

On Wednesday evening, December 2, 2009, the City Council Members met in the Council Chamber.

Present: Mayor Hooper; Council Members Weiss, Sheridan, Golonka, Jarvis and Hooper; also City Manager Fraser. Council Member Sherman was out of town.

Call to Order by the Mayor:

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

09-308. Opportunity to learn more about the potential increase of train traffic on the railroad track owned by the State of Vermont which runs through downtown Montpelier.

Mayor Hooper was invited to attend a meeting on Thursday, November 19th, at the Rock of Ages facility in Barre. Representatives attended from the Barre Area Development Corporation, the Rail Division of VTTrans, the Town of Berlin, the Town of Barre, the City of Barre, the Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation, Rock of Ages and Northern Power Systems.

Rock of Ages is seeking contracts to sell its waste material; they are currently in serious discussion with a company which would use the material for rip rap; a proposal to run one 20-car train and one 40-car train, daily, through downtown Montpelier, as well as potential additional trains, was presented. Each train would have a round trip, resulting in a total of four trips.

The Mayor raised concerns about potential effects on emergency service vehicles, traffic, and pedestrian safety, development of property on Stone Cutters Way and in other areas adjoining the railroad tracks, the bike patch, and property values.

The Mayor would like the City Council to have an opportunity to understand the effect of the proposal and to work cooperatively to assure that Montpelier's interests are protected while supporting the work of adjoining communities and their businesses.

Given the proximity of one of the street crossings to the High School, school officials have been informed of the proposal and invited to attend this meeting, along with representatives of the Vermont Agency of Transportation Rail Division.

Recommendation: Opportunity for Council Members to learn more about, and discuss, this proposal; possible direction to staff.

Mayor Hooper said they were fortunate to have Eric Benson representing the Vermont Rail System and Trini Brassard from the Agency of Transportation to provide some background. Eric said he would provide some background so we would have general understanding about how the system works which will lay the groundwork for questions that the Council and members of the community may have.

Mr. Benson said they couldn't actually trace the history of railroading back to the Romans building up the Apian Way because the gauge of railroad tracks is the width of the ruts that are in the Roman ways that went through Europe. There is a rich history of railroading in Vermont. He gave Mayor Hooper a copy of a brief paper he presented on the history of railroading and a set of railroad law as it applies to land issues here in Vermont and on a national basis. Most of the railroads in Vermont were developed as short line railroad companies. The Legislature would charter new railroad corporations and it sort of connected together a network of railroads that made more major lines. This occurred back in the middle to late 1800's. That is about the time period that the tracks we are concerned with were laid out which would have been during the time period of the 1870's or 1880's.

At that time essentially railroads were regulated by states. What took place over the course of time was that there was a vulcanization of the regulations of railroads and because of the way they were being regulated it was very difficult to have a railroad system. It was recognized by Congress a long time ago that it was in the national interest for the federal government to take a more active role not only in the regulation of railroads but even ultimately in the development and support thereof with regard to railroad crossings, funding of railroad renovation projects, etc. Up until 1995 there was still a little piece left of regulation that states had over railroads, but in 1995 Congress essentially deregulated railroads completely from any state or local control. It is called the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act. It even sweeps as far as to remove from regulation the local land use regulation planning any projects that are undertaken by a railroad. If a railroad is desirous of building a facility within the property they don't even have to get a permit to do so. They have to build according to all of the other regulations that apply to building a structure. They have to follow the building codes.

As part of this deregulation the railroad industry now has fallen under the jurisdiction of a newly created entity in 1995, the Surface Transportation Board. The Surface Transportation Board regulates all railroads in the United States. The Washington County Railroad successfully negotiated with the state to become an operator on this set of railroad tracks that we are concerned about today it had to apply to the Surface Transportation Board in order to be able to have rights to operate as a railroad on that line. As such, as a regulated carrier, the Washington County Railroad actually has a duty to provide services to customers. In other words, it can't pick and choose who it wants to do business with. If someone calls up and you have a published tariff they have to provide service to them.

He thinks it is important for officials here in Montpelier and also Barre to understand that when Washington County Railroad became the operator on this line it undertook an extensive process of going door to door looking for customers. Because initially there wasn't sufficient business to support it the policy makers, the Legislature and the State Agency of Transportation thought it was in the state's best interest economically that this be a viable rail line as it once was servicing this area. The decaying industrial sites that were here could ultimately be brought back to life. At the time when they first started the facility that was building rail cars was still there, but that has long since gone. From that point on they have been very aggressive in trying to find customers including Rock of Ages. They have been talking to them a long time about how they might service their needs as a transportation provider. As a consequence, they have had some negotiations about taking their some of their larger tailings from their quarry effort and distributing them around the country to customers they have.

Railroads are good for the environment and good for the economy and properly run they are safe as well. They had a tendency to think of accidents that occur at railroad crossings but when the rails are handled properly public safety can be protected in a manner that meets everyone's needs, and that is a critical concern for them as well. They undertake a lot of education effort through Vermont Operation Web Saver and provide free services to the schools and various other organizations to bring people up to an awareness of how dangerous a railroad can be and become aware of the accidents that do take place around the country. According to the last statistics compiled by the United States Department of Transportation the good news is that railroad related crossing accidents and fatalities are actually on the decline. There is an increased awareness.

Thankfully, railroads are coming back around the country. Vermont needs to be commended in taking the lead in this regard. You may recall that back in the 1960's when the Rutland Railroad was all but done everyone basically thought railroads in Vermont were over and done with. The State of Vermont did some planning and the policy makers decided they should acquire these rail lines and keep them open as rail corridors. Even the ones in recent times that have been acquired by the state, like the Lamoille Valley Railroad, even though there is no track on it and people are using it as a trail it lies there waiting for a day perhaps in the future when it may be able to be revitalized as a rail corridor. It is certainly everyone's hope.

For the first time in the country's history a relationship was established between a private entity and the state where the state would own the rail property and a private operator would lease the rail line, and that was Vermont Railway back in 1964. The Vermont Rail System is basically a family business that

operates here in the state. They are neighbors and very concerned about how their neighbors like them and try to work with them. They also have the confines of being a railroad and under the law having the requirements where it says we have to service their customers. They also felt a very strong duty to the state. The state is expending funds. Under the operating agreement of the Washington County Line the state has been funding a portion of the operation of this railroad, and until such time as revenues rise sufficiently then the subsidies will go away. The Legislature who approved this as well as the Vermont Agency of Transportation thought it was in the state's best interest that this take place.

It is exciting for them that things are starting to happen and they think this can be a good thing provided they can all work together. They are hopeful they can get some business going here in Montpelier as well. In the past they have had the American version of the Orient Express which stopped here. A number of local businesses were very pleased. These were people willing to pay thousands of dollars for this high level rail trip and spend their money in town. They try to encourage that and hope to have those things going on in the future.

Mayor Hooper thanked him for his overview and said it framed it very nicely in terms of the Council's basic understanding of the railroad system. She wonders if they could address what is being proposed or considered for our 13 ½ mile track here in Washington County and the evaluation of the track as well as what sort of improvements are being made.

Trini Brassard said what they are doing is similar to what they do on other lines and the state does encourage the use of the railroads for freight, especially for heavy freight, because of the number of trucks it can take off our highways. With some loads they can easily say crushed rock or aggregate is so many tons per truckload and so many tons per rail car. When you get into the larger blocks of granite or larger parcels of goods that are being moved sometimes they aren't able to be secured on a truck as easily. In some cases you could end up with six trucks for what would go into one rail car. For the state getting as much freight as possible moved on to rail is a good thing for a wide variety of reasons, such as the environment, the impact on the road, traffic congestion and safety at intersections. They have been working with Vermont Rail Systems and trying to encourage them to reach out and get more business.

Ms. Brassard said there are five or six businesses right now that are actively working with the railroad for freight. A couple of the customers currently on the railroad are seeing the benefits of that and it may make it more feasible for them to get additional product using the rail.

Ms. Brassard said at the Agency of Transportation they have already kicked off two projects. One is what they call a crossing diagnostic which is a group of three employees from the Agency who are engineers who go to every crossing where the tracks go across a public road and look at what type of impact it will have at that crossing and what type of crossing needs to be there. They will look to see if it needs to have flashing lights, the bars that drop or at a regular crossing the slower rate of speed by the train is okay. That is under way right now and they hope to have the results of that in three to four months. They are looking at all of the bridges and structures that the train has to go over. Some of them will be an easier evaluation than others, but there are two in particular that are pin trestle bridges, one out by Shaw's and one out by the roundabout on Route 302. A pin trestle is a more complicated bridge because if you just grabbed any engineer they would say they can't handle the trains. The bridges were built back in 1920 and handled the freight which came through there because the granite industry is what basically built the railroad coming through this line. They have a very small group of engineers and firms who can go out and do the pin trestle bridges and understand them. They will be doing a base evaluation. They will also be doing an ultrasonic evaluation. For anybody who has been following the story at Crown Point the ultrasonic is a very specialized test that looks inside the metal to see if the deterioration is on the inside as well. The results of those two evaluations will tell us what type of capital projects they need to be looking at for those bridges as well as the crossings. What that will also give them for information is any slow orders or what number of cars the train can bring through there today without it being a problem. In the past the train has brought lumber and fuel so it ran on a good structure and ran safely. What they want to be able to do is to increase the number of cars on that train and run it more efficiently which will then lower the freight costs and operating costs for those loads. They will get the results of the evaluations and look at what types of improvements need to be made.

She went on to say that in the western corridor right now they are putting out a project to bid in the next month to six weeks which will install 13 miles of continuously welded rail on the Vermont Rail. That project will be removing stick rail. Stick rail is commonly used for freight lines. It is perfectly good rail, but the continuously welded rail is a smoother ride and allows for higher speeds which they need for the passenger service where Amtrak runs. They are putting a condition in the bid for that project that requires the rail which is removed from that line be moved over here to be put on to this line. That will improve the rail that is on this line currently and allow for better movement.

Ms. Brassard said the other part they are doing is a large public outreach program. They have been in contact with Operation Life Saver. Operation Life Saver is a federal highway program and it funds different outreach projects that do everything from bringing coloring books and lessons to the schools to ads in the newspapers, to public discussions, and it is all based on safety around an operating railroad. It deals with crossings, trespassing, etc.

They do know they have an issue with both the Montpelier schools and Barre schools where kids use the tracks as walking paths. That is systematic of a rail line that hasn't seen a lot of action on it. This is all stuff they are going to have to get ahead of both through the outreach process and some type of enforcement process once they get the train running. That is the efforts the Agency of Transportation has underway at this point.

Mayor Hooper said she understood there are not proposals in place for new products to be moved, but they have heard there could be significant proposals there and they have also heard about the amount of traffic that could be coming through with the trains. She asked if Ms. Brassard could talk to the Council about what that means.

Ms. Brassard said she saw on the agenda tonight that some numbers had been thrown out about cars that would run daily through downtown and she wants to correct that. The discussion that had taken place was over a hypothetical amount of freight that was going to move on one of the bids that was asked for by the Army Corps of Engineers, which was going to move freight down to Louisiana to do a rock barrier breakwater. What was discussed was that it would be 65,000 tons of product and they had a short window in which they wanted it moved. It was going to end up being 60 cars moved per week over a three-day period. The number of cars in this report are a little misleading because it was 60 cars moving out to Montpelier Junction over a three-day period each week. What Montpelier would have seen was one train coming in with empty cars and one train going out in the afternoon on day one; 20 cars coming in empty on day 2; 40 full cars going out on day 2; and then 20 empty coming in and 20 empty going out on day three. It is not a huge number of trains coming through. If they looked at what is the ultimate place they would like to be, obviously that is a different story. If the rail line is in the best shape it can be and they can move the maximum amount of freight her understanding is the locomotive can move a maximum of 60 cars at one time. They would be able to move one train per day of 60 cars through, and that would be it. It would require a huge infrastructure investment by the State of Vermont to build a rail yard somewhere large enough to create the train traffic that would allow multiple 60 car trains to pass through this line on a daily basis, and she doesn't think it's in the budget and it's not in the business view out there either. Her understanding is that if they have a 10 mile per hour slow order on a crossing with a 60 car train going 10 miles per hour it takes 4 minutes and 32 seconds for all of those cars to pass the crossing. You are talking about a huge amount of business coming out of there to make up that load. She is sure the businesses would love to see that built up to that capacity, but they don't see it happening.

Mayor Hooper said she had understood it differently.

Council Member Golonka said Ms. Brassard talked about a Surface Transportation Board and her group looking at the train tracks specifically and how they impact their usage. His concern would be how it impacts Montpelier's infrastructure. Obviously, the tonnage they are talking about – half a million tons per year is what he read in the paper – the city has 100-year old pipes and 100-year old water lines and 100 year old sewer lines. He doesn't want to have to make a \$3 million dollar investment because the trains have been upgraded. How do they work with the city in that regard? They have gone

through upgrades before with under utilized lines. Do they work with the city in terms of looking at where there will be weak spots in our system as well? He suggested that they should be working together on this process.

Eric Benson said in his history with the railroad he has never heard of a train actually causing a rupture of a line that goes underneath it. That is not likely to occur.

Council Member Golonka said he understands that it is not likely to occur, but the city has significant aging infrastructure in certain areas of town. That was a concern to him. With a huge increase in weight or tonnage going through town he wanted to be at the table to at least talk about this before it happens so that three to five years from now they aren't faced as a Council with having to do a huge bond offering to the City of Montpelier to bear the burden the costs of our infrastructure costs. Does the Surface Transportation Board look at that with local communities to see if there are weak spots in the system of where they are running through our towns.

Ms. Brassard said the Surface Transportation Board is a federal entity that oversees the operation of the railroad and she has never heard of them getting involved with that.

Mr. Benson said he would be happy to do some research and get back to the city in terms of what is the likelihood of something happening.

Ms. Brassard replied the other thing you need to look at is how the rail beds are made. The rail beds are made to keep it from impacting the water and septic lines.

Council Member Golonka said he thinks it needs to be addressed here in Montpelier from the infrastructure point of view. That may not be a priority of the trains and the State of Vermont, but it definitely would be a priority to Montpelier.

Ms. Brassard said they have a master license agreement with the City of Montpelier and it does tell where each of the crossings are located.

Council Member Weiss asked what financial obligations, if any, the city will incur. For instance, it may be gates, flashing lights, etc. Who pays for all of that?

Ms. Brassard replied the State of Vermont. If the diagnostic testing for the crossing comes back and requires some type of flashing lights or a gate she believes the lease requires the state to install them and the railroad to maintain them.

Council Member Golonka said in terms of the Barre Street/Main Street intersection there isn't much space in that area. How does the railroad work through an intersection that is an "F" rated intersection already? How would you locate some type of crossing guard in that area because that seems to be the big area of concern to downtown Montpelier from a safety and traffic point of view. Would there be two gates, one that blocks Barre Street as well as Main Street?

Ms. Brassard said Barre Street wouldn't get blocked. Main Street would get blocked.

Council Member Golonka asked what the legal requirement for the spacing is.

Ms. Brassard replied 5 ½ feet from the edge of the rail. It is fairly close to where it is closing because you don't want bodies or anything in it. They know they have an issue there.

Council Member Golonka said the Shaw's entrance way is within five feet of that.

Ms. Brassard said they are looking at that intersection and know they have some issues there. There were some leases the state entered into. One is with Shaw's and one with Pomerleau for the bank building that has their drive through and exit literally on the tracks and the Redemption Center. All

three of those leases all have conditions in them that say if the train comes back to a more active status those will be terminated. The Shaw's access point will be one and not two. The area by M&M Beverage will get closed down so they will have one access point.

Council Member Golonka said it is an "F" rated intersection. How do you insure that this doesn't make it worse? He can't imagine that intersection being any worse than it is right now and he is concerned throwing a train into that mix would make it much, much worse, both from a backup point of view as well as backing out Barre Street, backing out Main Street. He foresees nightmares, particularly if the train is coming through during peak times. They had an issue with that intersection when they thought about putting up a parking garage behind one of those buildings. The traffic study that came through said that intersection is extremely poorly rated. Even though we would hope that through the evaluation the traffic study would be consulted.

Ms. Brassard said the crossing diagnostic would look at that intersection on Barre Street on to Main Street so the diagnostic will tell us if they need the flashing light and the bars.

Council Member Golonka said that will just tell us if we need flashing lights and bars, but won't say it is going to make it five feet further down even worse.

Ms. Brassard replied that is correct. It is just to look at what safety factors are needed to allow the train to pass through there in a safe manner.

Council Member Golonka said no one looks at the traffic impact on Barre and Main Street during this evaluation. Is that correct?

Ms. Brassard said not during the diagnostic of the crossing evaluation. It can be requested on the highway side through the Regional Planning Commission or through the state traffic people. We can ask them to look at specific areas where you feel an intersection is going to need that type of evaluation. That is a different type of evaluation than what they are doing.

Council Member Golonka said from his perspective that would be a nightmare.

Mayor Hooper asked how they would do that.

Ms. Brassard said through the Regional Planning Commission.

Mayor Hooper said there are five intersections in a mile and a half of track and a 40 car train is more than a quarter of a mile long. You have to close the intersection before the train gets there so it clearly will close two or three intersections at a time as the train rolls through.

Ms. Brassard said it depends on the street and what the diagnostics show as to whether it is an intersection that is totally closed before the train gets there. If you watch the way the train comes through nothing closes so it depends on the traffic that comes through there, the type of intersection it is, the number of cars on the train, and a lot of other factors.

Mayor Hooper said she was told it would be a 40 car train could close at least two intersections and it wasn't accounting for the clearing of the intersection to allow it to be clear before the train arrived.

Council Member Golonka said Trini talked about her evaluation and input. Is there a Board or an appeals group that the Council could go to and express their opinion in regards to what they feel needs to be addressed?

Ms. Brassard said there is the Surface Transportation Board.

Council Member Golonka said he wonders if there is a place the Council could have input into some of the issues that may come up.

Ms. Brassard said the Surface Transportation Board looks at the safety and operations of the train.

Council Member Hooper said he doesn't know much about train scheduling. He talked to some people and they say they buy their permits minutes before they head out on a piece of track. How much scheduling control does the state have over the trains going through?

Ms. Brassard replied the State of Vermont has none. The railroad as the operator has control over it and that is all driven by the freight they are moving but it is also driven by the time slots in which the freight they are moving has to fit onto the larger track.

Mayor Hooper asked if there was an ability on the part of the railroad operator to establish when these trains would be coming through town.

Mr. Benson said they have very little flexibility. They certainly would entertain whatever input the city feels would be important and what critical times to avoid if they can.

Council Member Hooper said if this is the only train traveling on this track they could theoretically wait for a few minutes before they come through the downtown.

Ms. Brassard replied there is more flexibility with it on this one track. It is meeting the time schedules to have all of them out there and waiting from whichever business they are coming from to get the empty and full cars back and jockeying between the different places.

Council Member Golonka said they are running trains through town that will have tons of granite. What happens if they get stuck? It could potentially separate Montpelier for an extended period of time where our emergency personnel are on one side and citizens on another. What type of emergency planning do you work with here? Are there trains on either end?

Ms. Brassard said there are response plans and Vermont Emergency Management works with the agency and the railroad. The railroad has equipment at either end.

Mr. Benson said all of their personnel on the train are required to have safety procedures and a time table. There is contact information if they have a derailment so there is an immediate response. There is a whole framework of how that gets managed which is driven by state law as well. It essentially falls to the Fire Marshall. They had an example of that in Middlebury when they had a derailment a couple of years ago. The emergency response there was right on and there was an evacuation and everything happened as it was supposed to happen.

Council Member Golonka said they are talking about transporting raw tonnage in large amounts.

Mr. Benson said most of their rail cars when they are loaded are pretty close to capacity and they do have limits because of the bridges in the state where they can't go over a particular weight anyway. That is a safety consideration. Thankfully, the rail bed is nice and flat so it isn't like you have a runaway train coming down the hill and getting away from you.

Mayor Hooper said traffic is one of the major issues on the list of concerns they would have. On Bailey Avenue, which is where the High School is located, the school has identified that as a troubled intersection with traffic during school time going in and out. On Main Street by Shaw's who have put hundreds of thousands dollars in improvements into their property and they are a very valuable business to us. Having a downtown grocery store is incredibly important. That traffic frequently backs up over the tracks as people are trying to get into a tight parking lot in the evening. That traffic on Main Street in the evening will sometimes back up from Memorial Drive to our first roundabout so that is an obvious concern. We have also heard residents express concern about a potential development in Sabin's Pasture. We have experienced significant traffic delays and watched how it backs up all over the community and the urgent issues it created. That is something that is of deep concern to the Council and they would very much like to understand and be assured it won't create problems for us. They

talked about the emergency access and the concern there. She believes the city's EMS people did raise the notion of a concern about derailment and wanted to make sure we could easily clear out the tracks. It is fabulous and she appreciates the business opportunities that are being created at Wilson Industrial Park and some important businesses on that side of the county. A core piece of Montpelier's business is our downtown with the offices and retailers who use our community and our way of attracting people into this community, making it livable and a good place to do business. That is terribly important to the city. A significant portion of the railroad goes through our designated downtown and in areas where we have invested very heavily in our infrastructure in order to create a good climate for our residents but also for the businesses in our community. We worry about that while recognizing the deep value at large, Washington County, their concern is paying attention to what our residents and businesses are going to experience.

Mayor Hooper said a lot of people have said the train should run at night. When we had the Orient Express here we heard from a lot of residents about noise because it was running their diesel at night. They need those sorts of issues to be considered. They are concerned about future opportunities to develop in the community. We have one important property on Stone Cutters Way which remains undeveloped. The city, state and the federal government have invested significant amount of money in partnership with the Vermont Rail Systems to redevelop that property on Stone Cutters Way. They need to see that redevelopment continue. That is very important to our grand list and property base in the community.

Another area is Sabin's Pasture which a group is working on developing at least 150 housing units. That is away from where the railroad is but comes back to the traffic issue. In the master Act 250 permit this group has achieved for that project the failure of the Main Street and Barre Street intersection has been identified as an impediment to the development of that project. This is one of the areas that this City Council has said that it is very important to this community to develop more housing. She is concerned that we are going to lose our opportunity to develop that housing because of traffic problems that could be further troubled by significant rail going through there. There is also the concern about noise and what it does to quality of life.

Richard Sheir from Loomis Street said he is going to frame the train in context. What you are dealing with is the most extreme outer limits of a proposal that really are way out there in terms of projections that will most likely never be met. He said he would like to frame what 4 minutes means in terms of traffic flow in this town so people can get an idea of exactly what this would involve possibly twice a day. Four minutes is three cycles of the light at Main Street and State Street. If you are coming into town from 4:00 to 6:00 P.M. almost all of us have been stopped by that light for three light cycles. That is what we are talking about. This would happen once or twice a day probably most likely during off hours. We are so early in the process raising flags of alarm when the press has barely started. It seems to him that good common sense will dictate that you don't run a four minute train during rush hour or you would have people backed up on Route 2 who want to go north on Main Street. That would be negotiated much further down. When we are talking about studies like this we're talking about something that is just months and years away so waving the flag of alarm so early in the process just seems alarmist to him, and it's not good government. That is basically what he came to talk about tonight. It isn't going to bring our downtown to its knees. It isn't going to cause horrendous noise and drive us all batty. It isn't going to destroy our sewer lines when empty cars travel the rail in a couple of times a day. Let's just let the process work its way through quietly and gradually along the line. We can come back and see the progress that has been made and comment. He is trying to be a voice of common sense for a change.

Mr. Benson told Mayor Hooper that her concerns have not fallen on deaf ears. It is their intent to communicate with the city. Call us because there is information available in terms of dispatchers, etc.

Marjorie Power from Independence Green said she is an ex City Council member. We need to get a grip here. Montpelier has always been a very "Can Do City." Stone Cutters Way, the strange design configuration of that whole project was specifically done to accommodate the needs of the railway. The bike path, Pioneer Street Bridge, all of those projects were designed to accommodate not only the

existing railway but to enable the right of way for the Montpelier/Wells River Railway to be re-laid with tracks if the need arose. We are all complaining constantly in town about parking, traffic, etc. She regards this proposal to upgrade the Montpelier/Barre Railway as an opportunity. We've talked for 15 years or more about having some sort of robot train that would go back and forth to peripheral parking and bring people who would be parking for long periods of time like state employees and other downtown employees to their work enabling them to park on the periphery of town. This is an opportunity for us to envision that actually happening. Here we are in the process of enVision Montpelier where we are planning for the next 100 years. Part of that plan includes all sorts of energy efficiencies, economics and yet the minute an opportunity arises where we can take traffic off the road we start going all giddy. She hasn't always been a friend of the railway. She has represented the Grange on the issue of farm crossings. She is quite aware as a Grange member and the history of the Grange's relationship with the railways which has been adversarial. At times railways can behave like jerks! We need to look at the brass ring here what is good for our community, good for Barre, and good for the region. It is going to enhance infrastructure that will enable us to use it if the railway gets its act together. There are a lot of uses that can be put on that track. She understands Tom's worrying about the sewer, but we need to remember the amount of sewer over which the rail line is quite small. It's not like the Barre problem where you are going to have big trucks going along the track. The sewer is not laid under the track. As a member of the Barre Historical Society and their exhibit creator we need to remember the genesis of these railways. It was for carrying heavy pieces of granite. It's the reason that Barre became the town that it was. It got rid of the oxen problem on the roads. It is fine to be concerned. We know things are a little different now. The ox teams don't back up over three light cycles. We need to get a grip. We can as a city deal with this, and it will be good for us, our neighbor community and for the region that we do deal with it in a back to the future kind of way. It is good for us that the railway should come back, and it is good for the people of Barre. There are those who love the grout piles but we could move quite a bit of grout out and not affect the amount that remains. This is good for business for Montpelier, for Barre and for Barre Town, and we should regard it in that light.

Mayor Hooper told Eric Benson that Marjorie had raised a question that others have asked her. How does passenger service or light rail coexist with freight?

Mr. Benson said it is just a matter of scheduling. It is certainly possible. They run tourist trains down in the northern corridor of the VTR. The most active tourist train is in the Green Mountains which is down in the Rockingham area going up the Connecticut River line and up through the Green Mountains into Rutland.

Norman James from Derby Drive said in a previous life he was the Executive Vice President of the Barre Granite Association. He isn't here to speak for them because they can speak for themselves. This is an economic issue. Straight up – it's a regional economic issue. He is also a member of the enVision Montpelier group that deals with the economy and livelihoods. The word "regional" is a part of that document in many, many places because they decided economically Montpelier cannot support itself by itself. It needs its neighbors as much as the neighbors need the City of Montpelier and the thought process that goes on here. He was very disappointed that at least one member of the Council has already made up her mind that this would not be of any benefit to the city of Montpelier. We have already heard some talk here tonight that has clarified a couple of things. He thinks with the issue of traffic or by Sabin's Pasture that instead of penalizing a railroad fix the traffic pattern. Make sure the eye is looking at the big picture here. It's a big economic issue. It will be a benefit to the City of Montpelier, a benefit to the City of Barre and to one of its long time employers in that community.

A member of the audience asked when we might actually see granite laden trains going down the tracks and how long might it take?

Ms. Brassard said first of all they are not just granite trains and they are going down now. They do run trains currently with lumber and oil so you do see the train once every week or once every two weeks. As far as when you can see more trains behind that train it is all based upon what happens out there with the other vendors as to when they are doing it. There are some active bidding processes going on right now so as soon as one of those is accepted you will see freight start to move. There are also a couple of

businesses looking at whether they can get the commodities they need brought in by train, and as soon as one of them gets a positive answer you'll see more cars.

Mayor Hooper said there was hopes there would be contracts and the product would be moved in April.

Ms. Brassard said that was with the original contract that was thought to be awarded but the money got moved by the Army Corps of Engineers to another project.

Assistant City Manager Hill said she is the liaison from the City Manager's Office to the Regional Bike Path Committee which has made substantial progress. They are actually in the right-of-way acquisition phase for the city. If the relationship of the bike path to this new proposal has been looked at, the rumor she has heard is that it will not affect Montpelier but Berlin's portion. The Agency of Transportation has to work with the bike path programs. Has this been looked at and discussed?

Ms. Brassard said they have looked at a couple of segments of the bike path that could be impacted. One is in Barre City and one is in Berlin. As far as the actual layout and what it will cause for problems they haven't gotten to that level of detail. As far as the rail corridor, obviously the first use for it is for rail operations and as Eric alluded to before when they rail bank a corridor they use it for trails. They are also allowed to use the excess land or land that is not currently being used for rail and that is what they were looking at using for the bike path. One of the big questions out there right now is whether a segment of the track in Berlin would be needed to build the larger trains to get them out of the downtown areas. There is a segment of the bike path when it comes through where the roundabout is and heads out towards Price Chopper and then there is a segment where the path comes off Route 62 behind Main Street in Barre

Christopher Parker, Executive Director of the Vermont Rail Action Network, said they support this action. To him this is an example of the power of the railroad to mitigate but could actually be a real negative environmental effect from this business. He is also a former train conductor and under federal law there is a limit to how long railroad crossings can be occupied by stopped trains. As a conductor if you are in a situation where the crossing has stopped for more than 5 minutes you are supposed to make a cut in the train and move the train forward and leave the crossing empty.

Anthony Otis said he previously worked with the Railroad Association for 22 years from 1986 to 2008. He lives near the tracks. They own three properties on Sibley Avenue at the eastern end and their bedroom is on the second floor of both Pioneer and Granite Streets and he would trade the sound of jake brakes on River Street for the sound of a railroad whistle. He doesn't think they have had enough explanation tonight about the environmental benefits of rail transportation as opposed to road transportation by truck. He's sure that if this project doesn't come to fruition with the railroad the granite industry will find a way to get loads of granite on heavy multi axle trucks which will be passing through the City of Barre and along River Street. Don't kid yourself that that won't come to pass if this project doesn't go through. He is very happy about the way the conversation is going tonight. He believes they have had good questions and good comments. He was involved in the creation of the Vermont Rail Advocacy Network which is private individuals and some businesses that join for the economic benefits and the environmental benefits of rails statewide. He worked for years with Vermont Operation Life Saver. If you are concerned about danger to people from the railroad tracks, he tried for years to get the city to try to educate the students in this community not to go over the rail tracks and bridges, and the city hasn't done anything. We need to start an education plan in Montpelier to stop our young people and adults from walking across the railroad bridges. They could cite many instances in other places where people have died thinking it is safe to do it, and it is not.

Council Member Jarvis said she wants to be clear that the Council is talking tonight about one proposal from one company to use the rail line.

Ms. Brassard said there are multiple businesses along the rail line that want to start using the rail line.

Council Member Jarvis said when they are talking about what the maximum is the maximum is really

the minimum because it is getting started and upgrading the rail and potentially allowing it to be used by many more businesses. There was an article in *The Times Argus* that made it clear that this isn't if but when kind of scenario. The City Council just wants to be in on the conversation, ask our questions and express our concerns. She is shocked and surprised at being chastised for doing our job which is to look out for the best interests of the city and to prepare for the worst case scenario. She thinks that is the Council's job.

09-309. Presentation by City Manager of the results of the recently-conducted "*National Citizen Survey*".

During August and September, the National Research Center of Boulder, Colorado (working in conjunction with the City of Montpelier) conducted an extensive survey of Montpelier residents. This is part of a program called the National Citizen Survey.

1,200 surveys were randomly sent to the community asking people to rate a wide range of topics including quality of life, transportation, housing, land use, economic sustainability, public safety, environmental sustainability, recreation and wellness, inclusiveness, civic engagement, public trust and city services. Certain policy questions were also posed.

558 responses were received. The 46.5% response rate is very high for this survey.

Responses were compared to all participants nationwide, as well as communities in the 4,000 to 14,000 population range. In addition, responses were analyzed by voting district, length of time of residency, homeowner/renter, children or seniors in household, income, age and gender.

The City Manager will present an overview of survey results, highlighting key issues and the five areas identified as Key Statistical Drivers – those services areas where citizen response most closely correlates to citizens overall ratings.

Recommendation: Receive update from the City Manager; opportunity for discussion.

City Manager Fraser said the survey has been a major initiative of the city this year to try to reach out to the community in hard times and find out what their thoughts and priorities are and take stock of what we do, who we are and how we do it and how people feel about us. The city received its final report which is in five large documents. The City Council has three of the documents. Everything that is in the five documents is available right now on line at the city's web site www.Montpeliervt.org.

The National Citizens Survey is a partnership between the National Research Center and ICMA, which is the International City/County Management Association. They formed a business partnership a few years ago for communities like Montpelier to understand what we are doing. Because they have a somewhat standardized list of questions it allows for benchmark comparisons with over 200 participants from 40 states and other 500 jurisdictions. In addition to their own surveys they have made it their business to try to acquire any other surveys that are published about local government services and to the extent that data matches up with theirs, they have incorporated it.

He first became aware of this survey at the ICMA Conference and was speaking with a City Manager from Dover, Delaware and he explained they had used it and it had been a big success. He has learned since then that many communities often do this in two year cycles so they can track their own progress and track what improvements have been made and where opinions are changing.

We can benchmark our service ratings. It informs our budget and land use strategic planning decisions. We find out what citizens' priorities are and their concerns. We can use it to measure our own

performance and how people feel our services are doing and we can use it to monitor trends and residents' opinions.

The 2009 survey is what they call a multi contact mail survey. It was all done away from City Hall. We provided some basic information and assistance to them, but it was kept at arms length and done by the National Resource Center. Representative samples of 1,200 residents and households were done, which is the standard sample size they use in all of their communities. Obviously, in a smaller community like Montpelier that is a big number. There were 558 surveys returned which is a 49% response rate. That is a very high response rate for this survey. They told them in the beginning to expect 30 percent. The survey carries a 4% margin of error and they weight the data to statistically reflect the population if they notice an under response from certain populations.

In addition to the main reports it gives the overall answers they have split the results in several different ways. There are demographic comparisons. Some of the questions are: How long have you lived in the town? Do you rent or own your home? Do you have children under 17 in the household? Do you have adults 65 or older in the household? What's your household income? What's the age of the person responding? What's the gender of the person responding? They also broke the answers into voting districts and both the demographic and geographic subgroups' responses are crossed tabbed so they can see the different responses by those groups, and it is interesting.

They also had a custom benchmark comparison so they selected to be compared to cities and towns with populations between 4,000 and 14,000 people across the country that have done the survey so Montpelier's results were compared to that specific benchmark. They were also compared to all of the communities.

Their respondents were also asked an open-ended question. What is the most important issue the city will face in the next five years? In addition, they asked some specific policy questions. All of the results are available in the document.

The first category deals with community ratings. Ninety percent of the respondents rated Montpelier as a good place to live and said good or excellent. That is above the national benchmark. People were asked to rate the overall quality of life in Montpelier, and 85 percent said excellent or good and they said the same thing about their own neighborhood. People like living here at a higher rate than people nationally. They were asked if they would recommend living in Montpelier to someone who asked and 86% said yes. Were they likely to remain in Montpelier for the next 5 years, and 81% said yes, which is similar to the national benchmarks.

There were some questions about community design. The ease of walking rated highly and 83% said it was easy to walk here which was above the national and population benchmarks. The availability of paths and walking trails 73% rated excellent or good, which is above the benchmarks. The ease of bike travel 53% rated excellent or good, which is similar to the national benchmark and above the smaller community benchmark. Ease of car travel was not terribly surprising given the conversation we just had. Forty-nine percent rated it excellent or good, which were both below the national and the population benchmarks. Traffic flow on major streets was 33% excellent or good, which is below the national benchmarks. This survey is a snapshot in time. Things have changed since then, both good and bad, in the community so that might change peoples' opinions from the August and September timeframe when they were doing the survey, which was also when Route 2 was tied up pretty badly with traffic.

Transportation services: street lighting was about the same as national benchmarks. With street cleaning we were similar. Sixty-four percent thought we did an excellent or good job which is similar to the national benchmark, but people in smaller towns are expected to be tidier. It was similar with snow removal. Sixty-three percent said good to excellent, which was similar to the national benchmark but below the small town comparison. Traffic signal timing we did well there and above the national benchmarks at 61%. Our bus and transit services were 52% rated good or excellent, which is similar to the national and population benchmarks. Areas where we fell below were sidewalk maintenance, street

repair and the amount of public parking. Those were 44% and 31% and 22%, all below both benchmarks.

They asked questions about the perception of housing. How would you rate the availability of affordable quality housing? You can see that only 20% rated this excellent or good and only about 30% that there were excellent and a variety of housing options. Both of those were below the benchmarks so people are concerned about housing.

Land use and planning – the overall appearance of Montpelier, 82% of our residents felt it was excellent or good, which is above the benchmarks. Forty-eight percent thought the quality of new development in Montpelier was excellent or good, and that is below the benchmarks. While people like the way it looks they aren't necessarily happy with the newer developments they have seen.

They talked about the economics. Montpelier is a place to work was rated highly. Seventy percent of the people felt this was a good place to work, which was above both benchmarks. The overall quality of businesses and service establishment 67% is above the national benchmarks. Shopping opportunities, however, interestingly enough we were at 45% good or excellent, which is below the national benchmark but above the smaller town benchmark. Larger communities compare to malls and larger stores, but for small communities we actually have an excellent robust shopping area so our people rated us highly as compared to other small towns. Employment opportunities 23%, which is below the national benchmark but similar to that of people in communities our size.

Public safety is a key issue and Montpelier can be proud of this. People were asked how they felt in their neighborhood and in Montpelier's downtown both during the day and at night. Overall 97% of the people felt safe in their neighborhood during the day and 87% felt safe in their neighborhood at night. Ninety-eight percent of the people felt safe in downtown during the day and 80% felt safe in the downtown at night. Those were both above the national and population benchmarks. It is interesting to look at that when you look at the demographic breakdown. A number of our folks felt safe from violent crime and 83% felt safe from environmental and hazardous crime and 73% felt safe from property crime. These were all above the national and size benchmarks.

We talked about our safety services. Fire service is 96% that people felt were excellent or good, which is above the national averages. Ninety-six percent for ambulance service, which is above the national average.

Police services are 85%, which is above the national averages. Fire prevention and education are above or similar to national averages. Crime prevention was 78%, which is above the national averages. Emergency preparedness 64% felt good which is above the benchmarks. Traffic enforcement was similar to the national benchmarks and below the small town benchmarks. He doesn't know if that means people think we enforce too stringently or not enough. Clearly people felt we were falling behind in traffic enforcement. In talking to people about the services they said that fire and ambulance are traditionally the high scorers here because they don't have much regulatory authority. People have a safety role but they also pull you over and give you a ticket. You can have a negative interaction with the police where you would almost always have positive interactions with fire and ambulance. They said it is very important not to try to compare one department against another based on their response because people just have built in biases for or against certain departments. It is very important to look at how they rate fire departments compared to how other people rate fire departments and how they rate police departments. That was emphasized throughout the survey.

Talking about our environmental sustainability issues people were asked about how they felt about the general quality of our overall natural environment and 85% said good or excellent, again above the benchmarks. Air quality was rated 85%. The cleanliness of the city was 84%, which was above the benchmarks. Preservation of natural areas which is open space and green belts were at 73% which was also above the national benchmarks. Ninety-five percent have recycled used paper, cans or bottles at least once in the prior 12 months, which is above the national benchmark. Environmentally the city scores very highly. Given the ethic in this community that is probably not much of a surprise.

Talking about utility services, our sewer services are rated highly. Our drinking water was rated okay or similar. Storm drainage was similar to the national and below the benchmark. We had some issues with storm drainage last year that may have played into some of those ratings. Yard waste pickup was below the national benchmarks. It's not a big service we offer.

Recreation and wellness – people ranked city parks 89%. Our recreation programs were rated at 82% above the benchmarks and our recreation centers or facilities were ranked 73%, which are similar to the national benchmarks and above the like communities. Sometimes we think we struggle with older recreational facilities, but we have a lot of them compared to communities our size and people appreciate that and recognize the value of what we have. A question was asked about the availability of recreational opportunities and 72% rated it good or excellent, which is above both benchmarks. People feel like they can get outdoors, do things and we have a variety of activities.

Similarly, culture, arts and education a question was asked about the opportunities to attend cultural events and 68% said excellent or good, which is again above the benchmarks. People were asked about the opportunity for educational opportunities and 61% rated that excellent or good, which is similar to national and above the smaller towns.

Health and wellness – this isn't really a city service but it is interesting to see where people fell. The question was asked about affordable quality health care. Forty-seven percent ranked it either good or excellent, and that was similar to where people feel nationally and in towns our size.

Council Member Weiss asked what percent of respondent means.

City Manager Fraser said that means out of 100% of the respondents you see 8% rated them excellent and 39% rated it good.

Something that certainly does affect us in the public sector is our community and civic engagement and how people feel about living in the community. Ninety percent of the people felt this was an excellent or good place to raise children and 79% felt there was a positive or excellent sense of community. Seventy-nine percent felt there was openness and acceptance of the community towards the people with diverse backgrounds. All of those were above the national benchmarks. Sixty-two percent of the people thought this was an excellent or good place to retire, which is similar to the benchmarks. Thirty percent thought there was a good or excellent availability of affordable quality childcare, which was below the national benchmarks. That was one area that really had some variances with regard to some of the demographics, particularly with income. The higher income people felt there was plenty of affordable childcare and low income people were really low.

Mayor Hooper said it is too bad when they combine affordable and quality in that instance and with health care because those are two different measures.

City Manager Fraser said talking about services to specific populations in the city, 76% of the people felt we had good services for seniors; 63% felt we had excellent services for youth and 58% of the people felt we had good services for low income people, all above the benchmarks. Interestingly enough, the higher income people ranked our services to low income people much higher than the lower income people ranked our services to low income people.

Talking about civic activity 82% of the people felt they had opportunities to volunteer their services and 79% felt they had opportunities to participate in community matters. Again, that was high and above the benchmarks.

Specifically talking about the City of Montpelier government. Public trust, is something that might have changed since we took the survey. The overall image or reputation of Montpelier 84% ranked it excellent or good, which is above the benchmarks. The job that the Montpelier government does at welcoming citizen involvement was rated 64%. That is above the national benchmark and similar to the population benchmark. The smaller communities are going to go the extra mile to include people in

their governments. The job that Montpelier government does at listening to its citizens 57% rated it excellent or good, both above the benchmarks. The overall direction that the city is taking was 56% excellent or good, and those were both similar to the national benchmarks. The question of whether they believed they get value for the services for the taxes paid to Montpelier were 46%, which was both below the national and regional benchmarks. They are happy with the city, happy with the services but do not believe they get the value for their services. That is another interesting one to look at the demographic breakdown on both by income. He was very surprised to see, for example, that families with children ranked that lower than the families without children considering if they have kids in school. It was a very surprising result. They also ranked youth services for kids high.

Talking specifically about City of Montpelier employees 89% ranked our employees as being courteous, 88% said knowledgeable, 86% said they had a positive overall impression, 82% ranked them as good to excellent, all above both benchmarks.

What do you do with all of this information? One of the things the National Citizens Survey does is identify key drivers. They do a statistical analysis of how people rated the community and they find correlations between how people ranked how they liked the community and how they ranked specific services. They find the 5 key drivers that matter the most to Montpelier residents, the ones that really drive their opinions of the city. We did not match the national drivers completely. Ours were planning and zoning, which is one of the national drivers as well, street repair which was down, city parks, police services and public schools. The five things that our citizens most directly correlate to their opinion of the city are our planning and community involvement, design of the community, streets and roads, city parks, public schools and police services. Of those five key drivers four of those are in the green which means we are above the benchmarks. The street repair is below the benchmarks.

Council Member Hooper asked what were the general drivers?

City Manager Fraser said the national ones are planning, schools, police, public information and economic development.

Then they asked people some policy questions because we wanted to know what was on peoples' minds. What is the most important issue the City of Montpelier will face over the next five years? These were the top three responses. About 20% of the people listed taxes as their number one concern.

Number two was affordable housing and the third was jobs. Those were the area that people really felt challenges for the city. Then, there were some policy questions and we asked them to what extent they agreed or disagreed. The city should collect alternate revenues like sales tax, rooms and meals tax to reduce reliance on property taxes and bring in more funding from nonresidents. Thirty-nine percent strongly agreed and 38% somewhat agreed and 24% strongly disagreed. The city should consolidate municipal services with neighboring communities even if it means a reduction in direct control of those services. Only 48% of the people agreed strongly or somewhat and 19% strongly and 52% somewhat or strongly disagreed. It is clearly a mixed bag on regional services.

Finally, the city should add 500 new housing units for the city over the next 5 to 10 years and 60% of the people strongly or somewhat agreed with that and 40% somewhat or strongly disagreed. Those break down differently by neighborhood, income, etc.

The other policy questions they asked were how important is it for the city to maintain the following services at current levels. Not surprisingly water was at the top of the list. Ambulance and fire, the roads, schools, sidewalks, and public safety. Parks interestingly enough was way down the list despite the fact that it was identified as a key driver.

We asked if the city had to reduce services to cut costs, which three services would they choose for reduction. The Justice Center was at the top of the list, capital projects, recreation, planning and parks. Given that planning and park was so important to people's positive view of the community yet they were near the top of the list of services they felt could be reduced.

The conclusions are that our residents feel there is a very strong quality of life in Montpelier. They have public trust in citizen involvement, performance by city officials, performance by the various services and they feel very strongly about their public safety. They feel it is a safe and comfortable place to live. The opportunities and concerns that people have are street repair, affordable housing, employment opportunities, economic development and taxes. He doesn't believe there are any huge surprises here, but it is interesting to see what community members reflect back to you with these results.

He tried to look at the sub groups and find those areas where there were disagreements. One of the things he found striking about this was how unified across the board a lot of the responses were. We hear a lot about renters and homeowners have different opinions and long time and new residents have differing opinions. Really, by and large, you will see a lot of consistency across all of the demographic groups. The area that had the biggest difference was income. If there was a differentiating factor about peoples' opinions it was income followed by age. The first of the geographic sub groups is voting districts and he picked out areas where there was some sort of swing.

When you move to the other demographic the first sheet is the people who have lived here less than five years, lived here 6 to 20 years, and people who have lived here 20 years and over. The second column is renters versus owners, people with kids under 17 or no kids under 17 in the household, and then seniors above 65 in the household. You can see where there were differences of opinion based on some of these things. The longer term residents use the library a little less than the newer residents. Homeowners certainly ranked their neighborhoods as higher places to live than renters. Seventy-two percent of renters gave it a positive rate. Interestingly enough, renters were much likely to see Montpelier as a place to retire than homeowners and people without kids also thought this was a better place to retire than people with kids.

We talked about shopping opportunities. Long term residents really see a lot less shopping opportunities than newer residents and it may be that different expectations of people who move to a community like this than people who have been around awhile. Visiting city parks the longer term residents are less likely to use them and certainly people with kids are much more likely to use them. Longer term residents and homeowners were more likely to read the city page in *The Bridge* whereas newer residents and people with kids were far more likely to have looked up the web site. That is important when we think about the ways we use to communicate with the public. That same divide really showed up on the ages as well, that the younger people ranked much higher on the web site use and the older people reading the papers.

With the question about the Justice Center there were some big differences where the newer residents ranked it much higher than the longer term residents, and renters ranked it much higher than homeowners. Renters may have had conflicts with somebody in an apartment next door to them that the Justice Center might try to resolve where a homeowner can't picture themselves needing that kind of service.

The last two pages related to income and age groups. Surprisingly enough, there were very little differences with gender throughout. One item that jumped out was the value of the services for the taxes paid. Fifty percent of women ranked us high while only 39% of the men did. The overall image of Montpelier women ranked it 11 points higher than men. You can see that it is the income area that had the most opportunities for differentiation.

With the use of bus travel the highest income people gave it a 37% ranking. The availability of quality childcare, clearly three groups are right at the 24% of the highest group bumped up to 48%. It is the same with the age group in that the older group has a higher perception that there is good childcare where the younger folks don't see it that way.

There was an increase in attending local meetings by income, and the 35 to 54 group was the highest in the age. There was one with homeownership, too. Fifty-four percent versus 34% homeowners versus renters reported having attended a public meeting of some sort. In terms of interactions with city employees that also rose by income and the same with homeowners versus renters.

He finds it interesting that the higher the income the more safe they felt downtown after dark. Either they don't come downtown or they don't realize it's not safe. More predictably, the higher the income the safer they felt in their own neighborhood

Council Member Hooper said what he thought was interesting was the district that included downtown felt the least safe in downtown.

City Manager Fraser said he was surprised and pleased by the consistency across the demographics on most of the responses. He feels it was a valuable exercise and he appreciates the Council's support. As we go into the budget it is informative to get a sense of where we are at in their priorities.

Council Member Hooper said this is great and a wealth of good information. Do we have the raw data so we can correlate our own benchmarks?

Mayor Hooper asked if anybody had suggestions on how we can use this information. It is timely when we are talking about budgets.

City Manager Fraser said certainly to the extent that the schools and libraries are involved he would share the feedback we got with them and urge them to look at the responses. In terms of policy questions we have some advanced polling of how people feel. The rankings of specific services and the rankings of our employees he is pleased that we are thought of that well. The demographic backgrounds also tell us that we may be doing a good job overall it helps us to take a look at populations, whether it is income, age, geography, etc. to see how we could communicate better. There are many ways to use this information. He thinks ultimately that people like and want the services they are paying for.

Council Member Sheridan said the consolidation piece was big but in this it wasn't.

City Manager Fraser said there is a question asking whether they are registered to vote or did they vote in the last election and it was 88% that voted. The person, who reads *The Bridge*, goes to the web site and votes is more likely to fill this survey out than the person who doesn't care. Eighty-eight to ninety percent of the people who completed the survey did vote in the last election so we did get a good survey of our voters.

Council Member Weiss said of the approximately 458 people who responded can we get data which will show how many of those responded to each question?

City Manager Fraser replied yes. He thanked Council Members for supporting this. He had wanted to do it for two or three years and he can see the value of doing it again in a couple of years.

09-310. Discussion of the "to do" lists/pending items that the City Manager and Department Heads recently compiled for their respective departments.

City Council Member Alan Weiss requested that this item be added to this agenda; since time was taken to put these lists together, he feels Council should review and discuss them.

Recommendation: Review; discuss; possible direction to staff.

Council Member Weiss said back in October the City Manager prepared and presented what he calls the City Manager's list that has 26 different items, each of which is important to the operation of the city such as the budget or the Carr Lot or the Barre Street buildings. An awful lot of time is needed in city government. He spoke of the list of committee's staff representatives. There are twenty-seven or so different committees that the Council has approved that require Council be represented on. That is a huge time commitment. There are not many people like Beverly and others employed within the city who are not liaisons and staff persons to committees. In addition to the long list of Council assignments, there are more committees than he can even identify – Business Loan Fund, Tree Board,

Development Review Board, Biomass, Senior Citizen Center, Emergency Management, Planning, Design Review Committee, Conservation, Disabilities, etc. Every one of those requires an inordinate amount of time and there is not enough time in this city to do all of these projects. On most of the agendas it will say recommendation by staff – poor staff! The Mayor very blatantly just said to the Manager wouldn't it be nice if he wrote a column to go into *The Bridge* and he suspects it is going to take the Manager a minimum of three hours to write a column of that depth, and he does it well, but it is another time factor. He is going to end with two suggestions. The first is that they seriously consider at the time of budget deliberations going to a specific item in the report of the city committee of expenses and revenues. We recommend hiring an outside consultant to do a city wide management study. The objective would be to look at personnel, duplication and redundancies, separation between functions, etc.

Another idea is something that is conceptual, which he would like to see the Council think about in addition to the Mayor, the Council and City Manager they add one more person to that group of two, and that third member is one of the six Council Members. What the focus would be would be time. How much time should really be allocated to a discussion of a particular item? There was an example a couple of meetings ago which still concerns him. He knows people want to come before the Council, but we spent as much time on a \$100 item as we did on a half million dollar item. His reference is that the \$100 represents rental fee of the auditorium. How did we end that? We formed another committee. His hope would be that with a third person they would look at what should the Manager and staff be involved with in terms of time commitment and what should be coming back to the Council. He showed a list of things the Council is involved in. We need to figure out a way to get rid of the bottleneck and reduce the number of items up here in terms of time commitment.

Mayor Hooper said she got the message.

City Manager Fraser said one of the problems they have has to do with the size of the community because there is a function that is set up like a larger community. In a larger community a lot of things that come to the Council wouldn't, but here people want to know what is going on with the drainage on their street and want to talk to the Council. There is a difference on what the Council wants brought before them. There also is in the charter a requirement that any citizen request be heard by the Council and any Council Member can put an item on the agenda. When they do their goals workshop maybe they should look at what falls there and how we operate.

09-311. Authorization for the City Manager to sign a contract for on-line webcasting, video archiving and searchable minutes, documents, agendas, etc.

The City has received two proposals – one from Granicus, Inc. of San Francisco, CA; the other from ClerkBase of Cranston, RI. Each provides a similar range of services using different approaches.

The City Manager is preparing a recommendation which will be forwarded to the Council in advance of the meeting.

Recommendation: Receive Manager's report; authorize Manager to sign contract with recommended firm.

City Manager Fraser said they have received good proposal from two very good companies and it is a tough decision. Part of the difficulty is they have different approaches of how they looked at what we wanted. They would be comfortable using either one of them. He recommended the Granicus proposal. There is an upfront cost but their annual cost is lower. They both have a range of options to select from. What we are talking about is a technology that would take meetings of the Council and web cast it so not only would people in the cable area could watch it but people could watch anywhere in the world. It would also record the meetings, link the agendas, documents and minutes so someone could select an item and watch only that portion of the meeting. They could see any related backup documents that were given to the Council and ultimately the minutes.

Council Member Hooper said most modern web designs incorporate all of the accessibility standards.

City Manager Fraser said they envision doing this for four main boards, Council, DRB, Planning and the DRC and we can provide what level of service we want to provide with all of those. There is even some minute maker software. It also has what they call non-meeting projects. For instance, if they wanted to do a presentation on the survey, they could just record it and post it on line and they would host that as well. His suggestion is they move slowly and see how it works.

Council Member Golonka said this looks really good and moved that the City Manager have the authority to sign a contract with Granicus for the City of Montpelier. The motion was seconded by Council Member Sheridan. The vote was 5-0, motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Hooper requested that the council acting as the Montpelier Liquor Control Commission consider A request from New England Culinary Institute to host a wine tasting event at LaBrioche on Wednesday, December 9, 2009 during the evening. Also a request received from Yebba Inc dba The Abbey Pub & Restaurant to cater a cocktail reception at the State House Cedar Room on Wednesday, December 9, 2009 from 4:00 P.M. to 8:00 P.M.

Motion was made by Council Member Weiss, seconded by Council Member Jarvis to approve the above requests. The vote was 5-0, motion carried unanimously.

09-312. Report by the City Council

Council Member Weiss said Washington County will be holding a pre-budget meeting on December 10th at 2:00 P.M. at the Washington County Superior Court and he intends to attend. It would be wonderful if one other community in Washington County would show up. Every county is required to do this by law. It is assessed to us and we have to pay by July 1st before we collect the taxes.

Mayor Hooper said she planned to attend.

Council Member Sheridan said the ADA Committee met yesterday. There is a draft of a transition plan. They are going to have the school look into handicapped accessible bathrooms at the recreational field. This is a huge undertaking and thinking about the transition plan in a city that is probably out of compliance. There are good people serving on the committee and they are moving forward. The emphasis just has to be moving forward even if it is in small incremental steps.

Council Member Golonka said he would like to have an update on Montpelier Net and see if it is dead or not. He would also like an update on the Berlin property with the structure on the city's land. It implied in the paper that the city could be charged by Berlin and forced to tear it down and we would have to pay for it, and that concerns him.

City Manager Fraser said they aren't going to pay for anything. That is the extreme outcome of a zoning case because it is on city property. It's a classic Catch 22 in that particular case that the gentleman owns the structure and put it up inadvertently and wants to move it. He hasn't been able to get the Agency of Natural Resources to approve it because it is in a wetland. He has been waiting to get approval from ANR while the Town of Berlin is breathing down his neck. This got brought up in particular because the press was notified by the gentleman who likes to kayak on the pond. The owner of the shed thought it was his property and it was an honest error.

Council Member Golonka thanked the Mayor for calling the meeting. Whether we have any jurisdiction it is important to voice these concerns early because if we don't we'll lose our opportunity. Council Members Jarvis, Sherman and himself have attended the Scott committee meetings on alternating weeks and they seem to be moving forward. They have hired an accounting firm, Cota Associates, to do a financial review. They have bifurcated the process. The committee now is going to look at trust issues and discuss it with the City Manager and Steve Stitzel. He told them that the Council would answer any questions they could. They asked for the financials for Scott Construction and he forwarded Stitzel's response. Tomorrow night there is the regionalization meeting.

09-313. Mayor's Report:

Mayor Hooper said we have all been reading in the newspapers from the emergency service providers and the hospitals about the budget cutbacks. There is an increasing burden by the state budget reductions and an increasing burden on local service providers. In that large category of issues that are out there, is the state budget situation which says the state correctional system may no longer accept public inebriates a year from this July. That has been the conventional way of helping to manage folks who can't be safely left alone and they have been transported to jail. That is not going to happen. That is going to be a huge issue to our police services. There has been a group of people who have been working on it and there should be some legislation that is proposed. It is just another of one of the large pieces of how the services are being shifted between the state and the communities and something we need to pay attention to.

09-314. Report by the City Clerk-Treasurer:

City Clerk & Treasurer Hoyt had nothing to report this evening.

09-315. Status Reports by the City Manager

City Manager Fraser said they had their department head budget discussion yesterday and that very topic was discussed, particularly for public safety. They are seeing increases already due to the mental health cuts with the stressful downtimes. They are working diligently on the budget and will have it ready for next Wednesday's meeting and presentation. He is still shooting for that zero. There will be a budget workshop on Saturday, December 12th.

He sent out some information to the Council from Geoff Beyer about a parks purchase and we would need a conservation easement. Because of some other technicalities the closing date has been changed it was originally scheduled for December 9th.

Mayor Hooper said they all understood they were accepting VHCP money which was part of the discussion when they talked about the purchase of this parcel. She isn't sure it is necessary to put it on an agenda. No one has raised any concerns.

City Manager Fraser said it just needs to be in the record that the Council knowingly accepted this restriction on the land we are purchasing.

Council Member Jarvis said her only concern would be about the management plan they are

required to do.

Council Member Weiss said it was announced today by the Vermont Tax Commissioner that unless there is a change that school property tax could go up 26 percent over the next three years.

Mayor Hooper said she found that very interesting because what they are experiencing in Montpelier is that property values are stable and the presentation was that they are going up because values are going down.

Planning Director Hallsmith reported they are having a food systems summit next Thursday night at the High School starting at 5:30 P.M. and everyone is welcome to attend. It's an important meeting because it gives us a chance to speak to our legislators about what we want to do in Central Vermont to improve our food systems and make sure we can produce our own food locally.

Agenda Reports by the City Manager:

09-316. No further items as of "press time".

Adjournment.

After motion duly made and seconded by Council Members Weiss and Hooper the council meeting adjourned at 9:50 P.M.

Attest: Charlotte L. Hoyt
Charlotte L. Hoyt, City Clerk