

**Regular Meeting of the Barre City Council
Held December 5, 2023**

The Regular Meeting of the Barre City Council was called to order in person and via video platform by Mayor Jake Hemmerick at 6:00 PM at City Hall, Barre, Vermont. In attendance 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, Assistant Manager Dawn Monahan, Planning Director Janet Shatney, Police Chief Brad Vail, Mental Health Clinician Annie Kasper, Human Resources Director Rikk Taft, IT Administrator Kris Kirby, Homelessness Coordinator Tess Taylor, and Clerk/Treasurer Carol Dawes.

Absent: NONE

Others Present: NONE

Adjustments to the Agenda: The following adjustments were made:

- Added discussion on the Christmas for Kids program under new items.
- Moved VLCT Welcoming and Engaging Communities to consent agenda.
- Moved VOREC to consent agenda.
- Added discussion on legislative platform to Leonine Public Affairs item under new business.

Visitors and Communications: NONE

Police Chief Brad Vail introduced Annie Kasper, the new mental health clinician who is embedded with the police departments in both Barre City and Montpelier. Ms. Kasper said she is helping educate officers and staff on addressing mental health needs in the community, and is collaborating closely with the department's social services specialist Brooke Pouliot. Councilors welcomed Ms. Kasper.

Steve Restelli said the November 21st minutes didn't accurately reflect his presence under Visitors and Communications. Clerk Dawes said she will review the minutes and correct as necessary. Mr. Restelli read a petition signed by property owners around 2 Orchard Street, saying they have noticed a change in the historical and non-conforming use of the property. He read off a list of adverse impacts that have occurred in the neighborhood, and asked that the petition be entered into the City records. Mr. Restelli said he has filed complaints with Code Enforcement and the police. The neighbors are asking that outdoor activities at the property cease and desist. Manager Storrellicastro said staff members have toured the area, and are working with the City Attorney on defining and interpreting the terms "existing", "prior use", and "conforming/non-conforming". The Manager said he will update the Council in executive session at the next meeting.

Alex Raeburn said he is the owner of 44 Pike Street, which has been red-tagged as uninhabitable since the July flooding and landslides, and there has been no measurable action to date with regards to his request for a buyout. Manager Storrellicastro said the City is waiting for the geotechnical report from Sanborn Head Associates so there are clear expectations of potential liability, and actions that will need to be taken to secure the area before the City can approve the buyout. There was discussion on timelines, managing expectations going forward, setting realistic goals with Sanborn Head, and what role the state is playing in decision-making around buyouts.

Rainbow Bridge Community Center executive director Shawna Trader said the Poor Peoples Campaign is holding a kickoff event at RBCC tomorrow morning to start a Barre City cohort.

Brandy Lussier and her daughter Shayla Messier, who live at 36 Pike Street, said they are in a similar situation as Mr. Raeburn, and noted it's difficult to be out of their home and paying rent elsewhere while they wait for the buyout situation to be resolved. Ms. Messier said there are concerns about her son being able to continue in the Barre school system while they are living outside the area. There was discussion on the buyout program and waiting on the geotechnical engineering reports, and having the Manager offer weekly update sessions. The Manager will give the Council an update on the finances around the properties on the potential buyout list at a future meeting.

Amy Galford suggested that Sanborn Head might possibly present a draft version of the final report that would be adequate for making decisions on the buyouts.

Shawna Trader asked about FEMA trailers to replace lost housing.

Approval of Consent Agenda:

Danielle Owczarski and Peter Anthony from the River Access Task Force said they are partnering with Friends of the Winooski on a Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) grant application for master planning around wayfinding and preliminary design work for an ADA accessible trail to the waterfalls near Rotary Park. There will be future exploration and planning around similar access near the Vermont Granite Museum.

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 November 21, 2023.
- B. City Warrants as presented:
 - 1. Ratification of the Warrants from week 2023-48, dated November 29, 2023
 - i. Accounts Payable: \$224,258.99
 - ii. Payroll (gross): \$159,648.79
 - 2. Approval of Week 2023-49, dated December 6, 2023:
 - i. Accounts Payable: \$2,029,341.82
 - ii. Payroll (gross): \$198,965.67
- C. 2023 Clerk's Office Licenses & Permits: NONE
- D. Approve City fee schedule changes associated with electric vehicle charging stations
- E. Ratify Council's 11/21/23 approval of documents and resolution #2023-13 for revolving loan RF3-514-1.0
- F. Ratify Council's 11/21/23 approval of free downtown holiday parking through January 1, 2024
- G. Errors & Omissions: 0 Country Way & 0 Westwood Parkway
- H. Approve Sno-Bees Snowmobile Club Landowner Permission Form (authorize Manager Storlicastro to sign)
- I. VOREC grant project proposal for ADA trail (moved from new business under adjustments)
- J. VLCT Welcoming and Engaging Communities cohort application (moved from new business under adjustments)

City Clerk & Treasurer Report –

City Clerk/Treasurer Carol Dawes reported on the following:

- Water/sewer bills mailed out last week. Due by January 2, 2024.
- Application form for flood-related abatement requests sent out last week.

Liquor Control Board/Cannabis Control Board – NONE

City Manager’s Report –

Manager Storrellicastro reported on the following:

- Substantial damage letters associated with the flood are being sent out this week to 96 properties. The letters ask property owners to file any required building or zoning permits by the end of December so as to allow for more accurate data on flood damage.
- The City has executed a lease with Barre Up for use of the former police department space. The lease runs to May 2024, and will come to Council for ratification at the next meeting.

New Business –

A) VOREC grant project proposal for ADA trail.

Moved to consent agenda under adjustments

B) Authorize the Manager to execute contract(s):

i. Leonine Public Affairs

Manager Storrellicastro said the proposal is to engage Leonine Public Affairs to serve the City as lobbyists during the upcoming legislative session to work on securing flood recovery funding support. Nick Sherman from LPA said they are being engaged by Barre City and Montpelier for similar work, and such funding would likely be included in a budget adjustment or omnibus spending bill, and not limited to these two municipalities. There was discussion on advocating for flood recovery, providing boots on the ground advocacy at the statehouse in addition to Barre City and Washington County representation, scope of services, and setting a single point of contract.

Council approved the \$15,000 contract with Leonine Public Affairs on motion of Councilor Waszazak, seconded by Councilor Stockwell. **Motion carried.**

There was further discussion on establishing a legislative platform of other items the City is interested in pursuing including:

- Charter changes
- Infrastructure replacement post-flood
- Future of the courthouse
- Public safety
- Support for areas housing social services
- Homelessness
- Streets and bridges
- Central Vermont bike path
- State highway aid funding
- Housing investments
- Clean water
- Flood mitigation
- Land use/Act 250
- Infrastructure to meet needs for climate change
- Substance abuse issues

Mayor Hemmerick said next steps are to set a meeting to discuss priorities and develop a list for adoption. Councilors will send ideas to the Manager for compilation.

C) Citywide reappraisal update.

Bill Krejeski from New England Municipal Consultants said they are currently scheduled to begin work on the City-wide reappraisal this year, but he is recommending a one-year delay due to flood damage. In the interim they will work with the assessing department to catch up on the backlog of building and zoning permits. Mr. Krajeski noted the grand list software referenced in the original contract is now available online and won’t require the purchase of a server.

Barre Unified Union School District board member Sonya Spaulding said her major concern is the City’s common level of appraisal (CLA) which is used to calculate education tax rates. The City’s CLA is below the mandatory reappraisal threshold of 85%. Clerk Dawes noted the City has informed the state that a reappraisal is scheduled, which satisfies the statutory requirements.

Council approved cloud-based hosting of the grand list software, work towards reduction or elimination of the permit backlog, and a one-year extension for the reappraisal on motion of Councilor Lauzon, seconded by Councilor Cambel. **Motion carried.**

D) FY25 budget update.

Manager Storellicastro gave a PowerPoint presentation on the draft budget and highlighted the proposed reductions, increases in the tax rate due to grand list losses following the flood, and plans to lobby the state for funding assistance.

There was discussion on breaking down the grand list reductions based on which ones are likely to be permanent and which ones are recoverable; being strategic about making investments to grow the grand list; level funding of outside organizations; using Brusa Trust funds for municipal swimming pool operations; and using civic center capital funds for operations.

Former City Manager Steve Mackenzie suggested moving town meeting to May so as to allow additional time before setting a budget. Manager Storellicastro will research if that is possible considering the City's charter.

There was continued discussion on reviewing the tax rate calculations at the next budget presentation, cost savings through shuttering Alumni Hall or renting out more of the space, early retirement buyouts, reopening collective bargaining agreements, and how to word the budget article on the ballot.

Joelen Mulvaney said the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps is available to perform services.

David Delcore asked if it would be possible to just vote an amount to be raised by taxes rather than a budget amount. Clerk Dawes said the charter calls for voting on a budget. Manager Storellicastro will get a legal opinion on that question.

Manager Storellicastro said the Council will hold a budget seminar on January 9th with all department heads present.

E) Adopt Council housing strategy.

Manager Storellicastro reviewed the draft housing strategy. It was noted strategies change with priorities and opportunities, and that adopting a consensus vision sends a message to funders that the City is motivated to move forward.

Jeremy Spiro-Winn said development needs to be mixed use, walkable, high density, mixed income, and include ground floor business development. He suggested looking at pre-development agreements from St. Albans as good examples.

Council approved the housing strategy as presented on motion of Councilor Lauzon, seconded by Councilor Stockwell. **Motion carried.**

F) Discuss implementation of equity impact assessment tool.

Joelen Mulvaney, chair of the Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Committee, read a statement from the committee recommending Council address the issue of community involvement with every proposed project, regardless of funding sources. They encouraged outreach and surveying, and use of the Barre City Equity Impact Assessment Tool for all development projects. There was discussion on the types of outreach that would be the most effective with the available resources and time.

To be approved at 12/19/23 Barre City Council Meeting

G) VLCT Welcoming and Engaging Communities cohort application.

Moved to consent agenda under adjustments

Added) Christmas for Kids (added under adjustments)

Councilor Boutin said \$4,258 was raised during last Saturday's coin drop held by the Council. The funds will be used to benefit the Christmas for Kids program. Councilor Boutin noted this is in addition to the \$6,000+ that has been donated by local businesses and individuals. He thanked Barre City Police Corporal Jason Fleury and his daughter Katie, who each year do all the outreach to schools and service organizations to identify kids in need, shop for and wrap all the gifts, and coordinate distribution.

Council approved allocating all funds raised for the Barre Juvenile Officers Association for its Christmas for Kids program on motion of Councilor Boutin, seconded by Councilor Deering. **Motion carried.**

Upcoming Business –

The following items will be on the 12/19 agenda:

- Continued discussion on legislative platform
- Ratification of Barre Up lease
- Update on volunteer activities following the flooding, cleanup and recovery

It was requested that there be a meeting next week to focus on the FY25 budget.

Round Table –

Those Councilors who participated in last Saturday's coin drop spoke of the generosity of the community.

Councilors attended the ribbon cutting at new business Tally on N. Main Street.

Councilor Deering said the Vermont Young Republicans are holding a Christmas ball at the Elks Club this Saturday.

Councilor Lauzon suggested meeting weekly until the FY25 budget is finalized.

Councilor Stockwell said White River Junction is a good example of medium density housing.

Councilor Boutin thanked those who participated in Saturday's coin drop, and the staff at Community National Bank for processing the receipts.

Mayor Hemmerick thanked public works employees for their smooth handling of the first snow storms of the season.

Executive Session – NONE

The meeting adjourned at 9:50 PM on motion of Councilor Lauzon, seconded by Councilor Stockwell. **Motion carried.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn S. Dawes, City Clerk