

**Regular Meeting of the Barre City Council
Held February 27, 2024**

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 (arrived approximately 7:00 PM) and Samm Stockwell. City staff members present were City Manager Nicolas Storrellicastro, Planning Director Janet Shatney, Homelessness and Housing Coordinator Tess Taylor, and Clerk/Treasurer Carol Dawes.

Absent: NONE

Adjustments to the Agenda: Moved trestle alternatives and flood resiliency to the beginning of the new agenda items list to accommodate those in attendance.

Visitors and Communications:

Adam Jacobs said the Barre Opera House spring break campers are putting on a performance of *My Father's Dragon* this Friday at 4 PM.

Barre Partnership executive director Tracie Lewis said they are hosting a Barre Solar Eclipse Block Party on April 8th in Merchant's Row/Enterprise Aly. Events will coincide with the total solar eclipse that will traverse Vermont that afternoon. Adam Jacobs said Barre City will experience total coverage north of Hill Street. Ms. Lewis also noted local photographer Shannon Alexander has a display of her flood photos at the statehouse from March 4-29. An opening reception will be held on March 14th.

Bernadette Rose said there is an art exhibit in the Aldrich Library Milne Room featuring local K-12 student art.

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 February 6, 2024.
- B. City Warrants as presented:
 1. Ratification of Week 2024-07, dated February 14, 2024:
 - i. Accounts Payable: \$162,075.17
 - ii. Payroll (gross): \$146,367.10
 2. Ratification of Week 2024-08, dated February 21, 2024:
 - i. Accounts Payable: \$62,534.66
 - ii. Payroll (gross): \$147,168.39
 3. Approval of Week 2024-09, dated February 28, 2024:
 - i. Accounts Payable: \$1,835,798.32
 - ii. Payroll (gross): \$153,893.70
- C. 2024 Clerk's Office Licenses & Permits: NONE

City Clerk & Treasurer Report –

City Clerk/Treasurer Dawes reported on the following:

- Just over 400 early absentee ballots have been issued to date for next Tuesday's town meeting elections. Polls will be open at the auditorium that day from 7AM – 7PM.
- Information on offices up for election, nominating petitions and procedures for Barre City's annual meeting on May 14th, are posted on the elections page of the City website.
- Water/sewer bills will be in the mail this Friday, March 1st. Due by Monday, April 1st.

Liquor Control Board/Cannabis Control Board –

Councilor Lauzon said he is recusing himself from the discussion and decision on the cannabis license under consideration this evening. Elizabeth Manriquez, owner of Dames Inc., introduced herself and her new cannabis retail establishment to the Council. Ms. Manriquez said they are hoping to open in April. Council approved the retail cannabis license on motion of Councilor Waszazak, seconded by Councilor Stockwell. **Motion carried with Councilor Boutin abstaining and Councilor Lauzon recused.**

City Manager’s Report –

Manager Storlicastro reported on the following:

- Public meeting on hazard mitigation plan revisions on Thursday, March 7th at Alumni Hall.
- Free COVID test kits are available in City Hall while supplies last.
- A letter is being mailed out from the assessors to property owners in the flood hazard area, asking if they’d like to schedule an inspection to review the impact of flood damage on property value.
- The buyout applications for 36 Pike Street and 44 Pike Street are being processed.
- There are openings on the Central Vermont Solid Waste Management District Board for a Barre City rep and alternate. Other committee and board vacancies are listed on the City website.

Representatives Peter Anthony and Jonathan Williams spoke of ongoing work being done by the legislature to provide flood relief through the budget adjustment bill. The Committee of Conference has included \$1M for Barre City, along with ERAF matching funds. They thanked their counterparts in Montpelier for working together to advocate for funding support for these hard-hit communities.

New Business –

D) City response to trestle alternatives.

Manager Storlicastro said the Vermont Agency of Transportation has issued a report on possible alternatives for the railroad trestle over the Stevens Branch on the north end of the City, and the public comment period closes March 7th. Former Manager Steve Mackenzie read a letter to AOT, encouraging them to opt for alternative #6, which calls for complete removal of the trestle. There was discussion on possible FEMA funding for the removal, and the need for a cost/benefit analysis related to other alternatives that would have the trestle repaired or replaced.

Council approved having the Manager share the City’s position that alternative #6, removal of the trestle, be chosen from the available options on motion of Councilor Lauzon, seconded by Councilor Stockwell.

Motion carried.

C) Next steps on flood resiliency, recovery and buyouts.

Manager Storlicastro shared a PowerPoint presentation outlining the results and responses from the public feedback process, and the key themes from the ward meetings, which included 1) support all types of housing, 2) floodplain mitigation & green space, and 3) removing river obstacles. There was a summary of the properties on the potential buy-out list, based on intakes, and a template for calculating costs and impacts on the grand list, and maps of the impacted areas with potential buy-out property locations.

The Manager said they are working with FEMA experts to review potential buyout properties, and the experts’ recommendations are to focus first on those properties that are river-adjacent, in clusters, and located in areas that would allow for floodplain mitigation. River scientists will need to be engaged to calculate impacts of any possible mitigation, both in the City and downstream. The Manager reviewed possible housing and flood mitigation areas in the north end, Vine Street/Scampini Square, River/Granite Streets, and Harrington Avenue areas.

Nick Roos asked about homes shown in the potential mitigation areas, and if surrounding area properties not currently on the potential buyout list might be included. The Manager said there is still time to request a buyout.

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Andrea Young asked about properties like hers that were impacted by landslides. The Manager said based on the FEMA experts' advice, the focus is on flood-damaged properties first. There was discussion on timelines, and sharing information with property owners as soon as possible so they can move on to their next options if a buyout isn't a possibility.

Mark Christie said his home on Oswald Street was destroyed by a landslide, and properties that were totally destroyed should be factored in.

Councilor Waszazak said it's not right to deny any of the buyout requests. There was discussion on expanding the scope of buyouts with a vision of strategic retreat along the river corridors, while keeping in mind the balance of lost housing and lost grand list value.

Amy Galford asked if it was too late to apply for buyouts, and Manager Storellicastro said no, there's still time to submit an intake. There was discussion on infill development, getting creative about parking and clustered housing, and whether FEMA property buyout restrictions would allow property to be used for parking in the future.

Councilor Lauzon said it's a hard job to tell people, "No", especially when looking at permanent removals from the grand list.

City Attorney David Rugh said the City needs to plan the HMGP buyouts with an eye towards any utilities or easements, and those improvements cannot be included on any buyout properties without an exemption.

Councilor Waszazak made the motion to issue a request for letters of interest to develop housing on the Wobby Park lot next to the public safety building, seconded by Councilor Boutin.

Bernadette Rose said the Vine Street playground might also be a possible lot for either development or flood mitigation.

Judie Copping said she has photos of the flooding on the Vine Street playground, and any deed restrictions would need to be researched.

Council voted on the motion as presented. **Motion carried.**

There was discussion on next steps to gather more details about buyouts, and investments in flood resilience and housing. Manager Storellicastro asked if there was general consensus among the Council on 1st tier focus on the flood mitigation areas identified in the presentation: Vine/Scampini, River/Granite, and Harrington.

Councilor Boutin made the motion to focus on these areas, seconded by Councilor Stockwell.

There was discussion on letting property owners know if they won't be offered a buyout so they can move on with their planning, and working with river scientists to further prioritize areas.

Central Vermont Flood Recovery Officer Pat Moulton said river scientists will be on hand as soon as possible. Planning Director Janet Shatney said the buyout process can be painful and time-consuming, and people can back out right up to the last minute.

Council voted on the motion as presented. **Motion carried.**

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A) Select Annual Report cover photo and dedication.

Manager Storlicastro reviewed possible photos for the cover, and there was discussion on whether to be strict about using photos and dedications from FY23. Council approved using a flood-related photo presented by Councilor Boutin for the cover, and three other photos presented by the Manager for the back and inside covers, on motion of Councilor Boutin, seconded by Councilor Lauzon. **Motion carried.**

Council approved dedicating the annual report to staff, community members and volunteers who have helped out during the flood recovery, along with a dedication to recently retired public works superintendent Steve Micheli, on motion of Councilor Waszazak, seconded by Councilor Boutin. **Motion carried.**

B) Authorize Manager to negotiate and execute a mediation contract.

Councilor Stockwell made a motion to authorize the Manager to negotiate and execute a mediation contract. She said the mediation would allow Council to work out better ways to disagree and work together. Councilor Boutin said he supports the idea of facilitation, but mediation implies sides and a need to mediate a specific issue. There was discussion on the differences between mediation and facilitation, and whether either can be held in executive session.

Councilor Boutin made a motion to authorize the Manger to negotiate and execute a facilitation contract.

Councilor Stockwell withdrew her motion.

Bernadette Rose said mediation can assist the Council in moving forward.

City Attorney David Rugh said a motion for findings to go into executive session only requires a simple majority. The requirement for a supermajority is specific to state boards.

Steve Finner said facilitation is a subcategory of mediation, and the concept of “sides” is not part of facilitation.

Councilor Deering seconded Councilor Boutin’s motion above. Councilor Waszazak said he will be voting against, and will wait to continue the discussion until after the May 14th town meeting elections, when there will likely be changes to the Council makeup.

Council voted on the motion as presented. **Motion did not carry with Councilors Boutin and Deering voting for, and Mayor Hemmerick and Councilors Cambel, Waszazak, Stockwell, and Lauzon voting against.**

Councilor Cambel left the meeting at this time.

Upcoming Business –

Manager Storlicastro said the March 12th meeting will include:

- Presentation of the FY23 audit.
- Warning for possible charter change public hearings.
- Review and acceptance of paving bids.

Round Table –

Councilor Waszazak thanked the City’s legislative representatives for getting flood relief funding over the finish line in the budget adjustment bill.

Councilor Stockwell said she attended a wonderful open mic event at the Rainbow Bridge Community Center.

Councilor Lauzon thanked property owners who participated in this evening's discussions, and those who have been sharing their stories in the abatement hearings. He said the Barre Community Relief Fund approved 30 funding requests recently, and there are another 19 under consideration. He said the fund will continue for future community needs.

Mayor Hemmerick said the Church of the Good Shepherd is holding a Pie to the Rescue flood recovery fundraiser this Saturday from 5-7:30 PM.

Executive Session – Councilor Stockwell made the motion to find that premature general public knowledge of real estate, personnel, and litigation issues to be discussed 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.**

Council went into executive session at 8:45 PM to discuss real estate, personnel, and litigation under the provisions of 1 VSA § 313 on motion of Councilor Stockwell, seconded by Councilor Lauzon. Manager Storrellicastro, City Attorney David Rugh, Barre Area Development Corporation executive director Aimee Green, and Prospect Heights board member David Sichel were invited into the executive session. **Motion carried.**

Council came out of executive session at 9:53 PM on motion of Councilor Stockwell, seconded by Councilor Boutin. **Motion carried.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 PM on motion of Councilor Waszazak, seconded by Councilor Boutin. **Motion carried.**

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

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn S. Dawes, City Clerk