



January 29th, 2020:

Residents and Neighbors,

City Council has heard from Barre Area Development regarding their market funding request for Barre Rock Solid, as well as funding within the City budget. The requested placement of a \$40,000 funding allocation on the March 2020 Annual Town Meeting ballot created discussion on funding support from Barre Town and private sources. Councilors later received additional information on the program beyond the video and website items that have been created and the funding article was approved, in lieu of a petition, to be on the ballot. The funding of the organization was originally cut, but Council restored the funds as the BADC is looking to hire a new Executive Director and include a member from the Council to participate.

Human Resources Director Rikk Taft reviewed the Worker's Compensation and Casualty Insurance Program. The City has seen a significant improvement in both due to the creation of a safety committee, review of claims, grant funds used to offset purchases of safety equipment, revised job descriptions, and a revamped worker's comp reporting system. These changes have resulted in a reduced rate for these types of services, which helps in an upcoming budget year that will experience a 14% increase in health insurance costs.

DPW Director Bill Ahearn provided information on the North Main Street and Route 62 traffic signal system that was malfunctioning, which required a contractor to help diagnose the issue and it is currently resolved. The DPW staff were able to perform some sewer lining repair on a portion of River Street. There have been concerns with smell from the Wastewater Treatment Facility, which is related to the digester cover repair that is needed and should be completed this Spring.

Council received a Legislative update from Rep. Anthony, Rep. Walz, Sen. Perchlik and Sen. Cummings. They noted proposed programs for funding remodeling of single-family homes, partially funding a mental health clinician along with the City of Barre, paid family leave, shared funding by electric vehicle owners for infrastructure maintenance costs, ways to make post-secondary education more affordable, employee shortages in the health care industry, and a tax and regulate system for marijuana.

A large number of landlords participated in the discussion or provided letters to Councilors on Charter changes, specifically on allowing additional security deposits as part of a lease agreement. Landlords advocated that Barre City join the vast majority of Vermont municipalities in allowing the ability for a pet and additional security deposit, which they stated would allow them to rent to people who have bad or no credit. Specific language is currently available in the Clerk's office for those interested in reviewing the changes.

Council continued to review the FY21 Budget in January, with meetings on January 4th and 18th. There were presentations from Department Heads at the workshops and discussion on areas that were to be

cut. The revisions resulted in a \$13 million budget that the Manager presented to Councilors on January 28th, which includes two new police officers, covers wages and benefits as part of bargained contracts, supports a \$1.7 million bond request, the \$40,000 article for the Barre Rock Solid program as well as the requested \$26,500 from the Central Vermont Public Safety Authority. The 4.38% projected tax rate increases to 5.09% overall when including the BADC and CVPSA articles on the ballot. The budget was unanimously approved by Council to place before the voters.

Councilor Tuper-Giles reviewed his proposal for the creation of a Public Art Committee to assist the potential for a future Arts District and identify areas for public art. A Public Arts Committee, formed by two members from each ward and one at-large member, was created. The committee will be listed along with other boards, commissions and committees that are to be appointed by the City Council as part of an upcoming recruitment effort. The concept of a “Welcome to Barre” sign contest was discussed, which more detail will be provided on criteria for submissions and selection, funding, materials, and locations.

Recreation Director Stephanie Quaranta requested Council authorization to submit the VOREC grant application for up to \$100,000, which does not require a local match. The grant would support the Metro Way portion of the multi-use path. Council also approved a grant application for the HGTV Home Town Takeover and awaits the outcome of the grant applications for the Vermont Community Challenges grant.

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

- Ground Rules and Decorum were reviewed, as well as updated progress on the City Council Priorities. These items were also reviewed with Councilor Stockwell outside of Council to make sure she was aware of items Council has agreed to work on.
- City Clerk Carol Dawes presented on the TIF Substantial Review and Legislative Changes. The City’s TIF changes were approved by the Vermont Economic Progress Council, an overview of the 2019 annual report was provided and a TIF memo with changes was provided to Council for review.
- Recreation Director Stephanie Quaranta presented on upcoming programs for the Summer. With the pool being closed this year, she is also working on a Summer Camp Program.
- Financial Director Dawn Monahan gave an FY20 2nd Quarter Budget Update. Her original projection showed a deficit of \$155,000, which was later noted as a reduction to \$70,000, and the City Manager has placed stopgaps to prevent the deficit from increasing further.
- Fire Marshall Robert “Howie” Howarth provided an update on Inspection Program and Vacant Properties. It was noted that the number of vacant properties as part of the program was declining, which they attributed some of the reduction to changes (such as signage listing properties for sale) in the 2019 ordinance revisions.
- Kim Cheney presented on the CVPSA Funding Request. The \$26,500 is the City of Barre portion to fund their planned budget for FY20.

City Council approved several items including the following:

- Approval of the Payment Drop Box Policy
- Approval of the PILOT Policy
- Approval of the Penalty & Interest Charges on Miscellaneous Accounts Receivable (MAR) Policy
- Approval of the Returned Check Policy
- Approval of the Small Balance & Refund Policy

- Approval of Civic Center Rate Changes
- Authorization to Sell Pearl Street EV Charging Station to the State of Vermont
- Approval of ChargePoint Contract for EV Charging Services
- Selection of Dedication, Cover Photo, and Cover Photo Description for the FY19 Annual Report. Council agreed to dedicate the annual report to former Councilor and State Representative Paul Poirier and to feature the City's K-9 officer Mikey on the cover.
- Ratification of the Tree Stewardship Committee Grant Application for a Tree Nursery
- Approval 2020 Certificate of Highway Mileage
- Approval of Fabienne Pattison to the Cow Pasture Committee
- Approval of BADC Ballot Question Language
- Approve \$1.7M Bond Documents
- Approve Warning for 2020 Annual Town Meeting

And lastly, there are several new and returning initiatives being discussed:

- For the February 4th Council meetings, Council will hold its second public hearing for proposed charter changes, and are scheduled to have presentations from the BUUSD Budget, VGM, Cow Pasture Committee and A.D.A. Committee.
- Coffee with the Mayor at Espresso Bueno on Saturday, February 8th from 8:00 – 10:00 AM.
- The City Council meeting for Tuesday, February 11th, 2020 is cancelled.
- Neighborhood Watch: Watch Leader Meeting on February 13th, 6pm, Alumni Hall 2nd Floor.
- Council is to receive quarterly updates from the Aldrich Library, Barre Area Development, and Barre Partnership at the February 18th Council meeting.
- CV Fiber is to provide an update at the February 25th meeting.
- Although the Planning Commission was to release the draft updated municipal plan in mid-February, the document will not be approved until February 27th at the earliest. Once approved, there will be opportunities for public comment.

Lucas J. Herring
Mayor, City of Barre