

City of Barre Public Body Meeting Minutes

Committee: Transportation and Public Works Committee

Date: February 20, 2025

Location: City Council chambers

Members in attendance: Mitch Bernard, Art Bombardier, Kenneth Bauer, Steve Mackenzie

Members absent: none

Others in attendance: Department of Public Works director Brian Baker; via audio only: city councilor Samn Stockwell

Call to order

Kenneth called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m. Attendees did some technical troubleshooting to get Samn connected, so Steve called it to order again at 5:10 p.m.

Adjustments to agenda

Brian asked to show some apps at his point in the agenda.

Public comment

No public in attendance to comment.

Approval of the previous meeting's minutes

Art moved to approve the minutes of the December 19, 2024, meeting. Ken seconded the motion. All voted to approve. Minutes were approved.

Approval of the committee charge

Ken moved to approve. Art seconded. All voted to approve. Charge was approved.

Steve will forward to Nicolas Storellicastro, city manager, to post on the website. He suggested that, after another meeting or two, the committee might want to get on the council agenda to update the council on the committee.

Agenda items

Steve inventoried items for the committee to consider taking up and suggested that the committee discuss two or three at each of the next few meetings.

- The committee discussed the suggestion of a pothole tip line, a question about sidewalk plows versus Bobcats, and a request for crosswalks to have launch spots and landing spots.
- Brian Baker gave a detailed report featuring demonstrations of two new tools the department is using to gather data for planning.

Very detailed notes on these discussions are at the end of these minutes for the interested reader.

Next meeting

- Steve suggested that the next meeting be at 5 p.m. on Thursday, March 20. Art moved, Ken seconded, and all ayes confirmed this date and time.

Mitch Bernard filed the minutes.

Discussion details

Pothole tip line

- Brian says that his crew is out there filling holes every day they can but that the holes open again in a couple of days because of the weather. He says they get some complaints from the website via Roxanne but only maybe one or two a week. Setting up a tip line might not be realistic. People can currently call the front desk, Roxanne Pike (executive assistant), Nicolas, or Brian.
- Ken offered to take an inventory of existing potholes. Brian iterated that they're out there as much as they can be. Ken offered to get GPS coordinates; Brian said that they might have something to do that already and would show us that tool later in the meeting. Ken offered to document the potholes; Brian said that there was no trouble finding them.
- Samn noted that the comments about potholes in the Barre Resident Chat group on Facebook can get really mean and that maybe the tip line would just bring them out more. Brian acknowledged that people were getting nasty on the calls, too.
- Brian added that, when it snows and it's wet, it's hard to have time to get them fixed. Steve added that, when the weather is suitable in the summer, the pothole truck is out.

Brian clarified that his department was just putting in cold patch, which is a temporary fix, because anything they put in now would have to be redone by spring. Once there's nice weather, he explained, they dig that out and do a proper repair.

- Steve asked whether there is a schedule for summer. Brian answered that they try to have the crew out there every day they can but that, when they have a project (such as paving), they have to pull everyone to it. Ken asked whether it's an issue of more manpower. Brian replied that they could definitely use another four or five guys. Steve asked whether these were new positions. Brian said that some are in water department, one of which is a foreman, but that they might have to start someone as a laborer and grow them into that role. Other positions are new ones. He said that he would love to have a couple of people just out there filling potholes, but they just do not have the people to do it.
- Steve concluded that the committee would not pursue starting a tip line but have people just call like they are doing now.
- Ken asked how much the entry-level jobs pay. Brian said \$21 (per hour), and Steve added that there were also good benefits. Brian clarified that the pay grade for laborers goes from about \$21 to about \$24.

Sidewalk plows versus Bobcat vehicles

- Brian said that sidewalk plows are great but are a single-season vehicle. Public Works uses Bobcats for construction as well but that the sidewalk plows just sit when there is no snow to plow.
- Steve asked what Kermit is. Brian responded that Kermit is a mini front-end loader.
- Brian added that the department tried one vehicle with a 100-horsepower engine and could do 25 miles per hour on street but had a plow and integrated salt. It was great, he said, for plowing sidewalks, but that is all one can do with them.
- Samn noted that someone had mentioned a concern about Bobcats eating up parts of sidewalks. Brian said that, if a sidewalk is in bad condition, a Bobcat might tear something up but that even sidewalk plows with tracked or articulated movement can damage too. A Bobcat might do more. Steve said that he was not aware of a Bobcat tearing anything up. Ken noted that these vehicles are bound to catch corners and that no sidewalk is perfectly flat. Steve added that it is the plow, not the wheels, that do the damage. The plow blades on the vehicles are the same. Ken agreed, adding that the blade is going to catch no matter what vehicle is pushing it. ([Link to description of tracked treads.](#))

Crosswalks in places with no landing zones

- Steve mentioned a list of places that members of the public had indicated needed crosswalks with launching and landing spots at the ends. One example was on Elm Street. (The same spreadsheet where these requests had been tracked included a complaint about large holes on Prospect.)
- Brian noted an example on Allen Street that might have a start on a lower sidewalk but no landing. Steve said that there were no sidewalks in that area. Brian mentioned that Bill Ahearn had hoped to have something added but didn't really have plans for it. Art noted they had had Prospect Street on a project list when he was at the Vermont Agency of Transportation (AOT) 40 years ago.
- Brian indicated that they would have to find out how much money they had, then do the upper section of Berlin (Highgate Drive to the top of the hill), Prospect from Allen to Jake, then Allen out to the city line. Some sections need to be rebuilt, but some need just an overlay. This is what they've done in the past.
- Steve asked Brian whether, when they do Allen, they can also do the sidewalk. Brian said that he did not think that there were plans for it. He said that probably they would have the crew do it ad hoc. In some places, he pointed out, lawns were too high to get a sidewalk in there. Steve agreed, adding that some places do not have room. Brian said that they are waiting for clear information but that they would like to get those areas done. Steve asked whether it would be better to maybe defer that a year or even go out now for design proposals to take a look at designing a sidewalk in there. Brian said that their goal was to do long streets all together so they get a good price, like they did last year. They are hoping to do the same this year. He thinks that they can put a sidewalk in after paving and that sidewalk completion there is not imminent. Steve asked whether they can get it paved then get sidewalk design in summer, programmed for next year or year after. Brian said that it would be great if they got their crew to do the sidewalk but that, if they do that, they cannot get maintenance done. He added that it would be great if they had those extra four or five guys. He also said that he and TJ DeRose, superintendent of public works, had different views; TJ is the realist. The department has way more maintenance than it can even do and does not have the budget to hire out to a contractor to do the projects. Art added that no one knows what kind of federal money will be around in a year.
- Samn suggested that, without analysis, no progress would take place. Councilors need to understand that the department does not have the staff.
- Steve noted that Bern Rose is biggest protagonist for Allen Street. He asked whether the city might go out for proposals for sidewalks after paving. Brian replied that he was not planning to go out for a design process; there are some places where you have to do

some design, but it doesn't have to be outsourced. Most of the work, the crew can do on their own—just not where lawns are high.

- Brian said that Allen is probably near the top of the list of those the department would like to put in.
- Steve asked whether it is realistic to think that these sidewalks would be in in 2026. Brian said that that would be earliest date, that it was a matter of what the city prioritizes. There are, he said, plenty of sidewalk to replace throughout the city, but the city has finite funds and plenty of options to replace or repair. Just the sidewalk up Allen could eat up the whole year's budget.
- Ken asked whether there is a map of where the city needs sidewalks. Brian said he thought that there was one from five or six years ago. Ken noted that the city needs a survey of sidewalks. Brian pointed out that the department has been inventorying manholes and would be doing catch basins next.
- Ken volunteered to work on organizing people to create a map like that.
- Brian said that the department did not get to any sidewalks, so this spring it would have money left from budget last year. Ken pointed out that the department could probably fix the ones making the most noise first, but Brian said that he tries not to listen to that noise and that it usually turns me the other way. He relies on TJ and Donnell Dexter, a foreperson for the Street Department, to tell him which is in the worst shape. Everyone thinks theirs is the worst.
- Ken requested a copy of guidelines for how to grade or rate the sidewalks. Brian said that he would look for that, maybe with Janet Shatney, director of Planning, Permitting and Assessing, or someone in regional planning. Steve volunteered to ask Bill Ahearn whether he recalls. Art asked whether the regional planning commission (RPC) was willing to help. He added that AOT might have something already if RPC has suggested it.
- Mitch asked whether installing a sidewalk later required doing some destruction of pavement. Brian answered that there was but nothing significant, just cutting. Steve added that the city crews do excellent sidewalks. Brian added that, if they contract it out, they spend their budget. Mitch noted that costs other than financial ones are important to consider in prioritizing decisions—pedestrian safety, school and hospital access, and the like.

Department of Public Works report

CITYROVER

- Brian showed the committee [CITYROVER](#), an app that records as you drive. CITYROVER uses a device on the dashboard, of which the city has one, and takes pics then uses

artificial intelligence to calculate how far out of position a manhole cover should be, for example (e.g., it assumes that there are 4 inches of pavement, then reports 50% displacement if the manhole cover appears to be 2 inches lower than the pavement). TJ has done most of the work with this and reviews the incidents (the items logged by the device) and approves (saves) them to add to a manhole list. The items currently logged or soon to be logged are manholes, catch basins, and roadways.

- Brian showed us a heat map with how much data the system has for each roadway, for example. They capture these images during normal days' drives. The city has a one-year subscription; the paid service logs other items, such as potholes, signage, damaged structures, garbage piled along the streets. They want to use this data to decide what streets to pave.
- Steve asked whether the instrument is mounted on one truck. Brian said that it is indeed dash mounted in one vehicle. Steve asked whether it is used on specific designated days or routes, and Brian said that they usually just record as they are out driving around. TJ monitors it; if they're getting close to the number of points they need to generate a report, he'll go try to get enough to reach that threshold. Art half joked that the department would have to run it every week for potholes.
- Samn said that the tool sounds great.
- Steve asked how long the city has had this, and Brian said about six months—they are doing a six-month trial. He explained that the municipality gets a subscription then pays for reports as needed. They can be selective about streets and incident types (manhole, for instance). Steve asked whether the city still has to decide about whether to purchase the subscription. Brian clarified that the city has the year subscription paid for (about \$1,400 per year plus per-report costs once you have enough points).
- Steve said that it would be great to preview this for the council, even have TJ (who is the most familiar with the tool) come in to do a demo. Maybe a couple of months out, he suggested. Brian added that it should be after the department has a couple of reports in. Steve said that it would be beneficial to the council and to the public to see what the department is doing.
- Ken asked whether committee members can get to the app, and Brian replied that the city has logins.

iWorQ

- Brian showed the committee another program, iWorQ, public-works software. Its pavement-management module includes a pavement map of the city. Once the department populates the data, the app can show the street's rating and can give recommendations. It can color-code everything.

- Steve noted that it would take some time for department staff to get these apps under their belts but recommended that they come in to demo it to council.
- Brian next showed the committee the fleet-management module, complete with fuel history, and monthly reports, all letting mechanics schedule and track maintenance.
- Steve asked whether the department has a keyed fuel-distribution system yet. Brian said that it did but that the system was sitting in the basement. He said that it would work with the iWorQ system. Steve noted that this kind of system helps a department police fuel usage and saves admins from having to enter receipts.
- Ken asked whether the maintenance history was available now. Brian said that there have not been great records kept in the past. Steve added that they were talking about these systems five years ago. However, Brian noted that the mechanic on staff now is very eager to work on schedules and these tools. They allow the department to schedule inspections for a given period and print out work orders. The department can set the system up with police and fire departments to request maintenance through it.
- Brian next showed the committee the water-management module. (There are several other modules, such as sewer management, but they are not part of the city's system yet.) Water management includes hydrants and mains. The department also has maybe tablets that have access to iWorQ in the field. The system can store images of old maps with the relevant locations. The department can log hydrant maintenance in this system and record flows. Steve noted that it would take a few years before it is all populated.
- Steve asked about some water-main valves around which, during the summer, pavement was cut. Brian explained that, historically here, valves have been paved over. Steve said that he never supported this but that it kept dirt and sand out and plow blades off of them. Brian said that the city had signed up for a free service from the state Agency of Natural Resources with three days of valve exercising and a report. Steve asked whether the plan was to leave them at the surface, and Brian said that it was.
- Brian added that the city had gotten a grant from RCAP Solutions to build a database of the city's sewer system, mapped, and that his department would put that into iWorQ. Through the grant, the city has a one-year subscription.
- Steve again said that the public and council really need to see iWorQ, that seeing this really changes the impression that the city is just following the last water-main break.
- After the 2023 flood, Brian said, the state had the city map what was inundated and had an engineer assess trunk lines from the wastewater-treatment plant to Brook Street and over to Smith Street. He said that an assurance of discontinuance (AOD) requires the city to do this for 10% of our system, so they are concentrating on Washington Street and Beckley. (RCAP didn't do Washington Street because they know that another company is doing it.) Brian noted that it will not be complete but will be good data. They also have

elevations on these. This will help the city get more-accurate elevations for those percentage-of-depth data.

- Steve interjected that it was 6:15. He suggested that, for committee planning purposes, it would be good to plan on a start and stop time and move whatever the committee does not cover during that time to the next meeting's agenda. The committee agreed to adjourn at 6:30, have Brian finish his report, and email the report to Samn.
- Brian's report continued with hydrants. The city has 16 new ones that they are hoping to get installed in the spring.
 - o Manholes are ongoing.
 - o The Route 302 transmission main is probably up in the air on funding. The total project cost is \$5.5 million, with \$2.5 million from congressional spending, but he was not sure where the city would get the difference.
 - o Regarding a leak on Cobble Hill, he said that the city was looking at alternative funding.
 - o The Ayers project would probably be pushed off to 2026 or 2027. For the sewer lining, the department was just waiting for warmer nights. Art requested clarification on the location, and Brian clarified that this was on Brook Street, the section where they had replaced the sewer, but it would cost \$30,000 to pave, and that would be temporary and the city would have to spend at least that much on it again in the spring. They are just trying to maintain it until then.
 - o The wastewater headworks loan application to Rural Development at the U.S. Department of Agriculture is underway. Total project cost is \$9 million, with construction costs of \$7.6 million, and Brian noted that the city would probably have to borrow from the loan fund, which is repaid over something like 30 years. Steve asked whether that was on the fall ballot, and Brian said that it was and that the bond was approved for that. They are hoping to request bids after July, with orders started in the fall.
 - o Installation of the new sludge-bunker roof is scheduled for March 28. Brian explained that they compress sludge to come out of the filter press at about 6% solids. The material is then put in the bunker, but then rain gets in and that percentage goes down and the city pays by the ton to get rid of it. So the city is paying for all that extra water. A new steel roof will, they hope, keep rain and snow off the sludge.
 - o There is an amended intermunicipal agreement that needs final numbers with Barre Town.
 - o They are paving Merchant's Row this spring. Then Berlin, Prospect, and Allen. They plan to advertise that bid any time now and start work this year. They hope that paving will be finished this year and that spring will be preparation. They

have manholes to replace, hydrants, etc. All the paving on the report they hope to do this summer. (The contractor had to postpone last year's planned work to this year because of flood damage.) They will likely strip most of Merchant's Row or leave some with just overlay. They will add in some drainage to push water to curb lines as soon as possible.

- Ken asked whether there was any plan to pave South Main. When Brian said maybe in 2027, Ken laughed that there will not be a street by 2027. Art added that it was most important to save the bridge. Brian explained that the main roads will be paved, then they can jump to neighborhoods and do every street in a neighborhood.
- Mitch asked how the city is mitigating its plans in the face of inevitable July flooding. Brian explained that the city had mapped out to lay out barricades to close streets because people driving through water creates more damage. They have also upgraded trash racks, which is working very well. He added that this July's flooding didn't damage a lot of pavement. 2023 did but not 2024, and 2023 was much worse. Mitch clarified that that was just a matter of where the flood decides to hit—Plainfield was hit terribly in 2024. She added that there had to be some kind of permeable pavement or other long-term way to mitigate these effects.
- Ken asked what mitigation plans the city has Samn said that it depends on funding. Ken asked whether a plan was available, and Samn answered that the hazard-mitigation plan (HMP) is on the city website (here it is on the Central Vermont Planning Commission site: <https://centralvtplanning.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Barre-City-adopted-final.pdf>). Brian added that it was probably in the document library and maybe in some meeting minutes. Samn said that the plan had a 1–10 list on highest-impact items that were needed soonest and that it's a very solid plan.
- Steve noted that, with this snowstorm, we really need to worry about a warm spring with a rainy day. If we have a nice warm spring without rain, we might be okay, but in 2011, it was a combination of frozen ground, 24 hours of rain, and lots of snow melt. Brian added that, in the 2023 flood, the city was keeping up with 3–5 inches of rain but, when it hit 8–9 inches, it just went everywhere. In 2024, on the other hand, it was the duration. Water levels went to 3 feet within a couple of hours but once it stopped, everything went down.

Steve suggested at 6:30 that the committee adjourn. Ken moved to adjourn, and Art seconded. The votes were all ayes. Steve said he would get other items on the agenda for next time and to send him ideas to add via email.