

**Regular Meeting of the Barre City Council
Held December 12, 2023**

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 City Hall, Barre, Vermont. In attendance were: From Ward I, Councilors Emel Cambel and Thom Lauzon; from Ward II, Councilor Michael Boutin; and from Ward III, Councilors Michael Deering and Samn Stockwell. City staff members present were City Manager Nicolas Storellicastro, Assistant City Manager Dawn Monahan, Homelessness Coordinator Tess Taylor, Human Resources Director Rikk Taft, IT Support Specialist Kris Kirby, and Clerk/Treasurer Carol Dawes.

Absent: From Ward II, Councilor Teddy Waszazak.

Adjustments to the Agenda: The following adjustments were made:

- Add to consent agenda: ratify last week's acceptance of the VLCT Welcoming Communities Grant, and appoint Joelen Mulvaney, Councilor Stockwell, and Councilor Deering to the cohort.
- Correct Barre Up lease agreement under consent agenda is an approval, not a ratification. Schedule ratification at next Council meeting.

Visitors and Communications:

Sonya Spaulding asked Council to support the Aldrich Library by approving its traditional funding increase in the FY25 budget. Ms. Spaulding said the library is a vital part of the community, and level funding would be a cut when you take cost increases into consideration. She said funding is an equity issue.

Joelen Mulvaney said she is disturbed about the way the budget is phrased, and there are differences between the groups that serve the community and those that serve businesses. Ms. Mulvaney said the Aldrich Library serves the community, and the traditional funding increase should be included in the FY25 budget.

Lisa Liotta said the same personnel cost increases the City is budgeting for impact the Aldrich Library, and level funding effectively cuts the library's budget.

Approval of Consent Agenda:

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

- A. Approval of Minutes:
 - i. Regular meeting of December 5, 2023.
- B. City Warrants as presented:
 1. Approval of Week 2023-50, dated December 13, 2023:
 - i. Accounts Payable: \$388,040.96
 - ii. Payroll (gross): \$141,945.11
- C. 2024 Clerk's Office Licenses & Permits:
 - i. Entertainment licenses:
 - i. Old Labor Hall, 46 Granite Street (annual license)
 - ii. American Legion, 320 N. Main Street (annual license)
 - iii. Barre Opera House, 6 N. Main Street (annual license)
 - iv. Ladder 1 Grill, 8 S. Main Street (annual license)
 - v. Vermont Granite Museum, 7 Jones Bros. Way (annual license)
 - vi. The Meltdown, 83 Washington Street (annual license)
 - ii. Waste Disposal Collectors licenses:

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- i. MK Trucking LLC, 3 drop-off vehicles
- D. Approve lease agreement with Barre Up (this item amended under adjustments)
- E. Authorize the Manager to execute contract(s)
 - i. Martin Appraisal Services, Inc.
- F. Ratify last week's acceptance of the VLCT Welcoming Communities Grant, and appoint Joelen Mulvaney, Councilor Stockwell, and Councilor Deering to the cohort (added under adjustments)

City Clerk & Treasurer Report –

City Clerk/Treasurer Carol Dawes reported on the following:

- Water/sewer bills are due by January 2, 2024.

Liquor Control Board/Cannabis Control Board – NONE

City Manager's Report –

Manager Storrellicastro reported on the following:

- Expecting the geotechnical report on Pike Street by December 19th.
- Issued RFP's for HVAC system repairs at City Hall and the Public Safety Building.
- Tentative substantial damage letters were mailed out last week. Responses are due by the end of December to allow the list to be finalized.
- North End public engagement meetings will begin in the new year. Meetings will be held in various locations, including neighborhood-specific sites.
- The 30-day comment period for the AOD settlement has passed, and the settlement between the City and the VT Agency of Natural Resources is now in place as approved.
- The turf for the BOR has been ordered, and will be ready for installation in the spring after the ice is out.

There was discussion on the steps needed for the substantial damage letters. Manager Storrellicastro said property owners need to provide copies of invoices or estimates related to flood damage repairs. Contact the Planning, Permitting and Assessment Department or Barre Up for assistance.

There was discussion on locations for the north end engagement meetings, including the Opera House and Labor Hall, along with other smaller venues.

New Business –

A) FY25 budget update.

Manager Storrellicastro reviewed his updated FY25 draft budget presentation, and noted responses to last week's Council questions:

1. Moving town meeting date: Act 1 approved by the legislature last year, and City charter allow the Council to approve an alternate date other than the traditional town meeting date of March 5, 2024. Staff recommends moving to May 14th, which would allow time for addition data on FY24 budget-to-actuals, and possible details on post-flood funding support from the legislature. Barre City elected officials whose terms expire in 2024 would remain in office until the new date, and those running for office would have adjusted petition deadline dates. It was noted the City will hold an election on March 5th for the presidential primary and school votes, regardless of whether the City questions are on the ballot or not;
2. Wording for the budget question on the ballot: Manager Storrellicastro said the ballot article can ask for spending authority up to the full budget reflecting projected state aid, while limiting the amount to be raised by taxes to no more than a certain percentage increase.

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There was discussion on a later date providing more clarity, and lobbying the legislature for multi-year financial support. There will be further discussion at next week's meeting.

There was discussion on the projected grand list values, use of the fund balance, and proposing a property tax rate increase of up to 5%. Mayor Hemmerick asked for a big picture presentation on bond status, FY23 audit, fund balances, and capital budget. Manager Storrellicastro said such an in-depth look into the FY25 budget is scheduled for January 9th. Assistant Manager Monahan said she'll have an FY24 financial report for the first six months of the fiscal year for review at that meeting.

There was discussion on voter-approved appropriations and whether the Council should revise the policy to list them on the ballot separately.

Sarah Helman asked how the City dealt with budgeting during prior flooding events. It was noted this year's flooding was significantly more impactful than past flooding in 2011 and 2015.

There was discussion on the impact on the FY24 financials from the current hiring freeze; having the state to take over handling development-related permits, as revenues are not covering expenses; tracking mutual aid to quantify value of services provided vs. services received; options for developing a local PILOT program for exempt properties; and what charter changes should be considered for inclusion on the 2024 annual meeting ballot.

B) Review LOI for development of Seminary St. parking lot.

Manager Storrellicastro reviewed the letter of invitation asking for proposals for development of the City-owned parking lot area on Seminary Street. The Manager said submissions will be reviewed, and followed up with a more robust application process. Homelessness Coordinator Tess Taylor said there will be additional information about the lot on a special section of the website. There was discussion on setting the due date for the LOIs for February 16, 2024; including information on the website on policy tools, TIF district opportunities, zoning and permitting, and tax stabilization; and disclosing conflicts of interest. It was noted LOIs would be treated with absolute confidentiality.

Upcoming Business –

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

- Continued discussion on legislative platform
- Ratification of Barre Up lease
- Orchard Street zoning issue
- Budget request presentations from Barre Area Development Corp., Barre Partnership, and Aldrich Library

There was discussion on Council meeting start times, and how frequently the Council will meet. There was consensus on 6:00 PM start times, and on holding meetings every other week, except during budget building.

Round Table –

Councilor Boutin asked for an executive session to discuss contracts and personnel. He said he did some research on the auditorium and when it was built, and he shared links to numerous newspaper articles.

Councilor Deering said the Spaulding High School girls and boys hockey teams have started their seasons, and encouraged people to attend their games.

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Councilor Stockwell said she has heard there are unresponsive landlords in Barre City, and she would like to get monthly reports on code enforcement.

Executive Session – Councilor Boutin made the motion to find that premature general public knowledge of contracts and personnel discussions would clearly place the City of Barre at a substantial disadvantage should the discussions be public. The motion was seconded by Councilor Lauzon. **Motion carried.**

Council went into executive session at 9:15 PM to discuss contracts and personnel under the provisions of 1 VSA § 313 on motion of Councilor Boutin, seconded by Councilor Lauzon. Manager Storrellicastro was invited into the executive session. **Motion carried.**

Council came out of executive session at 9:38 PM on motion of Councilor Lauzon, seconded by Councilor Stockwell. **Motion carried.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:38 PM on motion of Councilor Lauzon, seconded by Councilor Stockwell. **Motion carried.**

There was no action taken.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn S. Dawes, City Clerk