend Rebecca Clark, Rick DeAngelis, Jim Libby, Jack McCullough, Amos Meacham and herself.

Richard DeAngelis, the Town Service Officer, said his responsibility is to monitor and respond to emergency and social service needs on behalf of the town. In that capacity over the last several years what he has seen as the number one underlying factor contributing to those needs in the town is the lack of decent and affordable housing. The measures that Polly spoke about in her letter about the community development position and also the Housing Trust Fund are very tangible ways that we can respond to those needs in our community. He just wants to underscore how important that is to our most vulnerable citizens.

Casey Walsh spoke of an incident he was involved in with the Montpelier police department.

Jim Libby from the Housing Task Force said as far as he knows there are only three communities in the state, and Montpelier is one of them, that has a Housing Trust Fund. Burlington and Brattleboro are the other two communities. These are tough budget times but this is a good investment from a financial, social and community perspective. The folks who worked on the funding for 58 Barre Street would say this has been a key factor in terms of leveraging other funds and particularly when the federal funds for affordable housing are getting smaller. Those communities that can demonstrate they are willing to invest their tax dollars in affordable housing will have a competitive advantage, say nothing of the 30 homes they have helped create and all of the other positive community results.

Ken Russell who has been serving as Interim Community Development Specialist said he wishes them luck in making good decisions on the budget. He really liked working on the Barriers to Housing Committee and hopes the trust fund stands. It is a very important tool. He thinks their office is a dynamic part of city government.

11-309. Consideration of the Consent Agenda

- a) Consideration of a "Declaration of Official Intent of City of Montpelier to Reimburse Certain Expenditures from Proceeds of Indebtedness" for the District Heat Project. City Attorney Paul Giulinau suggests that a reimbursement resolution be in place before any project costs are paid.

- b) (Council tabled this item at their December 7th meeting, requesting further information.)
- c) Consideration of Corrections to the 2011 Grand List (Errors & Omissions) as provided by the City Assessor's Office.
- d) Consideration of executing documents necessary to set the annual limit for the City's Health Reimbursement Arrangement. A copy of the "Summary of Material Modification:" is attached; Council is being asked to sign the "Formal Record of Action" and authorize the City Manager to sign the "Health Reimbursement Agreement Amendment."
- e) Consideration of becoming the Liquor Control Commission for the purpose of acting on the following:
 - 1. No applications as of "press time."
- f) Payroll and Bills
 - None.

Motion was made by Council Member Sherman, seconded by Council Member Hooper to approve the consent agenda. The vote was 6-0, motion carried unanimously.

Council Member Weiss said the "Declaration of Official Intent" was tabled at the previous meeting. This is a legal document and he is afraid there won't be any reference in the minutes of tonight's meeting that they approved it. Council Member Weiss moved that the Declaration of Official Intent be removed from the table and approved. Council Member Golonka seconded the motion.

Mayor Hooper called for a vote on the motion. The vote was 6-0, motion carried unanimously.

11-310 Setting of "approximate times" for the following agenda items.

The City Council Members set approximate times for each agenda item and upon a motion duly made and seconded by Council Members Weiss and Jarvis it was approved on a vote of 6 to 0.

11-311. Presentation of the *2011 Way to Go* “Carbon Cup.”

- a) Tom Horn, from the Vermont Energy Investment Corporation (VEIC) is making this presentation to the City for its efforts to encourage participation, save energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transportation during the *Way to Go Week* (May 16-20, 2011).
- b) He will also give an award for participation to National Life, many of whose participants are Montpelier residents.
- c) Recommendation: Receive award.

One of Tom Horn's roles is to manage the Way to Go Program which is an awareness program to get people out of their cars and try other means of commuting to work or wherever they may go. It is very pleasing for him tonight to be able to present two awards to the Montpelier community. The first award goes to National Life and they get a participation award with the Governor's signature. National Life has been a great partner in Way to Go. They are a large employer, and for them to win a participation award is a big deal. It takes a lot of people in a large company to get the percentages up to win it. The second award is the Carbon Cup. This was presented to a community, a small business and a large business only for three aspects of participation. One is the level of participation, which is basically how many people signed up. The second element is how long they signed up for. It's the level of engagement. The third is what was the per capita carbon reduction during that week? They had a lot of help from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, National Life, GMTA and other groups. The Carbon Cup is a big deal. Montpelier is the first inaugural community to win the Carbon Cup, and the competition was intense. They had over 180 towns in Vermont participating which is over 75 percent of the towns. They had 50 towns outside of Vermont participating.

Mayor Hooper accepted the Carbon Cup on behalf of the City of Montpelier.

11-312. Consideration of an appointment to the City's Conservation Commission.

- a) There has been an unfilled seat on this board since Anthony Irrapino stepped down approximately a year ago.
- b) Alex Hoffmeier has indicated that he is very interested in serving on the Conservation Commission and former Chair, Kris Hammer, wrote that “Alex would be a great asset to the Commission.”

- c) Recommendation: Meet Mr. Hoffmeier; appointment to fill the unexpired 4-year term until June, 2012.

Mr. Hoffmeier said he has lived in Montpelier for three years. He has a background in environmental science, natural resource management and landscape planning and design. He thought this would be a great opportunity to use his skills and knowledge in a great town.

Motion was made by Council Member Sherman, seconded by Council Member Timpone to appoint Alex Hoffmeier to fill the unexpired term on the Conservation Commission that ends June, 2012. The vote was 6-0, motion carried unanimously.

11-313. Establish City Council's Budget Priorities

Mayor Hooper said she feels their obligation is first and foremost with the health, safety and welfare of the community of Montpelier and fire, police and public works form those core services. She also asked questions about whether or not it was possible to review how we offer some of those services.

Council Member Weiss asked what services are core to the work of the city government. His answer is the key service is the management of city government and it encompasses the very important aspects and components of Montpelier's population. This city is a business with financial operations bordering on \$50 million annually with a payroll of some 100 persons. It is one of the largest businesses in Washington County. Yet, it operates without either a business or a strategic plan. Is there an alternative way to provide these services? The management of this city is defined by the City Charter. In so doing it gives prime authority to the position of the City Manager with less authority going to the Mayor and even less authority going to the Council. A start to considering an alternative way in the management of the city is to review and revise the charter to enable the city in making parity between and among the Council, the Mayor and the Manager. In so doing the services wanted and needed within the city will be analyzed and appropriate decisions made. Should property taxes support these services or should they consider alternative revenue sources? Property taxes and fees will continue to be the major sources of city services. It can be supplemented by other revenue sources, such as the state contribution in lieu of taxes. However, supplemental revenue sources aren't permanent. They are dependent upon the whims of state sources.

Council Member Jarvis said the core is services that are offered in all municipalities in Vermont. She had broken it down into four rings: Emergency Response and Basic Public Works, the second ring tranquility professional management and

responsible government with professional land use regulations. The third ring quality of life issues and the fourth ring contributions to outside agencies.

Council Member Sherman said in terms of core services it seems we operate as a balance system and all of the parts belong. Certainly, public safety and public works are critical parts as well as land use planning and zoning. We couldn't get along without administration and couldn't get along without infrastructure. Those are the biggest pieces. In this balance she sees there is a critical place and need for community services. The balance needs to be maintained. Possibly the whole budget could be reduced or shrunk but she doesn't see that any of the parts can be eliminated. The community services are the long term ones included in the budget. Closely related to public safety is the Justice Center. It's preventive but connected to safety. She thinks the 3rd of July celebration is vital and wouldn't cut those out. The smaller budgets will be hit hardest by 2 to 5 percent cuts but the cuts need to be shared because it is the balance that makes the city the vibrant place we all want to live.

Council Member Hooper said they need a sustainable budget and he doesn't know what that means as far as personnel. Sustainable obviously has to do with how big our grand list is, how many people living in town, and we would be cutting off our nose to spite our face if we reduced our investment in growing the city because it isn't big enough to sustain where it is now. The Justice Center is a wonderful thing but it is a state responsibility. He loves the city for its park, trees and events they sustain and he hopes they can continue to keep those.

Council Member Golonka said ultimately the city can't be all things to everyone and they have tried to do that in a lot of areas. He thinks efficient delivery of services through our regionalization efforts with municipalities will help. The idea of mutual aid is not fair to the city of Montpelier. Outside communities should spend more for the benefit of having a full-time fire, police and ambulance up and ready.

Council Member Timpone said what they don't want to lose which is what they all care about for Montpelier but at the same time we need to have a sustainable community to live in. Their property taxes are too high. It is finding that balance which she isn't sure will be done in one budget cycle. We need to take a hard look at the outside agencies. It is going to be hard between sustainability and keeping the community we want and love.

Mayor Hooper said with the outside agencies over the past several years we set a policy at the beginning of the budgeting process which has been where we will put the outside agencies in our budgets provided they don't ask for additional money. It is a cost containment measure. If an agency requests to be funded at a higher

level we require them to petition back on the ballot and ask if the voters would support it. We have kept virtually everything level funded. She spoke about looking for reductions in the core service areas or continuing the pressure the Council has been working on to regionalize services with fire, police and ambulance. Are you interested in looking for the deep cuts that have been suggested within this budget cycle or are you interested in continuing strategy of how to pull down the costs over time?

Council Member Sherman said they need to look at this and if they try to accomplish it all in one year it's going to be very painful. Regionalization is important. The suggestion of looking at regional dispatch sounds like a good move and shows a movement in the right direction.

Council Member Weiss said regionalization is a key but we need to start regionalization on the outside communities that are utilizing services and costing this city expenses, and unless they pay their fair share we ought not to be providing those services to them. He doesn't think a 3 percent cut across the board is a deep cut. The Senior Center ought to be imposing or requesting fees from every community whose citizens use the center. When the Justice Center makes their presentation more than 50 percent of their services are going to non-Montpelier residents. Those communities should be paying for this. That's a part of regionalization.

Council Member Timpone asked how we get them to pay.

Mayor Hooper sent the Council a memo saying the areas she would like to look at in the consolidation of services with Barre City. If that is not possible, look at dispatching services during low volume time and sending it back to the state. Also look at the consolidation of police, fire and emergency services with Barre during the low volume times. She wonders if there is an ability for the two cities to put their heads together to figure out a way to do this.

City Manager Fraser said he believed the two Police Chiefs have talked and were looking at doing things together but it does require other members of the region as well. It is important to note that when we talk about dispatch we speak for 16 other communities who we are already providing regional dispatch. Then there is Berlin and Barre Town who are in our region that complete the picture and are certainly geographically situated. There is interest from Police Chief Facos and Chief Bombardier to lay something out.

Mayor Hooper said Alan suggested we continue reaching out to other communities.

Council Member Weiss said they should talk about the 1 percent tax for local options. A gentleman back here indicates we could get \$750,000 a year from local options taxes is revenue that needs to be considered.

Council Member Hooper said he has been opposed to the local options tax since he got here. He is much less opposed to it and perhaps in favor of it now. He still sees deficiencies in it. It is still more aggressive than a property tax and a kind of hidden tax. It's not great but it does go towards taxing some other people for the services they use and he would support it at this time.

Council Member Weiss said the question becomes, what do they do with that \$750,000? There is one proposal to reduce taxes and another proposal to commit all of that money to improving the infrastructure of the city. The idea has merit but they have to know in advance where that money is going.

Council Member Timpone said the only way she would support it would be if they had clear policy guidelines on how it is going to be structured and what it is going to pay for.

- 11-314. Complete review of Operating Budgets for Administration, Community Justice Center, Cemetery, Planning & Development, Parks and Senior Center.

Green Mount Cemetery;

Patrick Healy, Superintendent said the cemetery budget is reviewed, scrutinized and adjusted by five taxpaying publicly elected Montpelier residents before it even gets to Bill's and Sandy's desks. Those five residents are the elected Cemetery Commissioners. Cemeteries are a basic but often overlooked core services to communities since the beginning of time. Calais has a municipal cemetery. There are 1,900 cemeteries in the state of Vermont, most of which are owned by the town. Cost saving measures are taken throughout the years – the biggest one is using the Corrections labor crew. The potential savings or value added is \$100,000 a year. Lately they have been using a work camp crew out of St. Johnsbury. It is \$1,000 a week and they are paying \$23,000 a year and it works out to about \$5 per hour per man. The cemetery has been using a work crew since 1981, and they may have been one of the pilot projects for the Corrections Department. If they were to look at privatization, they are talking at least \$25 per hour per man. Other cost saving measures are their diversity. When he first started they just had lots for full caskets and now they have them for cremations and combinations. There is even an area in the woods with no grass to cut. They have also diversified with the city as far as mowing parks and he plows parking lots for the city for an income. They position share with the Department of Public Works and they are also sharing equipment. Their mini excavator is presently down on the bike path doing the

finished work on the flood mitigation project. Other things the Commissioners have done throughout the years is they don't give any bonuses to their employees except their shared position is a unionized position as of last July. There is a merit bonus. He doesn't receive any insurance payoff and doesn't take any insurance from the city. They no longer have cell phones. They found the cell phones were not a tool for the public but a tool for a few of the funeral directors to reach him. In their situation where the public is not dealing with cemeteries on a regular basis the cell phone just became a tool for a few businesses so they got rid of it.

Council Member Golonka asked how often they reviewed the fees. It looks like the revenue is a little static and it has been that way for a couple of years.

Superintendent Healy said they review them every two years.

Council Member Golonka said the grave openings are down to zero in the budget.

Superintendent Healy said they are now splitting them up between cremation and casket burial rates. When he started with the cemetery 25 years ago they only had one cremation and now they are doing 60 to 70 percent cremations. They are in competition with other cemeteries around – Berlin, Middlesex, and the Veteran's Cemetery. When the Veteran's Cemetery opened they probably lost 10 percent of their business. If you were to go up to the Berlin Corner Cemetery past Applebee's way back in the 70's that was all country. When he started here they were selling four graves for the price of one grave at Green Mount Cemetery. People are shopping for plots.

Council Member Weiss told Patrick that roughly half of his operating budget comes from the city. What about charging non-Montpelier residents more for services than you charge Montpelier residents? Why couldn't it apply here?

Superintendent Healy said it could. The issue is the definition of resident. Did they ever pay taxes in Montpelier? Did they retire to Florida and now they are a resident of Florida but pay taxes in Montpelier for 25 years and come back. Do you say your brother is a resident in Montpelier so can he buy the lot for you and transfer it?

Mayor Hooper asked what were the consequences of a 10 percent cut to the cemetery budget.

Superintendent Healy said they would strongly look at labor and it would be either his assistant's position or cutting back his position. It would be a drastic cut of \$10,000 or \$20,000. They would look at everything from cutting his position back

and also closing the cemetery for a certain amount of time each year. Most of their costs are fixed and not discretionary.

Community Justice Center:

Yvonne Byrd, Community Justice Center Director introduced her staff, Alfred Mills and Judy Gibson; John Gorczyk who is the Chair of the Citizens Advisory Board, and Marion Drew who volunteers with two COSAs and the Reparative Board. She handed out a memo to the Council along with revenue and expense figures. The mission is to promote and provide restorative responses to conflict in crime. It is here in our communities where we feel the impact of such events. For re-entry services currently this fiscal year they are funded to serve 10 people coming out of jail and next year it will be 8 people. They are finding the people they work with are benefitting from having a group of three people from the community to volunteer and meet with them on a regular basis to make the best decisions possible. Their observation is they are successful in building lives and not committing other offenses. They continue to have reparative boards with six meetings a month with potential to serve 70 new clients each year. The number they have each year goes up and down depending on the judge and time of year. Seventy-four percent of the people who have been accepted completed the program successfully. The reparative boards are seeing people at various stages of their journey through the criminal justice system and they have had people who have been convicted of an offense and then as part of their sentence being asked to go back to the community and meet with folks to talk about what they did and to address what contributed to the offending in the first place. Studies have shown it reduces their reoffending. In the past year they have worked out a protocol with the court to allow them to work with people who are sentenced but their sentence is to come to the reparative board as opposed to being on probation. They have been having an increasing number of referrals from the Police Department for their pre-charge program, our restorative justice alternative. This is especially true for teenagers and young adults who are doing relatively low offenses but left unaddressed would ramp up to be a problem. This way these young people can have a learning opportunity as opposed to a punishment and avoid having a record that might impact their chances of succeeding in the future.

With all of their programs they are committed to victim support reaching out to crime victims to offer information referrals and community support. They always invite victims to the table and communicate with them. They also have done and will continue to be conveners of community dialogue around issues related to crime and conflict. On the prevention level, which is also used as an intervention for people who have committed offenses, they continue to offer the insights into conflict class they created at least three times a year.

She gave out statistics of the service they have provided to Montpelier and different towns.

Council Member Golonka asked why should Montpelier bear the burden of the state push down of mandated services and now you are asking for a subsidy from the City of Montpelier again. In an era where they are looking to cut 3 to 5 percent in our core services why should the Justice Center get 44 percent increase? He can't justify that increase.

Community Justice Center Director Byrd said one of the handouts sheds a little light on that. The time when this budget was put together is way earlier than when they secure the grant funding so it is a forecast. She is really busy securing additional funding and she thinks their expenses will come out less.

John Gorczyk added they met with the Department of Corrections and Bill Fraser to look at the question of regionalization. The Legislature is looking fairly aggressively at the problems they have right now with the cost of corrections and the fact that the incarcerated population has more than tripled in the last 15 or 20 years despite crime being relatively flat or even down. Montpelier is part of the state and the fact that the state is now spending \$130 million on corrections is a problem that trickles down to the City of Montpelier. The state recognizes that incarceration is quite often a very ineffective and sometimes counterproductive response to crime. We know that the restorative programs and the reparative programs have a 22 percent reduction in re-offense rate regardless of offense type so it is important from a public policy perspective to try to make greater utilization of that. It is clear that the Legislature is going to be looking at alternative ways when dealing with this issue of crime and justice. It is becoming clearer that the Legislature has an investment in alternative ways of dealing with this issue. The justice centers represent probably one of their best options. It's not going to go away and they will continue to invest in it. When they met with the department they were trying to figure out how to expand the reparative program county wide recognizing that some towns don't have the capacity or the volume to justify a full blown justice center. They asked them to put together a proposal to allow us to take on responsibility for administering reparative programs in some other communities in Washington County. They put together a budget and gave it to them that would cover the operating costs associated with administering those services. In order for them to do this they are aware of the fact that the taxpayers of Montpelier are concerned about tax rates in this town and if you want Montpelier to take on that responsibility Montpelier needs to cover more than just the cost of doing so. They need an incentive to do so, and that incentive needs to be cash that starts to reduce the city contribution to this program. Having said that he doesn't think it would be a good idea to reduce the city's contribution to zero because it is important that Montpelier has a stake in the game. When they started

the whole concept of justice centers it was important that they tie into municipal government so there could be a democratic process to look at the desirability, viability and using this approach to justice in lieu of the traditional criminal justice system. This is a good debate to have. It is important to recognize the communities have a stake in conflict and dispute resolution and to simply move the problem to the state and let the state deal with it in a system that is primarily punitive and doesn't address the needs of victims and is not effective with the needs of the offender either

Mayor Hooper asked Mr. Gorczyk if he could speculate on what our police might be doing if we weren't running emergency services. What are they preventing from having happen in our community?

Mr. Gorczyk replied what they are providing is a community based response for the police. The concept was that when something happens that is bad who do the police have to call? Where do they get help from? The only resource they have is arrest and referral to the state's attorney for prosecution. If there is no phone number and no one for them to look for an alternative response they will continue to use the state's attorneys, arrest and citation. You are seeing mental health increasingly involved. They have more access to mental health street workers to provide a social service. Chief Bombardier decided to hire someone who is going to wear a white coat instead of a blue coat to work the streets. The Montpelier Police Department similarly is looking for alternative ways to respond to the problems they are confronted with day in and day out, whether it is a mental health worker or a mediation program or community reparative board. It becomes a way of solving the problems rather than just passing them on to the next layer in the bureaucracy.

Council Member Weiss said there are two programs and they total in excess of \$230,000. When he looks at the line items there is no reimbursement to the city for rent, heat, and electricity. Should there be?

Mayor Hooper said they are a department of city government.

Paul Carnahan said all they said the city is paying for is the conflict assistance programs.

Judy Gibson said she was referring to the things that are specifically Montpelier based.

Community Justice Director Byrd said they have made some commitments to the city that certain services they will just deliver to city residents such as the conflict assistance program, special request for facilitation services, etc.

Mr. Carnahan asked if Montpelier money went to some of the other programs as well.

Community Justice Director Byrd replied yes.

Linda Setchel said she wonders if she has more hard data about how much this is helping the city's crime rate. She would assume over time the need for a police force should be reduced if this program is effective.

Ben Huffman said he has always felt that the term "community" was a nice sounding word but he isn't sure it describes much. It doesn't correspond to a municipal boundary and the fact that this group is providing services to communities it has is evidence of that. He agrees with Mr. Gorczyk that this is a very important program and it is important to foster citizen participation in this process from the areas where perpetrators and the victims live but he doesn't know that sort of commitment by communities is defined by whether it is in a budget or not. Secondly, the larger issue before this group is that we have a host of such activities in Montpelier which are servicing people throughout the area who don't pay for it. He would suggest the bigger issue that should be taken to the Legislature would be to figure out a fair way so the people who are buying in financially are actually doing so on an equal basis. Is there an opportunity to bring this up explicitly?

Mr. Gorczyk said they brought it up with the Department of Corrections when they talked about possibly administering, supervising, training and helping to create a reparative capacity in other communities within the county. The funding that came to Montpelier had to be reflective in the fact that this isn't Montpelier's essential responsibility.

Montpelier Senior Center:

Jana Clar, Director of the Senior Center; Johanna Nichols, bookkeeper at the Senior Center; Elizabeth Dodge, Chair of the Senior Advisory Board; and Bev Hill, Assistant City Manager, appeared before the Council to present this budget. They explained the fee structure for the different programs. She reported they have lost membership over the past year.

Jana Clar detailed the Senior Center budget and how they would reduce the operating costs by approximately 7 ½ percent. Why does Montpelier need a senior center? They promote healthy aging, lifelong learning and physical activity as well as affordable options for all seniors. They are a center for connecting with community resources and referral to other appropriate community partners. They recently helped a local senior who had become homeless to get back on her feet.

The population in Montpelier is aging and is going to be increasing. They have a large number of program options in their classes. There are 9 different yoga classes and four different foreign language classes, book discussions, current events and writing classes. They also offer discounted memberships and privileges at some of the local gym facilities and discounted bowling. They offer free events to the public and are working at increasing their media outreach.

They are working hard to develop some policies and procedures. They have revamped the capital campaign and have \$60,000 left to raise. They are confident they will be able to meet the capital campaign goal by the end of the fiscal year. They are also doing more grant writing. In FY 2013 they will be moving back to 58 Barre Street. They are going to continue to focus on program development and increasing their options for younger and working seniors and the possible meal program.

She reviewed some of the cost savings. They have reduced their administrative management line item which accounted for a lot of the work Bev was doing for the Senior Center. They have revenue changes which she outlined for the Council. They are collecting some rental fees. They will be increasing fees for members' dues, meals cost and use of game room. They receive appropriations from Berlin, East Montpelier, Middlesex, Calais and Worcester.

Under contributions they have been collecting scholarship funds and doing a sliding fee for trips and classes. They are pursuing memorial gifts and on January 28th there will be a benefit dinner and silent auction.

Bev Hill reported that the Community National Bank will give the capital campaign \$30,000 at the rate of \$10,000 per year over the next three years. It is their largest gift to date.

Richard Sheir from Loomis Street said they have gone over this for years on the contributions of \$1,000. As a working senior every program the center has is during working hours. We are talking about a \$50,000 subsidy for the other towns.

Parks and Tree Board

Geoff Beyer, Parks Director and Tree Warden and members of the Tree Board appeared before the Council and presented their budget. They have worked hard to provide services efficiently. If they cut too much it really cuts into the services they can provide and how they leverage their services. It costs approximately \$44.00 from the average homeowner to support the parks budget. If they were to cut that over 10 percent he loses a VISTA or AmeriCorps member and the whole formula changes. The Tree Board has focused as a volunteer board for about 18 years on downtown trees and they have been a tremendous resource in planning

and grant writing as well as starting a tree nursery. They help with pruning and planting the downtown trees. They receive a budget of \$2,000 a year to help maintain the tree nursery for the downtown trees. They have the Tree City USA application which makes them eligible for grants. The maintenance of the downtown trees has been carried at least 80 percent by the Tree Board. Tree management has focused on removing tree hazards to increase tree safety and pruning street trees. They have also been working on doing a tree inventory so they can be aware of tree hazards around the city.

In the parks program there is an increase in the summer budget for AmeriCorps. They have a lot of older equipment they are trying to maintain and the repair and maintenance costs from Public Works has gone up during the last 10 years.

Mayor Hooper asked if there was data on the use of the parks.

Parks Director Beyer said it is pretty solid. The number hasn't gone down. They manage over 400 acres made up of over 15 miles of trails, over 7 acres of lawns and 60 miles of road to take care of. North Branch River Park is as big as Hubbard Park and there are five pocket parks they also maintain.

City Manager Fraser asked if he had any idea how many nonresidents use the parks.

Parks Director Beyer said with Hubbard Park it is probably 30 percent nonresident use but there are more in-town regular users than there are out of town people. North Branch is more like 90 percent residents.

Planning Department

Gwen Hallsmith, Planning Director reviewed her budget with the Council. Their budget is all staff. Over the past five years they have accomplished a lot. They have updated the Master Plan, raised grants for the city, redoing the Senior Center. They are working on the district energy project, different grants and programs like the REACH Project and Mazer grants. When you read through the Barriers to Housing Report a lot of what needs to be done rests on the Planning Department's shoulders. When you look at the whole picture they really try to build the social and infrastructure of the city that helps support people when times are hard. Now we are facing hard times and things like the community development programs give people loans if they need emergency repairs to their homes. Cutting the safety net in times when things are hard isn't always the most prudent way to go. Cities and governments are safety nets for people in economic hard times. Even though it looks tempting to save a little money by cutting back on government services she thinks Bill has very clearly made the case that the people who are hurt the most are the ones who can least afford it, and that is especially true in their department.

In the future they expect to be doing another review of their fees. They are still moving forward with some of the major development projects and there are others being proposed. The Economic Development Committee is gearing up and looking at things like an incubator and different types of ways to revitalize the downtown. All of those would be eligible for community development block grant funds which is one of the major things they work with in their office. They are also in the middle of a major zoning change and trying to increase the entire community in that change because it is a major revision. They have used a municipal planning grant to look at the boundaries within the zoning districts and redrafted those boundaries for the first time in 20 years. They have streamlined the permitting process in the office. Now it is uncommon for people to walk out the same day with a permit and that wasn't the case six years ago.

They have redesigned the web site and it is time to look at that again. The last web redesign cost \$20,000 and it will be at least that much to do it again.

Council Member Golonka said the other purchased services are a 270 percent jump. What is that for?

Planning Director Hallsmith replied it is the planning software. It is now on hold.

Linda Setchell said the Planning Department administers community development block grants and she asked how is what they do different than what the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission does in administering those?

Planning Director Hallsmith replied they do them for Montpelier. The Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission does it for the smaller towns that don't have administrative staff. They aren't a community development agency.

Ms. Setchell said she doesn't know where to find out about all of the projects and what their status is. Where is that information?

City Manager Fraser explained where she could get that information.

Ms. Setchell asked where the information about how long these projects have been going on is. What are the costs to date over these projects?

Council Member Sherman asked if they had to cut their budget 3 or 5 percent what would happen.

Planning Director Hallsmith said 3 percent would have to come out of staff and people would lose their jobs, or she would have to take a \$15,000 pay cut. It is the people that are the least able to afford losing their jobs who are the first on the

chopping block and she has trouble with that. They are also the least expensive. The VISTA are volunteers in service to America and live in poverty and this is one of the rare jobs in our region that young people can get that is a professional track job and it is an important one that the city should keep because it's not a big expense and does an enormous amount of good in terms of keeping in touch with people in the city.

Mayor Hooper asked how many permits they issue a year.

Planning Director Hallsmith replied between 200 and 300.

Mayor Hooper said this is really tough on a lot of people whose lives are involved but it a process they have to go through and the Council's obligation.

City Manager Fraser said they are in the process right now of bringing the Building Inspector to the Planning Department. He felt this would be an improvement in customer service. It will be easier to have that shared information when you are sitting in the same office.

Mayor Hooper asked if it would be possible for Gwen to run the administrative officer. Would it be possible to combine those services?

Planning Director Hallsmith replied it is a full-time job. There is design review, floodplain management, and historic management.

Mayor Hooper asked if she could redesign or reorganize the department to reduce staff and still provide the services.

Planning Director Hallsmith replied no.

Council Member Weiss said it's not personnel but programs. What programs could be eliminated from planning and development? He doesn't see assisting those with the greatest need a planning and development function at all. Let's also look at programs.

Mayor Hooper said one of the things she has heard strongly this past month is an area to increase our services is in economic development and housing. There isn't the capacity within the current staffing to consolidate what they are doing so we can dedicate their work to something else without diminishing the existing services.

Planning Director Hallsmith replied a lot of what they do already is economic development and housing. Right now what she considers an economic development project is the district heating project. Energy is a huge part of our

economy. As that moves into implementation she will have time to do other kinds of economic development projects. REACH was an economic development project.

11-313. Reports by City Council

Council Member Sherman reported she is going to run for Council again and will be circulating petitions.

Council Member Weiss reported he and Bev met with the county people and their budget will rise about \$50,000 going from \$439,000 to \$490,000, but if you divide the \$50,000 by the 20 communities and it is only \$2,500 but no one will know until January what their rate will be because it depends upon the equalized grand list which is set by the state. Bev Hill had told him the front steps of the Court House have to be replaced because they are in the middle of a law suit right now. That project will cost about \$35,000. The Union Elementary School periodically creates a traffic problem on School Street and the street coming down. One of the citizens called about it and the Police Chief and Public Works Director solved the problem. On Tuesday night the City of Barre agreed to put in its budget its share of the \$15,000 for regionalization.

Council Member Jarvis said the MDCA has a lot of energy and enthusiasm right now about all kinds of ideas to revitalize the downtown. She invited everyone to se come to First Night.

11-316. Mayor's Report

None.

11-317. Report by City Clerk-Treasurer

City Treasurer Hoyt said the Water and Sewer bills are due on Thursday, December 15th.

11-318. Status Reports by City Manager

City Manager Fraser said at next week's meeting they will be doing the police and fire budgets and talking about local options taxes and charter changes. Today the

city received our CLA percentage of 99.63 percent. This is higher than last year's so that should have a reduction of 1.8 cents on the school rate.

City Manager Fraser said they have been working on district heat contracts and hope to have it wrapped up by the end of the week.

Mayor Hooper said the goal is to have this resolved by December 23rd.

Adjournment:

After motion duly made and seconded by Council Members Weiss and Sherman the City Council adjourned at 11:10 P.M.

Transcribed by Joan Clack

Attest: _____
Charlotte L. Hoyt, City Clerk