

**Minutes of the Montpelier Special City Council Meeting
November 5, 2013
Montpelier City Hall Council Chambers**

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

Mayor Hollar called the meeting to order at 5:00PM.

Thomas Weiss addressed the council, asking who requested the meeting. (City Manager Fraser replied he did). He then asked who called the meeting (Mr. Fraser indicated that the mayor did). Mr. Weiss felt that the meeting was improperly called under the open records law.

13-262. Donald Marsh addressed the council regarding his candidacy for the Carr Lot Design Committee. He reviewed his background, as well as his interests and perspectives. He was followed by Elizabeth Robeck and Daniel Dickerson who did the same. Councilor Weiss asked Mr. Marsh and Mr. Dickerson about potential conflicts of interest. Both indicated they expected no conflicts to present themselves. Councilor Edgerly Walsh and Mayor Hollar each had questions which invited the candidates to elaborate, generally.

The Mayor indicated he and Councilor Edgerly Walsh would also serve on the committee.

Dan Coane addressed the council on the Carr Lot, noting there was a previous Carr Lot committee of which he was a member, and Jon Anderson was the chair. He wondered what happened with the old committee. The Mayor cited a change in the approach to the project (since his tenure), related to the need for the council to be involved and to work towards a tight timeframe. Mr. Coane suggested that the new committee include some input or representation from the previous committee. The Mayor indicated he would follow up and be in touch, lauding the previous committee's work.

13-263. Councilor Golonka explained the agenda item and the genesis of the letter sent to the newspapers and signed by council members, regarding the current conflicts between the Mayor, City Manager and Planning Committee, and the Planning Director. At an audience member's request, Councilor Golonka read the letter aloud.

Planning Director Gwen Hallsmith addressed the council. She referenced her "deep, spiritual commitment to community" and elaborated on what that phrase meant to her. She utilized props (hats and a book) to make her case. She then challenged the matrix report's criticisms of her department, and the council's acceptance of its conclusions. Hallsmith went on to defend her "stand(ing) firm" on the directives of the Master Plan. She suggested that the council could make changes, but that any changes would require a public input process. Hallsmith offered alternative explanations for the reported low morale cited in her department. She made a plea for due process, wisdom and forgiveness.

Ben Eastwood addressed the council, defending the ethics of Ms. Hallsmith and criticizing Mayor Hollar for being a lobbyist and Councilor Golonka for the phrasing of his letter. He couched the entire conflict as based in a deeper conflict over the value of a state bank.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh spoke supportively about the idea of a state-based public bank, and disputed the contention that the conflict was based in that issue.

Mayor Hollar responded, explaining what precipitated the email that many are objecting to - noting that it was not about the public bank issue as reported, but the associated, proposed consolidation of state agencies and her related advocacy. He also expressed concern about the relationship between the city staff and the Planning Commission. He further indicated in hindsight that he should not have sent the email, and if the public bank issue ever came up before the council, he would recuse himself from any decision. He also noted that he had no intention of suggesting or promoting any disciplinary action.

City Manager Fraser also responded to Mr. Eastwood, noting that it is not unusual or inappropriate for the mayor or council to approach him on any matter that concerns the citizenry. He indicated that it was part of his job to filter and respond to any such concerns.

Michael Sherman addressed the council. He announced that he was not taking sides, but was disturbed by the letter which he felt represented an inappropriate intrusion into the process. There was some confusion, and resulting clarification, about the role of the council in personnel matters.

Margaret Blanchard addressed the council. She felt that the conflict required mediation. She went on to speak positively about the idea of a public bank, before then speaking in support of the city Master Plan as written.

Jed Guertin addressed the council, expressing concern that reports of conflicts between the Planning Commission and Director Hallsmith have been overstated, and are not as one-sided as some Planning Commission members have suggested. He suggested that commissioners' conflicts of interest could be problematic.

There was discussion amongst the councilmembers as to how to proceed. Director Hallsmith rose to take issue with Councilor Golonka directly on the letter's content.

Michael Sherman rose again, repeating his view that a letter endorsed by the council was inappropriate.

John Halasz addressed the council. He felt that the content of the letter clearly originated from the councilors as individuals, and urged the council not to give its collective endorsement.

The sense of the council was to move forward without action.

- 13-264. Councilor Weiss moved that the council enter executive session to discuss appointments to the Carr Lot Committee and discuss a personnel matter, and that the session include

the city's attorney, as well as the Assistant City Manager. He was seconded by Councilor Edgerly Walsh. The motion carried unanimously at 6:03.

Councilor Watson moved that the council return to open session at 6:35. Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Councilor Hooper moved that Daniel Dickerson, John Snell, Donald Marsh and Elizabeth Robeck be appointed to the Carr Lot Committee, Councilor Golonka seconded, and the motion carried unanimously at 6:39.

Councilor Watson moved for adjournment. Councilor Hooper seconded. The motion passed unanimously at 6:40PM.