

**MINUTES**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY COUNCIL**  
**REGULAR MEETING**  
**ST. ALBANS CITY HALL, 100 NORTH MAIN STREET**  
**6:30 PM MONDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2024**

**APPROVED**

**Commission Members Present:** IN PERSON: Tim Smith (Mayor); Timothy Hawkins (Ward I), Newell Decker (Ward II), Marie Bessette (Ward III), Trudy Cioffi (Ward IV), Erik Johnson (Ward V), Chad Boudreau (Ward VI); Dominic Cloud (City Manager)

**Commission Members Absent:** None.

**City Staff present:** IN PERSON: Sarah Macy (Director of Finance and Administration); Katie Haseltine (Minute Taker); Chip Sawyer (Director of Planning & Development); Nicole Robtoy (City Clerk & Treasurer); Marty Manahan (Director of Operations & Business Development)

**Members of the public present:** IN PERSON: Bill Kimball; Lindsay Hunn; Ross Arsenault; Shelley Arsenault; Linda Coulomb; Tyler Wells; Makayla Wells VIA ZOOM: Doug Birnes; Nitant Raval; Josh Ellerbrock

- 1. T. Smith convenes Open Session with Pledge of Allegiance at 6:31 PM.**
  - a. T. Smith led the Pledge of Allegiance.
- 2. Public comment on non-agenda items within Council Purview.**
  - a. Public comment is limited to two minutes per speaker
  - b. A resident shares that the lights in Taylor Park are wonderful and the city does a nice job. T. Smith gives kudos to M. Manahan and his team as well as First Response who put the lights up.
- 3. FY 26 MRUSD Budget Presentation, Bill Kimball**
  - a. B. Kimball provides some history on local, state, and national level budget concerns, enrollment, education performance, and behavioral concerns. He notes that 1/3 of Vermont School budgets didn't pass last year and they've been doing a lot of work identifying the vision and mission of MRUSD in hopes voters will continue their support. The national average staffing structure is 7.45 pupils per staff member, and Vermont ranks lowest at 4.4 pupils per staff member. Vermont has seen an increase of about 1,000 staff members in the past few years.
  - b. B. Kimball notes that the drivers of local tax rate changes are spending across the state, paying for non Pre K-12 instructional items (like dual enrollments and PCB remediations), change in property value compared to the state, and change in the number of students compared to the state.
  - c. The cost of hiring a staff member is a lot to take in. B. Kimball shares that a paraprofessional is hired at \$32,000, but the cost of their benefits is \$34,000, putting a total compensation package at \$66,000. The benefits include health, dental, Health Savings Account (HSA), Long Term Disability (LTD), vision (only the individual, no family), and worker's comp. Healthcare is governed by a statewide union contract. Staff are responsible for 20%.
  - d. B. Kimball notes some items to celebrate; seeing increases in attendance, social emotional learning is looking better, math and literacy improvements, among others.

- e. First Draft of Budget - Very Preliminary
  - a. \$80,037,780 - 4.99% increase (there are many assumptions in this budget, many of the revenue parts are still to be determined).
  - b. If they go to a 3% budget, it will mean a 24.2 FTE cuts
  - c. Currently, there are 23 FTE units not filled, \$1.6 million in this budget (2%)
  - d. The increase is from Salary, Benefits, and Miscellaneous costs
  - e. E. Johnson asks for clarification on per pupil cost noting Milton's being lower despite a similar demographic. B. Kimball doesn't believe they are all that different from Milton.
  - f. The Common Level of Appraisal (CLA) being re-assessed could change things.
  - g. T. Smith asks about the CLA re-assessment timeline. C. Sawyer estimates some preliminary reports may be ready in Spring of 2025, but the official completion will be in the Fall of 2025.
  - h. T. Smith asks about the status of PCB remediation. B. Kimball shares that 3 of the 4 schools tested for levels outside the allowed amount, and remediation is still ongoing.
  - i. T. Smith asks about free lunch. B. Kimball explains that funding for that comes from the State Education Fund, and is not included in this budget.
  - j. M. Bessette asks about the dramatic increase of students on support plans over the past 3 years and why that is. B. Kimball explains that students with larger learning gaps have shown themselves since coming back from Covid. Additionally, the assessment process of students has shifted which has created an increase in identifying student learning levels.
  - k. T. Cioffi highlights concern of double digit spending increases year over year year, noting moving from the 72nd highest spending district in the state to the 33rd. She wants to be sure the board reviewing this budget pays close attention to it all.
  - l. T. Hawkins asks who does the assessment to determine what students need a support plan. B. Kimball explains that the state directs how often assessments are done.
  - m. B. Kimball closes by saying he is going out in the community to spread awareness and have conversations ahead of the budget going to vote.

#### **4. Recess for Liquor Control**

- a. T. Hawkins motions to recess and enter Liquor Control. E. Johnson Seconds.
- b. NEW 2024 LIQUOR LICENSE - New ownership for The Beverage Mart
  - a. Guruseva Corporation - The Beverage Mart (D&V) - Nitant Raval
    - a. Second Class License, Tobacco License
      - a. January 2nd, 2025 is the proposed start date for the new owners.
      - b. D. Brines explains that N. Raval intends to keep the business operating the same. N. Raval shares he has been working in this industry for over 20 years, with 9 operations in Massachusetts and 1 in Rhode Island. He recently added started operations in Coventry, VT location and this would be the second.
      - c. Nit has been doing work in this industry business in Massachusetts and Rhode Island for over 20 years. 9 in Massachusetts, 1 gas station in VT in October (Coventry, VT).
      - d. T. Hawkins asks if N. Raval or D. Brines reviewed the City's Liquor Regulations, noting they have stricter guidelines than the state of Vermont. N.

Raval and D. Brines believes that was shared with them, but they will be sure to review and reach out with any questions.

- e. T. Hawkins shares he is excited for Ross to be passing the torch and retiring, but is a little skeptical about someone new operating the business and keeping it going just as well as it has been run for 45 years. He wishes the new owners the best. R. Arsenault adds that he is staying on as the consultant for 2 years.
  - f. C. Boudreau also wishes N. Raval good luck, noting the shoes he has to fill.
  - g. T. Hawkins motions to approve the Second Class Liquor License and Tobacco License for the Guruseva Corporation (The Beverage Mart), Nitant Raval. T. Cioffi seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.
  - h. M. Manahan adds similar comments as C. Boudreau, noting that Ross has done his own neighborhood revitalization down there to always keep the store outwardly clean like keeping the sidewalks cleared off.
- c. Other Business
- a. T. Hawkins asks if there is an updated graph of violations. N. Robtoy reports that there has not been anything to report, which is good news.
- d. Adjourn
- a. T. Hawkins motions to adjourn. T. Cioffi seconds. Motion passes with all in favor. The board reconvenes as City Council.
- 5. Consider corrections to April 2024 Grand List, C. Sawyer (D&V)**
- a. C. Sawyer explains that inactive parcels need to be tracked as a requirement for the TIF district. In a recent audit, it was discovered that one parcel was never added to the list and one parcel was deleted when it shouldn't have been. The errors and omissions form tonight is to make those corrections.
  - b. T. Hawkins motions to approve. E. Johnson seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.
- 6. First Reading of amendments to Multi-Dewlling Overlay District, C. Sawyer**
- a. C. Sawyer explains that they created this overlay district for places that had historically been commercial or industrial but are now unlikely to be redeveloped unless the City allows some sort of residential development. .
  - b. T. Hawkins asks if there is something they don't know. D. Cloud explains that economies of scale are achieved when you have a mix of units that includes 1 bedrooms and studios. Someone interested in Fonda has included one bedroom and studio type apartments in their proposal, so the City has decided to make these amendments to make the site more marketable to potential buyers.
- 7. Second reading and adoption of amendments to prohibit parking on the south side of Stebbins St., C. Sawyer (D&V).**
- a. C. Sawyer explains this amendment is to address traffic problems that are present with parking and trucks getting through.
  - b. N. Decker asks about Kingman Street, noting that they used to have trucks go there. C. Sawyer highlights concern that it is still in the middle of downtown and causes disruptions to traffic.
  - c. T. Hawkins motions to approve. E. Johnson seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.
- 8. Authorization of Brownfields Grant for 175 Lake St., C. Sawyer (D&V)**
- a. C. Sawyer explains this is one of the last steps in getting approval for work that has been done at 175 Lake Street.
  - b. T. Cioffi motions to approve. M. Bessette seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.
  - c. A resident asks about the Fire Department and the worn look of it. D. Cloud explains that

plans for redevelopment and future maintenance are being discussed in the next budget.

**9. Second reading and adoption of Public Nuisance Properties Ordinance, D. Cloud (D&V)**

- a. D. Cloud walks through the structure and mechanics of the ordinance, with notes of changes from the first reading that city council made comment on.
  - a. Page 87, Section 2103 - Lease template must include a copy of this ordinance.
  - b. Page 103, Sections 2200-2204 - Changes to Authority, Statement of Findings and Purpose, Definitions, Procedure for Addressing Public Nuisance Properties (PNPs). The procedure has clearly outlined how notice and PNP's will be identified.
- b. The ability to revoke the Certificate of Habitability is not new. The fire marshal has always been able to revoke that Certificate.
- c. C. Boudreau asks what a Nuisance Abatement Plan might look like. D. Cloud shares that a letter could be sent identifying the instances of violation and recommendations of eviction, no trespass orders, or other measures. C. Boudreau highlights concern of noise complaints being considered a violation counting towards a PNP notice.
- d. D. Cloud notes that the ordinance is written to allow the board to have as much discretion as they wish to help with problem properties.
- e. T. Cioffi feels that 3 violations in a 90 day period is a long time to wait. D. Cloud notes that this is very similar to other ordinances adopted in similar city's experiencing this ongoing activity. D. Cloud adds that fines can currently be charged for the looks of a property only. This allows fines to be charged for activities beyond that.
- f. T. Smith asks T. Hawkins how this looks from a legal perspective. T. Hawkins clarifies that quasi-judicial should not make anyone nervous, that just means the landlord/owner can come and present their case to the board. T. Hawkins also wants to make sure the statute is clear in that the public can also make a report of violation. T. Hawkins feels that the ability for public voice is missing from this, noting that City Council represents the public and we need to allow their voice to be heard. The ordinance should be broad enough and reference any violation of Title 7, including the Landlord Registry Program.
- g. T. Hawkins has had conversations with half a dozen people and this is not an ordinance that the normal landlord is going to have a problem with. 99% of them are never going to have a problem with. It is the 1% that will.
- h. A landlord explains that most do not read their lease. T. Hawkins reminds that is the responsibility of the landlord to communicate that information. The landlord asks if the landlord will receive notice when there is any violation. D. Cloud notes that the administrative burden of sending out letters when any violation occurs is unrealistic to either the Police Department or the City of St. Albans.
- i. L. Coulmb acknowledges that she believes this is a really great shift, but is concerned about some of the language and how it is not encompassing of all types of victimization (stalking, breaking and entering), in addition to domestic assault.
- j. C. Boudreau notes for the public record that L. Coloumb is concerned about recurring victimization happening at a property falling into the definition of a Public Nuisance Property when it is not the fault of the tenant.
- k. L. Hunn asks if any language around "victimization" could be added to this ordinance, noting difficulties with Release from Abuse orders. Additionally, L. Hunn seeks clarification on who the ordinance could evict, noting that some tenants are not part of the bad activity, and should not be punished for it. T. Hawkins notes that landlords would be able to identify the problem tenants they wish to evict and keep the good ones.

- l. C. Sawyer reminds that eviction is one of the last resorts of this ordinance. It is going to be avoided as much as it can be and encourage landlords to consider all other options first.
- m. T. Smith turns to M. Manahan for a rough estimate on how many resolutions are decided on during public Health & Safety hearings. M. Manahan estimates about 95% of them are solved.
- n. T. Hawkins wants to reiterate that this is putting landlords on notice that City Council will step in to address these problems. It should not be creating an uproar.
- o. E. Johnson would like to see a one-year report from this ordinance and its success.
- p. T. Hawkins motions to approve with amendments discussed. T. Cioffi seconds. Moiton passes with all in favor.

**10. Consider redevelopment assistance funds for Project Vermont, D. Cloud (D&V)**

- a. D. Cloud summarizes the request.
- b. T. Hawkins motions to approve. C. Boudreau seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.

**11. Proposed Budget Development Schedule, D. Cloud**

- a. D. Cloud quickly explains:
  - a. Week of January 6, Reviewed by Finance Committee
  - b. January 13th Council Meeting, Staff Budget Proposal / Council Discussion
  - c. January 20th Special Meeting, Council Discussion Continued / Review Warning
  - d. January 27th Special Meeting, Sign Town Meeting Warning

**12. Consider a motion too direct utilization of ARPA fund balance, S. Macy (D&V)**

- a. T. Smith asks S. Macy what the balance is. S. Macy shares it is \$107,558.54 and explains the time to obligate these funds is coming to a close on December 31, 2024. Funds are obligated when contracts are signed or plans are made. A common use of ARPA funds is to fund personnel costs, which maintains flexibility in the General Fund for other purposes.
- b. T. Hawkins notes that it feels incorrect. S. Macy acknowledges that it feels weird, but really it is shifting this fund before the time to use it expires, and allows the City to extend using this funding for the benefit of businesses.
- c. E. Johnson motions to approve. C. Boudreau seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.

**13. Proposal for Four-Way Stop at Ferris and Lincoln, Erik Johnson**

- a. E. Johnson has heard from four people that there is safety concern at this intersection.
- b. After doing some research on ordinances, he discovered that Chapter 3, Section 5165 actually has Ferris and Lincoln listed twice in both a single stop section and four-way stop section. T. Smith is in support. T. Hawkins thinks it will be helpful for the schools.
- c. C. Sawyer explains that the ordinance is not wrong or broken, it is just redundant.
- d. The board agrees that the sign will be added and the City will communicate this.

**14. Consider approval of water and sewer allocation for proposed coffee house, Franklin Park West & Route 7, Malone Properties (D&V)**

- a. T. Hawkins motions to approve. T. Cioffi seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.

**15. Consider approval of water and sewer allocation for Richard Cummings project (D&V)**

- a. M. Manahan explains this is an extension on from the line at VTrans out to Bushey Road.
- b. T. Smith notes that the agenda says “water and sewer” and that it should only state water.
- c. T. Smith asks how it got out to this point. M. Manahan explains that it was there for Handy’s already, then VTrans extended it.
- d. T. Hawkins motions to approve. M. Bessette seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.

**16. Consider board appointments (D&V)**

- a. Rebecca Pfeiffer for Development Review Board
  - a. T. Hawkins motions to approve Rebecca Pfeiffer and Becky Manahan for terms

- ending 12/31/2027. M. Bessette seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.
- b. Becky Manahan for Development Review Board - *see above motion*
- c. Preston Fuller for Belonging, Equity & Inclusion Committee
  - a. T. Hawkins motions to approve Preston Fuller with a term expiring 12/31/2027. M. Bessette seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.
- d. Paula Minch to Parks & Recreation, Dog Park Representative
  - a. T. Hawkins commends P. Minch and the dog park constituents for the work they've done there. T. Cioffi notes that this came about as a way to open discussion about fencing and other ways to involve and support the dog park as a recreation spot.
  - b. T. Cioffi motions to appoint Paula Minch. E. Johnson seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.

### **17. Mayor's Report**

- a. Commends public works for a great job sidewalk and street cleaning during recent storms.
- b. Big thank you to Arleigh and the Downtown Board for the Festival of Trees and Hallmark in the Park. The Monte Carlo Gala was a great success, about 130 people.
- c. Kudos to First Response for the lights in Taylor Park, the City looks great.
- d. Hopeful that downtown businesses have a good holiday season.

### **18. Council / Committee Reports**

- e. Ward IV - T. Cioffi
  - a. Park and Ride trash was finally picked up. Sean Atkins got in touch with the DOT.
  - b. Property on Bank Street (that burned down) is still a gaping hole, seems to be a safety concern, and wonders if the city has any liability. D. Cloud says they do not.
  - c. Follow up on Duffy's leaking trucks. D. Cloud states they have not connected with Duffy's about that yet. E. Johnson and T. Cioffi both highlight that there is still ongoing early trash pickup.
  - d. Wonders if City Newsletter is redundant to the Mayor's Report in quarterly water bills
- f. Ward V - E. Johnson
  - a. Reminder about pedestrian traffic.
  - b. Asking about a City Newsletter and any update on that. T. Smith asks who would be responsible for that. D. Cloud states it would be S. Macy and Kristen Smith. T. Cioffi wonders if this would be redundant to the Mayor's Report sent quarterly with water bills. T. Smith doesn't believe it would be and would like to see more communication to the public about the work the City is doing.
  - c. Ward 5 Winter Block Party - January 18th, all are welcome to join. There will be activities for kids, a few bonfires, and music.
- g. Ward VI - C. Boudreau
  - a. Animal Control Officer, do we have one? D. Cloud shares that a position was recently restructured at the Police Department to do more of that. Steve Bracy is that person. Jim Benson is acts as a local canine relocation specialist.
- h. Ward III - M. Bessette
  - a. Tree lighting in the park was gorgeous and it all looks wonderful, noting the red and white trunks and snow globes at Hallmark in the Park.
- i. Ward II - N. Decker
  - a. Commends M. Manahan and the work his crew is doing.
- j. Ward V - T. Hawkins
  - a. Shopping Center parking lot - poles need addressing, M. Manahan will look into.
  - b. Shares condolences on recent passing of Dick Hebert, JW Ryans - condolences to the

family and friends. T. Smith shares that the funeral is Friday at 11. C. Boudreau shares there is a celebration of life at the Elk's Lodge after.

**19. Consider approval of reg. Meeting minutes: 11/18/24 (D&V)**

- a. M. Bessette asks for an update on the Smoke Shop on Main Street. C. Sawyer explains that right now the zoning does not consider distinction for the retail sale of items.
- b. E. Johnson notes edit to item 12 c, should read citywide, not just 12 - c, citywide reckless driving is a concern, not just in Ward V.
- c. T. Hawkins motions to approve. C. Boudreau seconds. Motion passes with all in favor.

**20. Consider approval of warrant: 11/30/2024 (D&V)**

- a. T. Hawkins motions to approve. T. Cioffi seconds motion passes with all in favor.

**21. Adjourn**

- a. T. Hawkins motions to adjourn. E. Johnson seconds. Motion passes with all in favor. T. Smith adjourns meeting at 9:20 PM.

DRAFT