

**St. Albans City Council  
Minutes of Meeting  
Monday, May 11, 2020  
City Hall, Council Chambers**

A regular meeting of the St. Albans City Council was held on Monday, May 11, 2020, at 6:30 pm in the City Hall Council Chambers.

**Council Present:** Mayor Tim Smith; Aldermen: Michael McCarthy, Jim Pelkey, Chad Spooner and Tim Hawkins & Alderwomen: Marie Bessette and Kate Laddison.

**Council Absent:** None absent.

**Staff Present:** Dominic Cloud, City Manager; Chip Sawyer, Director of Planning & Development; Curry Galloway, City Clerk & Marty Manahan, Director of Public Works, Operations & Business Development.

**Visitors:** Leonard Parent and Michelle Monroe.

1. Executive Session re: personnel matters.
  - a. The Council finds that premature disclosure of contract negotiations would compromise the City or person involved (D&V).

**A motion was made by Alderman Spooner; seconded by Alderman Hawkins to find that premature disclosure of the above matters would compromise the City or person involved. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**
  - b. The Council moves to enter Executive Session for purposes of discussing employment or evaluation of an officer or employee (D&V).

**A motion was made by Alderman Spooner; seconded by Alderman Hawkins to enter Executive Session for purposes of discussing employment or evaluation of an officer or employee. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman Spooner to exit Executive Session. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**
2. Convene Open Session with Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Smith called the meeting to order at 6:39 pm and led the pledge of allegiance.
3. Recess for Liquor Control.

**A motion was made by Alderman Spooner; seconded by Alderman Pelkey to recess for liquor control. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**
4. Consider resolution to accept VCDP grant agreement (D&V).

Mr. Sawyer recalled that CHT came through the City to get another round of VCDP requirements for their home repair program which is aimed toward helping low income homeowners. Some City households have made use of the program. The City Council already approved the application but needs them to pass a resolution again accepting the grant.

**A motion was made by Alderman McCarthy; seconded by Alderman Pelkey to accept VCDP grant agreement as presented. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**
5. City Manager Report.

Mr. Cloud noted that they neglected to add public comment in error and asked if there was any. Mr. Parent stated that given the state of flux that the VT State colleges are in, he asked if CCV is still going to

use the property at Congress & Main. Mr. Cloud stated that he will discuss that during that section of the agenda. Mr. Parent asked who will ultimately own the building on Main Street and who will be responsible for the property taxes.

a. Workforce update

Mr. Cloud noted that staff is slowly working its way to being 100% open. The first floor will continue to be open by appointment only and the second floor staff is working remotely. Mr. Manahan is bringing back the remainder of his workforce on Thursday. Staff is still continuing to stagger employees at the water and wastewater plants.

b. FY 20 budget

Mr. Cloud stated that staff is forecasting a fairly sizeable surplus of \$500,000 that may decrease as the end of the fiscal year approaches. Mr. Cloud noted that it's a perfect storm of increased costs at the police department and dispatch. Staff will look to address staffing issues and adding an additional Commander. He added that COVID-19 has had a bigger impact on all of the property tax revenues in the City.

c. MRI update

Municipal Resources Inc. is the firm which has been hired to help the City get the Police Department back on track. They are doing a document review and making plans for their team to be onsite in the coming weeks. It will be a 3 person team at this point in time.

d. Congress & Main Update

Mr. Cloud stated that the building is a LLC with several major investors but the Operating Manager is Grant Butterfield. He owns a real estate office and is the managing partner of the LLC. Mr. Butterfield is chiefly on the hook for taxes but many of the leases are triple net leases where the renters pay the taxes. The City has pretty conservative budget projections and Mr. Butterfield is moving ahead with the project. On the back of the property, the residential building is being built by Snyder Construction and will be owned by Champlain Housing Trust. There will be no issues with payment of property taxes. The market rate unit across from the library is also managed by Grant Butterfield. The City is an investor in that project as well for \$300,000 and is scheduled to close this Thursday.

e. Water & Wastewater budgets calendar

Mr. Cloud stated that typically around the end of May, a budget proposal for the Enterprise Funds will be submitted to the Finance Committee and brought to Council in June. One of the line items they are working out is allowing residents to pay their water and wastewater bills online without having to incur the fees. Staff will bring it forward for consideration for the committee and council.

f. St. Albans Town Police RFP

St. Albans Town has released their proposal and opened a RFP. The Chief will be working on that in the coming weeks.

g. Property tax payment overview and update.

Mr. Cloud stated that they have received some requests for payment plans. In the past, the City Manager has structured 12 month payment plans but abatement or forgiveness would go before the Council. The legislature appears to be on track to waive the 8% penalty and assisting with interest charges. Mr. Cloud stated that he hasn't been able to find out if that is strictly for educational taxes and cannot structure any payment requests until more information is gathered.

Mr. Leitz stated that he was on a call with the Bond Bank and they are unsure but may be the borrower.

Mr. Parent asked Mr. Cloud if he is confident that CCV will move downtown and asked if they are legally committed to do so. Mr. Cloud responded that there is a binding lease to move downtown, a purchase and sale agreement on their own building and millions of dollars have been spent on that contract. Mr. Cloud stated that he believes the public/private partnerships is an ideal model and is optimistic that some of the space that has been vacated as RiseVT has exited, will be utilized by CCV. Mayor Smith noted CCV is in a much better condition than the other VT State Colleges.

Mayor Smith asked Mr. Leitz how much time he will need to get a true feel for the delinquencies on the property taxes. Mr. Leitz stated that he should know by the following Monday. Mayor Smith asked Mr. Leitz if he could share the percent delinquent and the amount. Mr. Leitz stated that a good chunk of the taxes come from escrow companies and just received \$500,000 from Core Logic last week. Mr. Hawkins noted that the City is also lucky that it bills quarterly. Mayor Smith stated that he believes a lot of the manufacturing in the region continued to work as well as Homeland Security. He believes we are fortunate with the diversification in the region.

h. Other business

Mr. Manahan stated that half the Public Works crew has been working for the last couple of weeks and have had a couple of water breaks. All in all, the department is in good shape and will get ready to open the pool in the next couple of weeks. Mayor Smith asked Mr. Manahan if he had an opening date. Mr. Manahan responded that they will start draining it next week and will be ready by the end of the month. Mr. Hawkins noted that the Governor stated today that businesses will be able to open next week. He asked Mr. Manahan if anyone has gotten in touch with the downtown businesses to see if they all plan to open. Mr. Manahan responded that they will be meeting next week. Mr. Hawkins asked how information will get out to the public so they know which businesses will be open. Mr. Sawyer responded that they have a google doc with the hours of all the businesses and will update that accordingly. Nearly all of the retail businesses are open to curbside now. Mr. Manahan stated that What A Yarn is the only business that has given notice and one potential business is interested in that space.

Mr. McCarthy stated that there has been a lot of conversation around the Governor's announcement where staff would be required to wear a mask but customers wouldn't. He wondered if anyone from the Merchant's Committee has commented on people entering businesses without masks. Mr. Manahan stated that he thought it would be up to the business to decide if masks are mandatory. The City has put up signage at City Hall and the plants mirroring VOSHA guidelines. Mr. Manahan stated that that conversation can be had with the group.

Mayor Smith noted that he's been helping Pam Cross distribute masks and has some available for businesses. Mr. Pelkey wondered if the City should make an investment to make masks publicly available. Mr. Sawyer stated that one merchant is looking into a large bulk buy and will follow up.

6. Mayor's Report.

a. Green Up Day

Green Up Day will be on May 30<sup>th</sup>. They are working closely with the Town to do one big Green Up Day. Free creemee certificates will be handed out to participants.

b. Memorial Day

Mayor Smith stated that he has had conversations about dropping flags to half-mast for Memorial Day. He explained that it can be at half-mast for half a day on Memorial Day but has to go back up at noon. Mayor Smith has requested that it remain at half-mast for two days since there won't be any gatherings.

c. Downtown Board Appointments (D&V)

Mayor Smith stated that he and Mr. McCarthy interviewed both applicants.

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman McCarthy to appoint Jeremy Read and Keith Longmore to the Downtown Board with terms ending 12/31/22. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

Mayor Smith stated that he is hoping folks have seen the Downtown Dollars which has a lot of opportunity. The cards can be used at 28 establishments in the City for a one time purchase and the merchant can present them to City Hall to be reimbursed \$10 for the card. The Tech Center purchased 200 and the hospital and Green Mountain Hemp have also purchased bulk cards. Mayor Smith thanked Mr. Sawyer and Mr. Manahan for their efforts. Mr. Sawyer stated that there are 32 business participating as of today. Mayor Smith stated that Al Voegel purchased 30 for Artist in Residence as well.

Mayor Smith stated that staff felt the City was short changed at the last census and asked if it would make sense to have some yard signs made to remind folks. Mr. Sawyer responded that a lot is being done on social media and doesn't think more reminders will hurt. Census stated that they will be following up with residents as well. Mayor Smith asked Mr. Sawyer if he knows what the response rate is at this time. Mr. Sawyer responded that City is at a 58% response rate which is above the State average but below the National average. Mr. Cloud stated that there is room in the Mayor's promotional budget to cover yard signs.

Mayor Smith recalled that Mr. McCarthy provided an email summary of the LOT updates. Mr. McCarthy stated that the house government operations committee has the bill and did a speed introduction for 4 charter changes including the City. The City was seen as being easy and straight forward. It seems that committee will take a round of testimony from people that sponsored the bill such as the City Manager and himself. This is the first week where committees are starting to take testimony on non-emergency items. The House will be in session as well as the Senate through the month of June. He believes the charter change will pass during that time.

7. Other Business.

Mr. Hawkins noted the curbing on Brainerd Street and stated that they are doing a great job and are very efficient. Mr. Manahan commended Wrights Excavating and stated that they are planning to move to Bank Street next. Mr. Hawkins stated that there have been no issues with traffic.

Mr. McCarthy commended Sara Auer who is filling the gap for 40 to 50 families by providing meals. Mayor Smith added that they are willing to take donation and looking for any grant opportunities or partnerships.

Mr. Pelkey commended the BFA choral group for their uplifting presentation of We Are The World, shared on Facebook.

Mr. Spooner thanked Mr. Manahan and his crew for fixing the sinkhole at the corner of Edward Street and Lower Welden Street. He asked if 7-9 Lower Welden has been sold and stated that the house looks fantastic now. Mr. Manahan responded that it was renovated by Mike Gosselin. Mr. Spooner stated that he would like to extend a thank you to him. Mayor Smith noted that the house on the top of Aldis and Federal looks great as well and has no problem sending a thank you note. Mr. Cloud stated that it might be a good idea to put an ad in the Messenger to recognize these neighborhood improvements. Ms. Bessette added that 15 North Elm should be recognized as well.

Mr. Spooner stated that a resident brought it to his attention that a neighbor was blowing debris from their lawn into the road and will probably start seeing that a little bit more. He asked if a detailed list of what the City has spent on COVID so far this year can be shared. Mr. Cloud responded affirmatively.

Mr. Spooner stated that he would like to recognize Pam Cross and the group making masks for healthcare workers. He stated that they have made 10,000 face masks to date and would like to recognize them at a council meeting when this is over. Mayor Smith stated that he's been working with Pam to help businesses have access to masks and agreed with Mr. Spooner's sentiments. Mayor Smith noted that Hometown Beverage and Twiggs has been giving out spaghetti dinners and the Co-op has given out free milk. Mr. Spooner stated that Rosie's gave out 300 chili meals as well in conjunction with Pie In The Sky. Mayor Smith recommended a full page ad recognizing everyone.

Mr. Manahan stated that the Farmer's Market will begin this weekend. They have a plan in place to keep their vendors in compliance with social distancing and will have one area where people can enter and exit. They have about 20 vendors ready to go. A difficult decision was made to cancel the Summer Concert Series which models most communities that typically have summer concerts. Mayor Smith added that Little League is going to make a decision by June 15<sup>th</sup> to see if they will have a season. Mr. Hawkins stated that he believes the Farmer's Market is going to have a large turnout and encouraged having the City provide some extra help. Mr. Manahan stated that they have a volunteer who will be facilitating curb side pickup and will have markers in place. They will see how this weekend goes.

8. Consider approval of meeting minutes:

a. Regular Meeting: 4/13/20 and Special Meeting: 4/21/20 & 4/29/20 (D&V).

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman Pelkey to approve 4/13/20 regular meeting minutes. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman Pelkey to approve 4/21/20 special meeting minutes. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman Spooner to approve 4/29/20 special meeting minutes. Vote was unanimous, 6-0 with Alderwoman Laddison abstained.**

9. Consider approval of warrants.

a. 4/17/20 & 5/1/21 (D&V).

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman Spooner to approve 4/17/20 warrants. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman Pelkey to approve 5/1/20 warrants. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

10. Adjourn

**A motion was made by Alderman Pelkey; seconded by Alderman Spooner to adjourn meeting at 7:46 pm. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Smith

Community Relations Coordinator

Approved