

Minutes of the Montpelier City Council Meeting
May 8, 2013
Montpelier City Hall Council Chambers

In attendance: Mayor John Hollar (presiding), City Manager Bill Fraser, City Councilors Jessica Edgerly Walsh, Thierry Guerlain, Alan Weiss, Andy Hooper, Tom Golonka and Anne Watson. City Clerk John Odum acted as Secretary of the regular business portion of the meeting.

13-125. The goal setting session was called to order by Mayor Hollar at 5:30PM.

After a five minute break following the goals session, the mayor called the regular meeting to order at 7:38PM.

13-126. Councilor Weiss asked that item b of the consent agenda be removed for consideration. Councilor Hooper moved the remaining portion of the consent agenda for approval, seconded by Councilor Edgerly Walsh. The motion passed unanimously at 7:40.

13-128. The first public hearing for the proposed ordinance relating to the Downtown Improvement District and related assessment passed by voters on the 2013 Annual City Meeting ballot began at 7:41.

Sarah Jarvis and Phayvanh Luekhamhan (Montpelier Alive board member and executive director, respectively) were introduced by City Manager Fraser who provided background. Jarvis referred to the draft ordinance language, noting that it was an attempt to provide an appropriate role for the council, without putting it in a position requiring an excessive amount of direct management. She made note of the funding envisioned under the plan (the commensurate increase in PILOT payment from the assessment, and the expectation of receiving that increase and the time lag before it becomes available), in response to recent coverage in the Times Argus. Jarvis indicated that Montpelier Alive feels obliged to keep with the projected assessment level, noting that the city had agreed to help fill in any shortfall in the meantime.

The City Manager clarified that the city had allowed that any additional PILOT funds that may be available beyond what was anticipated this year (and up to the level of the anticipated shortfall) could be provided to Montpelier Alive. Councilor Golonka expressed concern that the ordinance language might preclude such an action. Fraser acknowledged the problem and suggested a language change to address the concern.

Councilor Weiss identified four areas of inquiry: 1) he expressed doubt that citizens were clear on the implications of the ballot article authorizing the district. 2) Citing the Montpelier Community Fund, he questioned why an ordinance was necessary for a DID administered by Montpelier Alive. 3) He felt that Montpelier Alive's bylaws may need modification to proceed with the DID. 4) He suggested that the ordinance be edited to remove specific direction to the governing board, so the board could be adaptable without having to change the ordinance.

Mayor Hollar agreed with the fourth point. Councilor Golonka was concerned that the board would be unwieldy. Luekhamhan indicated that the committee size was consistent with other Montpelier Alive boards.

The mayor closed the public hearing at 8:03.

Councilor Golonka moved that the Council approve the proposed ordinance language with the following changes: remove the phrase “to raise \$75,000” from Sec 16-11. Also, modify Sec 16-14(a) as follows:

The City Council shall constitute and appoint a Downtown Improvement District Committee consisting of five to ten (5-10) members at the Council’s discretion, to include one or more representatives from the following categories: natural persons owning or representing owners of real estate within the District; natural persons owning or representing co-owners of retail businesses within the District; natural persons owning or representing owners of hospitality businesses with the District; natural persons owning or representing the owner of a service business within the District; persons owning or representing an arts community enterprise within the District, employees of the State of Vermont, City Council appointees.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded. The motion was approved by a 5-1 vote at 8:03, with Councilor Weiss voting nay.

13-129. Planning Commissioner Tina Ruth (joined by Planning & Development Director Gwen Hallsmith) addressed the Council on the proposed merger of the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, reviewing the history of the initiative and its progression for the newer councilors.

Ruth indicated that the most recent report will recommend a merger (although there will not be pressure to move forward overly quickly), and that she was approaching the Council for direction. She shared her disagreement with the (anticipated) recommendation as, in her view, the two organizations have functional statutory and organizational distinctions that make merger problematic. She felt the arguments to merge were not persuasive.

Councilor Golonka asked about the time frame when a merger vote could happen, and it remained unclear at this time.

Ed Larson, Planning Commissioner Doug McCain, Peter Hood (current chair), and Josh Fitzhugh approached the Council, speaking favorably of the pending merger recommendation. Larson added some information to the account of the history, noting that it was mandate to consider merging (while noting that the mandate was no longer active). He cast the merger as an honestly-assessed strategy to more thoroughly serve the public. He also suggested that Ruth’s questions – while valid – had been adequately addressed.

McCain characterized their message as urging the council to withhold judgment at this point in the process.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh asked for details on the advantages of merging as opposed to simply working closely together. Hood replied that the merger would create a stronger organization. Larson cast a merger as a bold move towards a better organizational model, while acknowledging that there would be costs of merging.

Jed Guertin addressed the council and citing his economic development background, indicated he was troubled by so closely marrying economic development and planning, noting that the different types of organizations historically have very different approaches. He felt that, over time, you could end up with economic development priorities trumping planning priorities. Larson acknowledged the concerns, but felt they were adequately accounted for in the proposed solution.

13-126(b). Councilor Weiss asked for clarification about the bike path segment as it related to the Carr lot, and further asked about the contract work schedule. He also requested that a project schedule be provided for each component of the project. Councilor Edgerly Walsh indicated that the bike path committee had reviewed the schedule, and that it was available for review. Councilor Weiss asked for maintenance projections from the contractor at 5 years and 10 years out to be made available. City Manager Fraser indicated that they could be provided

Councilor Hooper moved consent agenda item b for approval. Councilor Guerlain seconded. The motion passed unanimously at 8:55.

Councilor Weiss welcomed back Beverlee Hill to City Hall. Councilor Edgerly Walsh reported that the housing committee suggested that the council send a member to the planning commission to participate in some capacity.

13-131. The City Clerk made note of the tar sands advisory town meeting article which had passed recently, inviting councilors to approach him in the intervening period between meetings to review the language and take action as they saw fit.

Councilor Guerlain moved for adjournment, seconded by Councilor Edgerly Walsh. The motion passed unanimously at 9:01PM.