

**St. Albans City Council  
Minutes of Meeting  
January 21, 2015  
City Hall, Council Chambers**

A special meeting of the St. Albans City Council was held on Wednesday, January 21, 2015, in council chambers at City Hall at 6:30 pm.

**Council Present:** Mayor Elizabeth Gamache; Aldermen: Ryan Doyle, Scott Corrigan, Tim Hawkins, Chad Spooner, Jim Pelkey & Alderwoman Tammi DiFranco.

**Council Absent:** None absent.

**Staff Present:** Dominic Cloud, City Manager; Sue Krupp, City Clerk and Treasurer; Marty Manahan, Director of Business Operations.

**Visitors:** See attached sign-in sheet.

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance.  
Mayor Gamache led the pledge of allegiance and called the meeting to order at 6:40 pm.
  2. Public Comment.  
Judy Ashley, City resident and Director of Health Department for the State of Vermont thanked council for the new State Office Building.
  3. Continued Discussion RE: FY 16 General Fund Budget
    - a. City Manager Presentation  
Mr. Cloud stated that staff incorporated comments made by Council at the last meeting into the budget. The revised budget remains at a level tax rate of .8117 and requires no increase in taxes. Mr. Cloud added that he spoke with Home Health yesterday who asked that the title on their appropriation have the word "petition" removed. Mr. Cloud noted the following which is an update based on the last meeting:
      - The annual sidewalk appropriation remains at \$160,000.
      - The option for a special article on sidewalks is no longer included.
      - The City pool house floor remains at \$10,000.
      - Home Health has been incorporated into the budget.
      - Paving has been increased to \$276,637, a six percent increase over last year.
      - City Clerk revenues have been reduced by \$4,000 to be more conservative.
      - The working capital contingency of \$10,000 has been eliminated.
      - Staff has reduced the public works garage expenses by \$1,000.
      - Staff has added a "notes" field to anticipate and more clearly address questions.
- Mr. Cloud explained that this is our biggest shift yet away from personnel and administrative expenses and investing in the City's infrastructure. Salaries are down 3 percent and health insurance is down 11 percent, paired with a 100 percent increase in sidewalk spending, a 6 percent increase in paving, a new fire truck and a new floor for the pool house. From staff's perspective, this budget strikes an appropriate balance between the need to invest in the City's infrastructure while remaining sensitive to the tax concerns of voters.

Mayor Gamache thanked Council, the City Manager and staff for their hard work and in depth session at the last meeting and believes some very important questions and concerns were raised. She noted that having been involved in the City's budget process at some level over the past 10 years; she is noticing changes based on the effort and hard work done over the years. Mayor Gamache added that she appreciates that more is going into infrastructure and the non infrastructure parts of the budget have shifted and are not as prominent.

b. Council Discussion and Comment.

Mr. Hawkins noted the hard work that staff has put into the budget process over the years. He believes council has an obligation to the City residents to make sure that spending is controlled and enjoys when everyone comes together to champion a cause. He added that the most difficult part in looking at this budget is asking the taxpayers to be favorable of a cause for an eventual reward and to then see those expenses go away without any return. During the City Hall renovation bond, staff stated that all things being equal, there would be a negative budget if the bond passed. It took some understanding and a further dive into the documents to see that there are actual and genuine reductions across the board in all departments and all that things weren't equal due to sidewalks and the need for a fire truck. Mr. Hawkins explained that after hearing the Chief's comments at the last meeting, he further understands the need for a fire truck and strongly believes safety is of the utmost importance. He believes it is unfair to hold staff to a negative budget when we have those two big items in the budget that requires tax payer's funds. Mr. Hawkins stated that he is not at all disappointed with this budget knowing that council will soon be looking at a bond vote for sidewalks and knowing that there is an appropriation that allows the City to pay for two-thirds of those sidewalks in this budget with a bond vote. Across the board, Mr. Hawkins noted that there are a lot of reductions and although every year the budget appears to be \$40,000 - \$60,000 over budget, it is not a lot of money considering the budget is a \$7.6 million budget. Mr. Hawkins added that if staff is confident in the proposals put forth and tax payers are happy with the appropriation made for sidewalks along with making staff on the fire department safe, he is very confident in this budget. Mayor Gamache thanked council for asking questions and appreciated the respectful manner in which challenges were raised. Mr. Corrigan commented that he can support any budget that has a zero percent increase and thanked staff for putting it together.

Mr. Doyle asked if the Home Health item has been worked into the budget or if it is a separate item on the ballot. Mr. Cloud responded that he believes council made a motion at the last meeting to embed it into the budget. Mr. Doyle asked what was reduced in order to accommodate the Home Health item into the budget. Mr. Cloud responded that it was in the budget last time and has been in it since the initial roll out. Mr. Doyle recalled that Home Health was ok with their item being a stand-alone item on the ballot. Mr. Corrigan stated that that council already voted on that issue and it passed, 5 to 1. Mayor Gamache noted that for future thought, it might be helpful to adopt policies as it relates to these types of items. She commented that Newport has established some best practice policies that might be helpful for council to take a look at. Mr. Doyle stated that every year the issue of charities come up and believes this year the stance to put that directly into the budget is a complete reversal of what's been done in the past and feels it is inappropriate.

Mr. Spooner commented that he always gets caught up in the number when reviewing budgets and believes it is important for council to first identify whether it is good budget or not regardless of the overall number. He added that he strongly believes this budget is the best budget he's been a part of in 5 years. With the sidewalks getting more attention, the new pumper truck and the City Hall renovation, he believes the budget is strong. He noted that in the past the emphasis was on the poor condition of the City's roads and in 8 more years, all of the roads will be in good condition.

Mr. Spooner explained that he took a poll on social media asking voters what they would like to see in terms of a negative percent budget or a 2 percent increase and the majority of the responses were in favor of a zero percent budget with an increased focus on sidewalks. Mr. Spooner stated that he's afraid if council continued cutting down the budget, it would be for the sake of getting the budget below zero percent and not focusing on what's at stake. Ms. DiFranco commented that she is happy with the increase for paving and increased sidewalk appropriations. Mr. Pelkey noted that he is pleased with the budget and thanked staff for their hard work. Mr. Hawkins commented that there are always things that people want but believes the needs of all departments have been met in this budget. If we do a bond for sidewalks, the \$160,000 that has been apportioned will almost be enough to support the bond.

c. Public Comment.

Judy Ashley stated that she has lived in the City for 15 years. She enjoys watching the children walk and bike to St. Albans City School. As a Public Health Director, she commented that having active, healthy communities is important. She brought a letter that speaks on the subject of unhealthy foods, chronic disease and the importance of walking and biking in the community which reduces medical costs and lost productivity. She hopes council continues to support the walking and biking environment in the community which benefits everyone.

Ms. Ashley explained that she is also part of the grassroots walk and bike group in St. Albans whom conducted a survey at Town Meeting Day in March, 2012. Of the 269 surveyed, 91% believe it is extremely important to have safe walking and jogging opportunities in the City. She noted that Walk & Bike St. Albans still maintains their facebook page. She also believes the budget is solid and that the City is on a great track.

Mitch Craib, Wellness Coordinator for St. Albans City School, introduced himself. He is encouraged to hear that council is standing behind sidewalk improvement. He believes heavily in the need for a walk-able and bike-able City. He noted the weight issues that many students have and believes walking to school is the most important thing that kids can start doing. He noted that one of the main concerns of parents is the safety of their kids getting to school part of which is a safety issue and part of which is a crime issue. He asked council to continue to promote the walk-ability and bike-ability in the City. Mayor Gamache thanked them both for their efforts in creating a spirit of wellness in the community and shifting the culture in the City.

d. Possible Motions for Amendment (D&V).

**A motion was made by Alderman Hawkins; seconded by Alderman Spooner to approve the General Fund budget for fiscal year ending June 30, 2016.** Mr. Pelkey made everyone aware of his role as County Clerk in case anyone believed there was a conflict of interest. **Motion carried, 6-1 with Alderman Doyle opposed.**

e. Consider Motion to Approve Budget (D&V).

4. TIF Article for Streetscape on Warning.

a. City Manager Presentation.

Mr. Cloud explained that this opportunity comes forth due to the potential hotel deal at 43 Lake Street. The article will propose the repurposing of existing debt authorizations for the Streetscape projects on North Main and Lake Street. Mr. Cloud stated that council does not need to ask for any more authorizations than the voters have already given but staff thinks it's wise to seek voter permission to repurpose those funds from the Downtown Core project to the Streetscape project. Mr. Cloud explained that the exact language is being finalized with bond counsel, but is expected to read something like the following:

**Shall the City Council be authorized to apply \$1 million of previously authorized indebtedness (\$16,000,000) and unexpended proceeds of parking garage improvement bonds (\$14,500,000) for the purpose of making tax increment financing district streetscape improvements on Lake Street and Main Street?**

Mr. Cloud stated that Council has seen the designs for both Lake and North Main and also have obligations to do the Brownfield cleanup for 43 Lake. Mayor Gamache asked Mr. Cloud what can be expected next. Mr. Cloud responded that he is just introducing the topic and would like to answer any questions that council might have now. He reiterated that this is not new debt. Mayor Gamache noted that coming in within budget and on schedule for the parking garage was extraordinarily impressive.

b. Council Discussion and Comment.

Mr. Doyle stated that he is concerned voters may not understand this item very well and was wondering if a bulk mailing could be sent out to voters. Mr. Cloud responded that staff will incorporate all of the same educational pieces and agreed that it is an unusual question.

c. Public Comment.

Judy Ashley asked if this article included work at the Federal and Lake Street intersection. Mr. Cloud responded that staff still intends to put a traffic signal at that intersection and is ardently pursuing that. He explained that in order to improve the intersection, a signal is needed but there is also a geometrical issue at hand. The resolution to that would be to pick up some real estate from the railroad. Staff has been under negotiations with the railroad for the 6 months. The money for that improvement is actually in the original authorization and doesn't include the reserve that is being held to fix the intersection. Staff had hoped to have the signal installed this winter but property negotiations are taking longer than anticipated. Mr. Cloud stated that staff is hesitant to install the signal until the geometrical issue is resolved.

5. Continued Discussion RE: Sidewalk Rehabilitation.

a. Council Discussion and Comment.

Mayor Gamache noted that at the last meeting, she realized that there was a lot more opportunity for discussion amongst council and the public in regards to how the project moves forward. She looks forward to the opportunity to getting the discussions moving and get out into the wards to engage our community members and find out what matters to them. She is looking forward to putting together a plan for the future.

Mr. Doyle noted the curb work involved in the plan and stated that most of which is not ancillary to the sidewalks directly.

Mr. Spooner noted that Mr. Hawkins made some good points at the last meeting. He believes more conversation should take place and gave the example of replacing only one sidewalk on a street having "poor" sidewalks on each side or replacing a "fair" sidewalk that is heavily used. He also believes the discussion will be a great opportunity for council to start walking the sidewalks.

Mr. Hawkins asked if we are on a pathway to ensure that something is done in 2015. Mayor Gamache responded that she would like to see council on that type of time line. She stated that the presentation gives council the basis to begin evaluating and start asking questions. Mr. Spooner stated that he believes sidewalks and greenbelts will be at the top of council's priority list this year. Mr. Cloud noted that a special meeting in 2015 would be plausible and reminded council that the parking garage was passed at a special meeting. Mr. Cloud noted that he and Marty had been brainstorming other ways to advance neighborhood initiatives and believes there is some opportunity programmatically through departments. There have been thoughts about the Planning

Department and Recreation Department teaming to incorporate neighborhood competitions such as best holiday decorations, best lawns, etc. Mayor Gamache welcomed any ideas from the community.

b. Public Comment.

Judy Ashley stated that when council is ready, she and her staff are available for collaboration of any wellness initiatives and sidewalk discussions.

6. Other Business.

No other business was discussed.

7. Executive Session.

a. Purpose: to discuss purchase, sale and development agreement for a hotel located at 43 Lake Street.

b. Motion: to consider the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options (D&V).  
**A motion was made by Alderman Spooner; seconded by Alderman Doyle to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing the purchase, sale and development agreement for a hotel located at 43 Lake Street and to consider the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options at 7:31 pm. Vote was unanimous, 7-0.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristen Smith  
Administrative Coordinator

Approved by Council