

**Minutes of the Montpelier Special City Council Meeting
December 4, 2013
Montpelier City Hall Council Chambers**

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

Mayor Hollar called the meeting call to order at 6:30.

13-289. Councilor Weiss moved approval of the consent agenda and was seconded by Councilor Guerlain. Motion carried unanimously at 6:30.

13-290. Cindra Conison of The Quirky Pet addressed the council, expressing her frustration with the district heat project construction process (in particular the communication from City Hall), citing her business losses, and expressing particular disapproval of public comments made by the City Manager. She compared the process unfavorably with Barre's recent downtown construction.

Conison offered suggestions for future city procedures on this, and comparable projects, going forward - including recommendations for loans to impacted downtown businesses.

Rob Kasow of Bear Pond & Rivendell Books indicated he'd suffered similar losses, and reported that there were times when there was no apparent physical access to his business. He felt that downtown merchants were not given adequate attention, suggesting that comparing time spent on district heat with the Hebert Road antenna issue from the previous year illustrated the council's misplaced priorities.

Jason Merihew of Sweet Melissa's echoed Mr. Kasow's comments, relating the challenges of starting a new restaurant under the circumstances. He indicated that the construction crew had been accessing his business's water without permission.

Yvonne Wall (Riverside Salon) indicated she attended the Montpelier Alive meetings and received a lot of information, although she felt there were some informational gaps. She did feel that when she voiced concerns, they were addressed, and suggested that some of the more frustrated merchants might have been well-served by asking more questions. She indicated she had lost money from the construction, and suggested that informational signage would have helped tremendously. She also said more day-to-day information would've been helpful. She praised the recent "cash mob," and suggested more such things would have been beneficial.

Karen Williams Fox of Woodbury Mountain Toys echoed the sentiments of the other merchants, reporting her losses as well as sharing stories of construction workers complaining about the disorganization of the construction company, and of her delivery truck turned away by local police. She also cited a time when 7 Days did not deliver into downtown during a week when she advertised heavily. She also cited Barre's approach positively, and expressed incredulity at the parklets while the construction was going on.

The Mayor expressed his regrets that the city did not communicate and inform the merchants and the public adequately, and also expressed his regret that he didn't personally realize the extent of the impacts. To Mr. Kasow and Ms. Conison specifically, he indicated that the Downtown Business Association (Montpelier Alive) was a critical component to communicating with businesses, and if it is not working, the system should be looked at. Finally, he rejected the suggestion that he did not care about the downtown, noting that he himself works downtown.

City Manager Fraser went over some of the options discussed for lessening the impact of construction (such as working at night) and why the project proceeded as it did. He acknowledged frustrations and insufficiencies of the communication scheme. He also relayed his personal concerns over the impact of the project, citing his regular communications with the contractor, and calling it a "personal failure" that merchants felt he was not taking their concerns seriously.

The Kingsbury Construction operations manager addressed the council, explaining some of the unique challenges of the project and how they tried to deal with them as efficiently and quickly as possible.

Phayvanh Luekhamhan, director of Montpelier Alive, addressed the council. She indicated that comparisons with the Barre construction project were problematic, due to the comparative scales of the projects (Barre's was much larger and more expensive, taking place over a longer time). She did indicate that there were miscommunications or a dearth of communications, especially early on, between MA and the city.

Councilor Guerlain asked what the next large project would be. The City Manager indicated it would be the repaving of State Street. He said the Rialto Bridge would be repaired in about ten years, and the Carr Lot Construction would also be coming soon. Public Works Director Todd Law reminded the council that the repaving of Main Street was also forthcoming, and could take two months.

Councilor Guerlain asked about the potential of doing paving work at night.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh apologized - and expressed frustration - that she did not do more to communicate her concerns before and during construction, while noting that she herself had only received one phone call from a downtown merchant about problems during the process.

13-291. Susan Ritz and Lyn Munno (of the dog waste committee and the conservation commission, respectively) reviewed the proposed ordinance and the status of the eleven new dog waste stations. The wording change was met with approval, with the understanding that language in section (b) of the same ordinance would be tweaked to match the new section (a). The council agreed the change should be worded (“domestic pet” instead of “dog”).

13-292. Councilor Edgerly Walsh introduced the discussion of possible use of Parking Revenue for bicycling improvements and provided background.

Councilor Weiss questioned Councilor Edgerly Walsh about details on the proposed allocation from parking meter revenue. Councilor Guerlain asked for clarification about the current bike path. He indicated he thought it was a good proposal, but thought that the finances previously discussed were to be put towards bike lanes on motor vehicle roads. Councilor Edgerly Walsh thought that the goals were not mutually exclusive. Mayor Hollar agreed with Councilor Guerlain.

Councilor Golonka expressed concern that the set-aside funds for the bike plan could be frittered away inefficiently with small projects that would not be impactful.

Councilor Weiss asked for clarification about what is meant by the "bike path," and whether it includes the proposed bike path extension to the civic center.

Assistant City Manager Jessie Baker explained the financial outlook for the proposed bike path build out from the co-op to the civic center, explaining that more funds than anticipated (into six figures) would be necessary to complete it.

Bill Merilees of the bike committee discussed the proposal, explaining that the "on street bike network" could be done piecemeal, while the roads are being repaved - or that it could be saved up (as Councilor Golonka suggested) and done as one major project. He also discussed other aspects (bike parking, mountain bike options, a fall bike festival, etc.).

The City Manager reviewed the implications on other budget items and priorities to approving this specific allocation.

Councilor Weiss recommended a time limit and a cap on any firm proposal.

Councilor Guerlain supported the proposal, particularly for the statement it makes.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh moved 5% of gross parking revenue be allocated to alternative transportation to sunset after 5 years with the bike committee tasked to come to the council with a plan annually for spending that money.

The mayor suggested the language be changed to specify "bikes." Councilor Hooper seconded the motion. Councilor Edgerly Walsh rejected the mayor's suggested change. There was discussion over the specific language of the motion.

Councilor Edgerly Walsh amended her motion: moved 5% of gross parking revenue is allocated to alternative transportation to sunset after 5 years with the bike committee tasked to come to the council with a 5-year plan for spending that money. The motion carried unanimously at 7:58.

- 13-293. The City Manager introduced the Discussion of possible ballot item for tax exemption of alternate energy producing devices as per 32 VSA 3845. Councilor Edgerly Walsh disclosed that she is employed by a solar power company.

The council discussed the impacts of the relevant statute on citizens, businesses, and the assessor's office.

Councilor Hooper moved to put it on the ballot. Councilor Edgerly Walsh seconded. The motion passed 4-1, with Councilor Guerlain opposed, at 8:08.

- 13-294. Councilor Weiss confirmed the Dec 11 agenda would include the charter and the public safety authority. He also reported that there would be a meeting on the Washington County budget, which - as proposed - would not be increasing.

- 13-295. The Mayor reported on attending the funeral of Manny Canas, former mayor. He also attended a public discussion at the Senior Center with Sue Aldrich of the School Board, and pitched the SC as a lunch destination. He also reported meetings with representatives of the Farmer's Market, as well as with Jeb Spaulding. Mayor Hollar noted that the Farmer's Market management is still looking at alternative locations, but they are committed to staying downtown and are no longer looking at the Vermont College location. He also met with the Carr Lot design review committee.

- 13-297. City Manager Fraser cited the tour of district heat. He noted that Senator Sanders would be visiting to review the system as well. Fraser reported on the status of activating the "mini-system." He noted the assistance of visitors from the St. Paul (MN) municipal government. The City Manager indicated that the budget proposal was forthcoming, and that the city met the council's goals. Finally, he indicated that they were in the process of setting up a grievance regarding the termination of the Planning Director. Councilor Guerlain asked for details on who the meeting would include.

Councilor Hooper moved to adjourn, and was seconded by Councilor Guerlain. Motion passed unanimously at 8:19.