



March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020:

Residents and Neighbors,

It seems like a lifetime ago since I wrote a monthly letter. And a lot has changed since then. The Working Communities Challenge Grant process was postponed, as is the VCRD Community Visit Day. Most other events throughout the City, and the Country, were cancelled, postponed, or otherwise transitioned online due to COVID-19. City Council has met by conference call and now meets by videoconference. I may hold my first official meeting of City Council while at my house in April. It is surreal for me, as I am sure it is for you.

Regardless of all of the change, the City is still in operation. Public buildings cannot be accessed, but services are still being provided. The City is adjusting just like schools are to provide education, restaurants are to provide food, and the State is to provide essential services.

The Manager provided his last presentation for the FY21 budget at the March 2nd Council meeting, prior to Town Meeting Day. This capped off several presentations around the City with different organizations and groups of people. I want to express my sincere appreciation to the voters who filled out an absentee ballot, stopped by City Hall, or came to the polls to vote. Knowing that the City has your support for our budget, for streets and capital, our bond and other ballot items helps to keep Barre moving forward.

At our March 10th meeting, we welcomed in person two new Councilors; Jake Hemmerick from Ward 1 and Ericka Reil from Ward 3. I also thanked former Councilors Jeffrey Tuper-Giles and Samn Stockwell for their service to our community. Councilors reviewed the onboarding process, which includes meeting with the City Manager, City Clerk, Department Heads, and training through VLCT. We also overviewed the remaining items as part of the FY20 Priorities. New Councilors were assigned tasks and updates provided by others on Council on items that they have been working on. All Councilors congratulated the Spaulding High School girls' hockey team for their undefeated season and State Championship.

On March 17th, Council met by conference call. The meeting was still open to the public at City Hall, but social distancing measures were already in place. Manager Mackenzie reviewed the steps being taken to address COVID-19 issues and the City had established a page devoted for providing information from sites such as the Vermont Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control websites. A City COVID Response Team was in place led by the Manager, Fire Chief Doug Brent and Deputy Chief Joe Aldsworth. The City Clerk recommended, and Council approved, changes to defer deadlines for dog licenses, waive late fees on water and sewer through the month of April, and late fees on taxes from March 17th to April 15th. There was also a watermain break that was fixed but needed test to verify the lifting of a boil water notice.

On March 24th, Council met by video conference. Governor Scott issued a "Stay at Home" order late in the afternoon and City staff were working to implement its plans for compliance. Positions were reviewed for work-at-home options and what services were considered essential. Some services were transitioned to receive with online payments and staff payroll was transitioned to direct deposit. All City

playgrounds and recreation facilities were closed with a plan to close all municipal buildings to the public.

Tonight, March 31st, City Council will meet again by video conference, but it looks to be the last time that there will be a requirement for a public meeting space during this emergency response period. The Manager will provide a COVID-19 City Response Update, including FY20 Revenue Impacts & Year-End Deficit Projections as well as ensuring the city operations continue.

Council continued to receive presentations from organizations in the City and our neighbors:

- The City held a “Telephone Town Hall” on this Thursday March 19th to take calls and answer questions from the public. The event was hosted by JD Green through Facebook Live, but was also broadcast on CVTV723.org. The panel included Mayor Lucas Herring, Manager Steve Mackenzie, Fire Chief Douglas Brent and Deputy Chief Joe Aldsworth.
- The Whitehouse has set up State and Local Briefings. Congressman Welch has also provided information through a Conference Call organized by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns. Several staff and the Mayor have participated in calls with the State Emergency Operations Center.

City Council approved several items including the following:

- Approval to Loan Firehouse Weathervane for American Folk-Art Museum Exhibit
- Authorization to Accept Forest, Parks & Recreation Tree Nursery Grant for \$2,400
- Pre-authorization and Ratification for the City Manager to Execute FY21 Fuels Contracts
- Appointment of Michael Hellein to the Transportation Advisory Committee
- Appointment of Michael Boutin to the Central Vermont Public Safety Authority
- Approve Participation in 2020 National Mayor’s Challenge for Water Conservation
- Approve Participation in World Wildlife Foundation’s Earth Hour in 2020
- Appointment of Jeffrey Tuper-Giles to the Public Art Committee
- Authorize Submission of USDA Teen Center Grant Application
- Approval of Annual Authorization to Conduct Tax Sales
- Approval and Ratification of Dog License, Parking Permit, and Delinquent Interest and Late Fees
- Authorization to Accept FY20 GHSP e-ticket subgrant for Barre City Police Department
- Authorization to Apply for the SRF loan for Wastewater Treatment Facility Improvements
- Authorization to Execute Step II DuBois & King, Inc. Design Phase Agreement for WWTF Improvements
- Authorization to Purchase DPW Truck Chassis
- Authorize Award of Municipal Pool Bid
- Ratification of Collective Bargaining Agreement with Local #4-68 of the USW
- Action to Extend Overnight Parking Permits COVID-19 Conditions
- Approval of Interim Policy re: Waiver of Meter Fees, Collections and Enforcement
- Approval of COVID-19 Employee Sick/Quarantine Leave Payroll Policy
- Approve Renaming Solid Waste Management Committee to Organic Diversion Committee

We are all in this together,

Lucas J. Herring  
Mayor, City of Barre