

**Minutes of the Montpelier City Council Meeting
March 28, 2012
City Council Chambers, Montpelier City Hall**

In attendance: Mayor John Hollar (presiding), City Manager Bill Fraser, City Councilors Andy Hooper, Thierry Guerlain, Alan Weiss, Angela Timpone, Sarah Jarvis and Tom Golonka. City Clerk John Odum acted as Secretary of the Meeting.

Mayor Hollar called meeting to order at 6:59 PM.

12-083. At 7:00, under General Business, City Manager Fraser took a moment to recognize Assistant Director of Public Works Tom McCardle for his 30 years of service to the city and presented him with a pin in commemoration of that service. Mr. McCardle then took a moment to express his appreciation.

12-084. Councilor Weiss moved that the Consent Agenda be approved. Councilor Guerlain seconded. Councilors Timpone and Jarvis expressed their view that the consent agenda should be read through before approval for the benefit of the public. Councilors Guerlain and Weiss noted that the consent agenda was available for viewing before meetings via the city's website. Councilor Jarvis urged the Council not to assume all citizens have web access. The mayor weighed in against reading the entire agenda. The Consent Agenda was not read through.

At 7:03, the Consent Agenda was unanimously approved.

12-085. Item 4 was taken up. One of the two applicants for appointment as an alternate to the EC Fiber Governing Board, Dan Jones, addressed the Council on his expertise and qualifications. City Manager Fraser confirmed there is another applicant who was not present.

Councilor Hooper gave an update on the EC Fiber board's activities, and noted that Montpelier would not be included in the early stages of the coverage plan.

Councilor Golonka moved that Dan Jones be appointed to the position of alternate member of the EC Fiber Governing Board for Montpelier. Councilor Timpone seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.

12-086. At 7:07, the Council moved to agenda item 5, the discussion of City Council goals and priorities for 2012-2013. The mayor invited comments and input from those members of the public in attendance.

Bill Merrylees spoke, representing the Bike Committee. He urged the Council to prioritize making Montpelier a more bikeable city, noting the recommendations contained within the Master Plan. He also urged the Council to create a "Complete Streets Committee" and noted the public support for this goal revealed in a survey. Mr. Merrylees passed out a list of his recommendations to the Council.

David Beatty of Northfield Street advocated for increased citizen involvement in the budget process, suggesting citizens be brought in to focus on specific departments or challenges.

Eric Gilbertson indicated he has seen Montpelier change for the better over his 36 years. He stressed the importance of downtown physically and economically, and noted that visitors to the city are always impressed.

Didi Brush encouraged the Council to reach out to the public for input on the budget. She agreed with the previous speaker that visitors are consistently impressed by the city, but was not confident about its long-term “vibrancy.” Brush also expressed concerns with the downtown’s empty storefronts and reports that the Farmer’s Market may leave downtown. She expressed the opinion that “getting things done” in Montpelier was more complicated than was appropriate for a city of only 8000.

Ethan Atkin of Clarendon Avenue indicated he was angered by what he described as an inadequate response by the Council to citizens’ requests for budget reductions in the recent budget cycle. He noted with frustration that what were described as “core” budget items were not examined for reductions, while smaller “discretionary” items were. Atkin sees those smaller items as valuable. Atkin asked that the Council enter the next budget process with an attitude that smaller budgets are possible.

Larry Myers of 26 Liberty Street spoke about the budget, urging the Council not simply to look at cutting spending, but to look at potential revenues as well.

Phil Dodd asked the Council to think about a different way to handle the “outside agencies,” noting that they present a challenge. He noted there are towns inside and outside Vermont that have created committees that review those sorts of financial requests as a first step. Before getting as far as becoming a ballot article. Dodd also suggested the formation of a citizen committee to look at budgets in similarly sized cities for comparison. He also noted that the City’s goal from a year ago of 500 new housing units in 5 years was “ambitious,” noting the challenges in the marketplace. Dodd also indicated his support for economic development and the support of new businesses.

Rebecca Davison spoke of her concern about the affordability of housing and the potential cultural impacts. She would like the City to look again at encouraging low cost housing development in Sabin’s Pasture, as well as the potential to convert more downtown space.

Bill Brown of 33 Foster Street expressed his opinion that we should be proud of Montpelier because it’s walkable, bikeable and has a conservation ethic. He encouraged the Council to continue with the District Heat project, and that it would make Montpelier more appealing.

He felt that “prudent and well thought through” revenue solutions for city revenues were fine, and said that he believes the City Government has been doing a good job.

At 7:35, The Mayor indicated the Council would move on to item 6. When Councilor Timpone then inquired about planning for a Goals and Priorities work session, The Mayor returned to item 5.

The nature of the Goals and Priorities work session was discussed. Councilor Timpone felt strongly that a focused, roundtable discussion format, rather than a regular Council meeting format, would be more conducive to progress. The mayor indicated his preference for a more format maximizing public engagement. Councilor Golonka agreed with Councilor Timpone in principle, but suggested a working group format could also be made public and televised (Councilor Timpone agreed). The merits of the Council Chambers versus the Police Station meeting room were discussed. Councilor Weiss noted that the body was on record supporting a 2-part process.

Mayor Hollar was amenable to suggestions that the discussion be at the smaller table in the Council Chambers, and possibly facilitated. He also clarified that he had envisioned planning each phase of the Goals discussion as specific allotments of time in upcoming regularly scheduled meetings.

The City Manager indicated that the questionnaire that had previously been used would be used again and Councilor Golonka’s inquiry.

Councilor Weiss expressed disapproval at focusing on “goals,” preferring measurable objectives that create firm benchmarks. Mayor Hollar agreed in principle. Councilor Jarvis noted that an expression of goals is helpful to City Manager Fraser, who indicated he appreciated the policy guidance.

The Council concluded (unofficially) that the work session would be a facilitated block of time in a regular council meeting, and could be at the smaller table.

12-087.

At 7:45, the Mayor moved the Council to item 6 on the agenda (consideration of the draft report on the Gallison Hill/US Route 2 intersection). Tom McCardle (who took a moment to introduce his wife and son, who were in attendance), was joined by Steve Gladczuk (from the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission) and Jody Carriere (from engineering firm Lamoureux and Dickinson) at the front table, where they displayed a power point accompaniment to the written report.

The group reviewed the current status of the intersection, including concerns they have heard on right of way issues and the current traffic rate. Councilor Golonka asked about the change in traffic during summer months, but that data was not available.

The group then went over the three proposed alternatives in the report and their relative impacts, both positive and negative (alternative 1 was to do nothing, while the other alternatives involved possibly changing the “geometry” of the intersection (which would impact the planned bike lane) and adding a turn lane, while another alternative would add a traffic light.)

Councilor Golonka was concerned about impacting the area businesses with extensive road work, particularly given the recent experience of building the nearby roundabout. McCardle stated he believed the impact would be less widespread and smaller in magnitude.

Discussion continued on how such construction projects have been prioritized, and to what extent they can and should be reprioritized, based on other needs. Councilor Jarvis noted that the Gallison Hill area is the town's only Industrial Park, and that it should receive due consideration.

At 8:21, Councilor Weiss moved that the Council receive the US Route 2/Gallison Hill Road intersection study. Councilor Timpone seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

- 12-088. The Mayor then moved the Council to Item 7, the first of a two-part public hearing process to consider six amendments to the City's Code of Ordinances in regards to parking. The City Manager took a few moments to describe the process of approving the changes, before Tom McCardle presented the six changes being proposed. He indicated the changes had been discussed by the Parking Committee in July of 2011, but they were pushed off because they were not urgent at that time.

McCardle's presentation detailed the parking changes proposed for specific parts of Bailey and Clarendon Avenues, Barre Street, Liberty Street, State Street, Towne Hill Road, and College Street. He indicated that letters had been sent to those affected in the neighborhoods.

Councilor Timpone noted that the traffic constriction on Liberty Street that the proposed parking change is meant to alleviate is exacerbated during winter months due to snow accumulation. Councilor Guerlain inquired as to who broached the issue on Liberty Street, to which Mr. McCardle replied that he had observed the situation himself.

Regarding the State Street changes, Councilor Timpone expressed concern about the bike lane, and Mr. McCardle indicated he could approach the issue in different ways. Councilor Guerlain wondered if moving the lanes of traffic to the River Side would open up more parking (McCardle indicated that it create further challenges).

Councilor Guerlain also inquired as to whether the proposed elimination of parking from the corner of College and Arsenal could be scaled back to one space from two. McCardle indicated that the guidelines for turning visibility called for the solution as proposed, but that it could be changed. Councilors Jarvis and Timpone expressed concerns about deviating from the guidelines. The disposition of the crosswalk, which extends into

Arsenal Drive a bit, was also discussed. McCardle indicated he could further study the matter. Councilor Guerlain indicated that the occupant of the house on the corner would also prefer a one-space reduction, rather than two.

The Mayor opened the discussion for public comment.

Ethan Atkin expressed concern over the proposal on parking between Dwinell and Redstone, and its impact on his business. Given that the change was intended to mitigate parking impacts during the legislative session, he wondered if other solutions – such as narrowing the amount of the year in which the restrictions were in place, or instituting a resident permit system – wouldn't be better. McCardle indicated he could look at those solutions, and also explained the rationale for restricting one side of the street over the other.

Mayor Hollar wondered if it wouldn't be more efficient for the Public Works Department to take public comments and incorporate them into the plans, rather than engaging in this type of public hearing process. McCardle replied that this was just the way it had previously been done.

Cathy Metz of Liberty Street felt the constricted lane slowing traffic was not necessarily a negative (Councilor Guerlain added he knew other residents who felt similarly). She also expressed concern about the impacts to school families of removing parking, and noted she had never seen an accident there.

Larry Myers agreed with Metz, calling the proposal "overkill." He also observed that the parking survey which indicated the Liberty parking ban would impact out of towners was done during daytime hours when residents could be working.

Gabrielle Dietz of Liberty Street agreed with the previous Liberty Street commenters, and noted that there was a bigger parking challenge facing the city that wasn't being addressed.

Barbara Conry, also of Liberty Street, felt that the Liberty Street restrictions would just push the parking problems elsewhere.

Councilor Weiss expressed concern about visibility when turning onto Barre Street from Hubbard Street. McCardle felt that they had addressed that problem, but would look at it. Councilor Weiss also expressed concern about traffic at Union Elementary. Weiss and McCardle alluded to a problem with Cedar Street traffic being impacted. McCardle indicated that they had worked with the school and police and had made progress.

Dave Bellini of Liberty Street concurred with the other Liberty Street residents speaking against the proposal, and hoped that a resident permit system would not be the solution. He also noted the need for elderly residents to park in front of their homes.

The Mayor again asked McCardle about the possibility of Public Works reaching out directly to the public for input. McCardle indicated he felt the need for guidance from the council, but indicated he would attempt to reach out.

The Mayor and Councilor Guerlain asked if the Liberty Street proposal could be taken off the table. McCardle indicated he had no objection.

At 9:12, Councilor Jarvis moved that the public hearing be closed, and that we set all except for the Liberty Street ordinances, proposal be set for a second reading in the second meeting in April. (Councilor Jarvis expressed a desire to allow Tom McCardle enough time to communicate with residents further). Councilor Timpone seconded. The motion was approved 5-1 (Councilor Weiss opposed).

12-089. The Mayor directed the meeting to item 8, Council Reports. Councilor Hooper indicated he had nothing to report.

Councilor Weiss had nothing to report.

Councilor Timpone indicated she had received several emails during the meeting regarding bike lanes and complete streets, and that she would forward them to the rest of the Council.

Councilor Jarvis offered congratulations to the Green Mountain Film Festival for a successful festival.

Councilor Golonka reported on the Regional Committee meeting he attended, indicating that Barre Town has approved a \$10,000 in their budget that only Town Meeting could reject. He is waiting to hear from the Berlin town board. Approximately \$40,000 has been identified. An allocation formula will need to be worked out.

Councilor Guerlain wondered if the Council could minimize the amount of paperwork that needed to be signed each meeting, particularly liquor and smoking licenses and catering permits. City Manager Fraser provided background on the process and indicated he would look into what the Council is required to sign. Councilor Jarvis wondered how much of a problem it is. Mayor Hollar agreed with Councilor Guerlain.

Councilor Guerlain also expressed displeasure at the late-arriving emails he received relating to this meeting. Fraser apologized and indicated he and the staff try to avoid that. Mayor Hollar expressed agreement with Councilor Guerlain.

Councilor Guerlain also expressed the opinion that road issues should be looked at more comprehensively than simply discussing parking.

12-090. Mayor Hollar reported that he has been working with the City Manager on the District Heating plan as per last meeting, and was optimistic.

Councilor Golonka indicated his concern about what sounded like less than full commitment for participation by the schools, based on Ken Jones' testimony last meeting. Councilor Timpone added that she believes that Jones' testimony was an imprecise representation of the will of the school board

- 12-091. At 9:25, the City Clerk reported that the charter change approved by voters at the recent Town Meeting was in progress at legislative Council. Councilor Weiss complimented the Clerk on the minutes from the previous meeting.
- 12-093 a. Councilor Jarvis broached the topic of the second April meeting date, which would normally fall on the 25th but conflicts have arisen. The Mayor asked for a show of hands, and the Council preferred the meeting be moved to the 18th.
- 12-092. The City Manager reported the progress on adjusting the District Heat plan in more detail.
- 12-093 b. At 9:27, Councilor Jarvis, citing statutory authorization, moved that the Council "enter executive session to discuss labor relation agreements with employees." Councilor Weiss seconded. The motion was approved unanimously, and the Council entered executive session.
- At 9:51, Councilor Weiss moved the Council come out of executive session. Councilor Timpone seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.
- Upon the Council's return, the Mayor noted that Councilor Guerlain would be the council's representative for fire union negotiations.
- At 9:52, Councilor Weiss moved to adjourn, Councilor Timpone seconded. The motion was unanimously approved.