

**Regular Meeting of the Barre City Council
Held September 27, 2022**

The Regular Meeting of the Barre City Council was called to order in person and via video platform by Mayor Jake Hemmerick at 7:00 PM at Barre City Hall. In attendance in person or virtually were: From Ward I, Councilors Emel Cambel and Thom Lauzon; from Ward II, Councilors Michael Boutin and Teddy Waszazak; and from Ward III, Councilors Michael Deering and Samn Stockwell. City staff members present were City Manager Nicolas Storrellicastro, Human Resources Director Rikk Taft, and Clerk/Treasurer Carol Dawes.

Absent: NONE

Adjustments to the Agenda: NONE

Visitors and Communications –

Bernadette Rose read the following statement for the minutes:

October 10, 2022 marks Indigenous Peoples' Day in our nation.

We have been learning about our US history of warring upon and subjugating the Native People on this continent. In VT, we have the shame of the Eugenics project which was an attempt to build a white supremacist society, later adapted by Hitler. As late as 1975 some Abenaki People were involuntarily sterilized. In the 20th century, the so-called Indian Schools forcibly removed Abenaki children from their homes, stealing their language, traditions, and hope. We know that some survived by hiding in plain sight, and in the last 10 years or so, are emerging to share with each other, and those of us who are not Native, their culture, language, and understandings of living with the earth.

Please join me in supporting the VT Tribes, many who are impoverished, and struggling from the oppression by our ancestors.

Ms. Rose shared ways to learn more about the the Abenaki People, and ways to make reparations.

Sharon Toborg read the language from proposal 5/article 22 being considered on the November general election ballot, which would add personal reproductive liberty to the Vermont constitution. Ms. Toborg said she will be voting against the proposed language, and she encourages others to do the same.

Approval of Consent Agenda:

Council approved the following consent agenda items on motion of Councilor Lauzon, seconded by Councilor Stockwell. **Motion carried.**

- A. Approval of Minutes:
 - i. Regular meeting of September 20, 2022.
- B. City Warrants as presented:
 1. Approval of Week 2022-39, dated September 28, 2022:
 - i. Accounts Payable: \$165,074.23
 - ii. Payroll (gross): \$138,602.51
- C. 2022 Licenses & Permits: NONE

City Clerk & Treasurer Report –

Clerk/Treasurer Dawes reported on the following:

- The final delinquency rate for the first quarter property tax collection was 4.74%.
- Water/sewer bills are due by September 30th.
- Ballots for the November 8th general election have been mailed to all active voters. Voters can

either return ballots before the election, or bring ballots with them to the polls on Election Day.

- Barre City's local options sales tax begins this Saturday, October 1st.
- The Board of Civil Authority and Board of Abatement are holding back-to-back meetings tomorrow at 6PM to hear property tax assessment appeals and abatement requests.

Liquor Control Board – NONE

City Manager's Report –

Manager Storrellicastro noted the following:

- Met earlier this evening with City committee and board chairs and vice chairs to discuss communications, training, direction & guidance, overlapping foci, possible consolidations, Council liaisons, and balance of roles between committees and staff.
- The City is interviewing possible candidates for the open staffing positions including IT, assistant DPW director, and engineering tech. Exploring options to amp up recruitment efforts, possible internships, and working with local schools and colleges.
- The fall yard waste drop off schedule has been finalized and posted on the City website.
- Staff members have been meeting to work on the FY24 budget.
- Garfield playground structure was removed for insurance reasons. It has reached the end of its useful life and could no longer be maintained safely. Manager Storrellicastro apologized for not notifying the community of the impending removal. The Recreation Committee will hold its next meeting on October 3rd at the playground at 5PM to engage to community in a discussion on the future of the playground.
- ARPA engagement letter is posted on the City website, encouraging people to submit suggestions for proposed community innovation projects.

Unfinished Business – NONE

New Business –

A) Appearance by the Diversity & Equity Committee.

Mayor Hemmerick reviewed the history of the creation of the Diversity & Equity Committee, and thanked the members for working in good faith. He reviewed procedures for public comment and noted participants would be limited to 5 minutes each. The Mayor said the August 30th executive session held under the category of "legal" should not have been called, as there was no pending lawsuit or lawyer present.

Joelen Mulvaney, Diversity & Equity (D&E) Committee chair, said the committee is not for addressing ideological differences. She said she apologizes for not engaging the Council, and read the definitions of the words "diversity" and "equity" as developed by the VT League of Cities and Towns (VLCT). She said there is conflict because of the makeup of the committee, and there should be a better system for placing people on the committee. She requested professional mediation assistance.

Ellen Kaye, D&E Committee member, said she is also a member of the VLCT Equity Committee, and that VLCT committee is serious about bringing this work to its member communities such as Barre City. She said the City's committee takes on the work in earnest, and works with the criteria established by VLCT for core values, membership guidelines, and required membership. The committee is deeply committed to the work, with each member upholding the values of the committee. The City Council needs to support and enable the work of the committee.

Anthony Williams said civil discourse slipped through the cracks, and Council needs to apply civility to processes used by committees.

Steve Finner referred to his previously submitted statement on structure for committees and Council responsibilities. He said he cautions comments about the applicability of the First Amendment, and offered to provide technical assistance.

Tom Kelly said to keep the First Amendment in mind or we lose our country. He said he doesn't assume there is systemic racism and doesn't know what that means. It is healthy to have someone on the committee who doesn't buy into systemic racism.

Garrett Grant said the newspaper article included one-sided reporting that pushed buttons instead of allowing the citizens of Barre to make informed decisions. He said we need to expand childcare and respect families without taking away rights.

Carol Hebert said she was shocked by the committee's behavior, and an apology is owed to committee member William Toborg.

Rachel Nelson said Council needs to look around at those attending tonight's meeting and note there are few that match her demographics of age, gender and child bearing abilities. She said if you can't look at age, poverty, sexuality and race issues and listen, you are perpetrating an act of violence.

Sarah Helman said the Proposition 5 amendment doesn't take away rights of abortion. She said First Amendment rights were threatened at the D&E Committee meeting, and that needs to be addressed.

Ericka Reil said the article in the newspaper was one-sided. She sees racism in Barre, and the D&E Committee was formed because there is discrimination in Barre.

Laurel Maurer said she encourages people to watch the video of the committee meeting. A committee member was treated wrong. She agrees with the committee's aspirations, but the current chair lacks leadership skills.

Danielle Owczarski said she is a former member of the D&E Committee. She said there were no prior incidents, and previous meetings showed mutual respect. She said don't judge the committee on this one incident.

Lisa Liotta reviewed resolution #2020-05 condemning systemic racism, and noted it was unanimously approved by the Council. She said the D&E Committee was created to combat these issues and the work must continue.

Rosemary Averill said the D&E Committee is important. She said the treatment of board member Toborg was uncalled for and must be dealt with. We can applaud the committee's work, but not this.

Christopher Roberts, D&E Committee member, said he wasn't present at the meeting in question, so won't comment on that, but the reporting in the newspaper was execrable. He said the committee members have always been respectful of each other, and are always working hard.

William Toborg, D&E Committee member, said he echoes what Ms. Owczarski and Mr. Roberts said. He said he wasn't concerned about what happened at the meeting, but was concerned by the email he received afterwards from the committee chair. He said he spends most of this time at the committee meetings listening, and has learned. He believes there is systemic racism and it needs to be looked into. There are forces that want to divide the committee members and get us filled with hate against each other. He said he hasn't seen evidence that the committee chair disagrees with her original statements.

Bernadette Rose said she appreciates tonight's opportunity for people to share. She feels the committee is being judged by the community, and the community is riled up over a single incident. It would be inappropriate to ask for the removal of committee members.

Mary Fifield thanked the D&E Committee for difficult and imperative work. She said systemic racism is written in our historic documents, and there needs to be ongoing discussions on addressing inequities. She said she applauds the community for speaking about difficult experiences.

Joe Shadrout said he is confused as to why this discussion has come before the Council. He said divisiveness comes from the right and left.

Councilor Stockwell said there aren't individual histories; there is one shared history, and it includes discrimination which can't be denied. She said it's critical we recognize our shared history, and the work of the committee is vital. She said maybe the committee meetings could be facilitated for a while.

Committee chair Joelen Mulvaney said she proposes a mediation process for the committee, and would be happy to work with a Councilor or the Manager on a proposal.

Councilor Boutin said there are ideological differences among committee members, and he wouldn't support spending money on a facilitator.

Councilor Cambel said Barre is again front and center, being mocked and degraded, because of this incident. She said the committee is doing vital work and we need to move forward. She said the committee needs a mediator.

Councilor Deering said future concerns about committee member behavior should be brought to the attention of the Manager to be addressed. He said it's important to know the rules of conducting a meeting, and the previously referenced email to committee member Toborg was purposefully stifling.

Councilor Waszazak thanked those who participated this evening, and he has no desire to remove anyone from the committee. He said we don't get it right every time, and the committee confronts difficult issues. They are set up for long-term success, and should be empowered to move forward.

Councilor Lauzon said the round table portion of the D&E Committee meeting in question was out of order and should have been stopped by the chair. He said he doesn't support removing committee members, and we can all do better. He said the executive session mentioned by the Mayor earlier in the meeting was appropriate in response to the email regarding removal of a D&E committee member. He said he wanted the Council to get in front of any potential First Amendment issues.

The Diversity & Equity Committee will take this opportunity to explore options for moving forward, and will report back to the Council with any additional needs.

Upcoming Business – NONE

Round Table –

Councilor Lauzon suggested adding the local Cannabis Control Board to the weekly agenda, like the Liquor Control Board. He noted the state has fentanyl test strips available as a protective measure against overdose. Governor Scott and other New England governors are asking the federal government for an additional \$500M for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Executive Session – Councilor Lauzon made the motion to find that premature general public knowledge of real estate discussions around 22 Hill Street would clearly place the City of Barre at a substantial disadvantage should the discussions be public. The motion was seconded by Councilor Waszazak.
Motion carried.

Councilor Stockwell recused herself from the discussion due to conflict of interest.

Council went into executive session at 9:00 PM to discuss real estate under the provisions of 1 VSA § 313 on motion of Councilor Waszazak, seconded by Councilor Lauzon. Manager Storellicastro and Clerk Dawes were invited into the executive session. **Motion carried.**

Council came out of executive session at 9:13 PM on motion of Councilor Waszazak, seconded by Councilor Cambel. **Motion carried.**

Councilor Stockwell rejoined the meeting.

There was no action taken. Clerk Dawes told Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity executive director Zach Wilson that she and Manager Storellicastro will be in touch to discuss CVHFFH's proposal for 22 Hill Street.

The meeting adjourned at 9:14 PM on motion of Councilor Waszazak, seconded by Councilor Deering.
Motion carried.

The open portions of this meeting were recorded on the video meeting platform.

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn S. Dawes, City Clerk