

Council Minutes

March 10, 2025

A duly warned meeting of the Newport City Council was held on Monday, March 10, 2025 in the council room in the Newport Municipal Building. Present were Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase, Council Members Kevin Charboneau, Andrew Touchette, A. Carter Finegan, City Clerk/Treasurer James Johnson, Recreation Director Michael Brown, Police Chief Travis Bingham, Public Works Director Thomas Bernier, Zoning Administrator Francis Cheney, members of the Press and Public.

Mayor Ufford-Chase called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Additions, Changes, and Deletions to the Agenda

None

Consent Agenda

Tabled until the next regular council meeting.

Council introductions

Each council member introduced themselves and gave a brief statement on why they ran for office.

Council Review of Legal Matters with Legal counsel 1 V.S.A. 313(a)(1) (F)

Mr. Charboneau moved to find that premature general public knowledge of the City's attorney client communications would clearly place the council at a disadvantage by disclosing the City's privileged attorney-client communications and potentially waving said privilege. Seconded by Mr. Touchette, motion carried.

Ms. Finegan moved to enter executive session to discuss confidential attorney –client communications with the City Attorney for the purpose of providing professional legal services and invite the city attorney into executive session pursuant to 1 V.S.A. 313 (a)(1)(F). Seconded by Mr. Charboneau, motion carried.

No action.

Grant Agreement Resolution-Single Grantee-Gardner Park Improvement

Mr. Touchette moved to approve the Grant Agreement Resolution – Single- Grantee- Gardner Park Improvements, Seconded by Mr. Charboneau, motion carried. Mr. Charboneau, Mr.Touchette and Mayor Ufford-Chase voter in favor of the motion.

Resolution Authorizing Mayor Ufford-Chase to Act as Authorized Agent for the City of Newport.

Ms. Finegan moved to authorize Mayor Ufford-chase to act as authorized agent for the City of Newport. Seconded by Mr. Touchette, motion carried.

Special Task Force on Water and Sewer

Mr. Touchette moved to establish a Special Task Force on water and sewer as amended with letters of interest received by Friday, March 14, 2025. Seconded by Mr. Charboneau, motion carried.

Special Task Force for Financial Reporting and Fiscal Practices

Mr. Charboneau moved to establish a Special Task force as amended to be called Financial Reporting and Fiscal Practices. Seconded by Ms. Finegan, motion carried.

Council Assignments

The council discussed appointed city positions

Financial and Office Admin. Position

Mr. Touchette moved to ask Chris Vachon to serve as a volunteer to help with creating council packets and posting warnings and minutes appropriately for up the three months until we have filled the Financial and Office Administrator position and that person has been oriented to those tasks appropriately. This would not include access to any confidential materials that the council would consider in executive session. Seconded by Mr. Charboneau, motion carried.

Process to fill Empty Council Seat – to appoint or call a Special Election

Mr. Johnson presented a petition to hold a special election that was received today.

Mr. Touchette moved to appoint a person to fill the vacant council seat until a special election is held. Letters of interest and a brief resume should be filed with the City Clerk by March 20, 2025. Seconded by Mr. Charboneau, motion carried.

Mr. Charboneau moved to hold a Special Meeting on March 20, 2025 to appoint a person to fill the vacant seat on the council until the next election. Seconded by Mr. Touchette, motion carried.

Ms. Finegan moved to hold a Special election on May 6, 2025 to fill the vacant council seat. Seconded by Mr. Charboneau, motion carried.

Invitation to Council to Request Items be placed on Council Agenda

The Mayor requested that any item to be placed on the agenda be submitted by mid-week of the week before the next meeting.

Agree to Hold a Special Meeting on March 31, 2025

The council agreed to hold a special meeting on March 31, 2025 and cancel the regular meeting scheduled for April 7, 2025 to accommodate the mayor's travel schedule.

Public Comment

Ann Chiarello commented on generally including the public on city business.

Jennifer Bjurling thanked the new council members for running.

Old Business

None

New Business

Mayor Ufford-Chase read a statement (attached)

Next Meeting Date

Mr. Charboneau moved to set the next council meeting for March 17, 2025. Seconded by Mr. Touchette, motion carried.

Adjournment

Mr. Charboneau moved to adjourn at 8:20 pm. Seconded by Mr. Touchette, motion carried.

Attested _____ this _____ Day of _____ 2025

Mayor

Authorizing Resolution

A Resolution Authorizing Rick Ufford-Chase, Mayor of Newport, to act in his role as Mayor and on behalf of the City of Newport, VT as the Authorized Official and granting him permission to sign all investment documents for any/all Grants awarded to the City of Newport, VT.

Resolved by City Council of Newport VT as follows:


Whereas the City of Newport, VT has been awarded certain Grants for infrastructure and community development projects;

Now therefore, the City Mayor, Rick Ufford-Chase, is hereby authorized, on behalf of the City of Newport, VT to be the authorized Official and apply for, accept, and expend grant funds for those Grants awarded to the City of Newport, VT. As Authorized Official, City Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase has permission to sign all investment documents that bind the City of Newport for any/all grants awarded to the City of Newport, VT.

Approved this 10th Day of March, 2025



Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase



Kevin Charboneau



Carter Finegan



Andrew Touchette

Seat Vacant

Memo: Recommendation for Council Consideration

From: Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase

Regarding: Special Task Force on Water and Sewer

Date: 3/7/25

Recommendation: That the Council establish a Special Task Force on Water and Sewer with the following mandate:

1. To Review the Water and Sewer Expense Budget with a focus on whether the operation is being managed efficiently and at the appropriate cost to the rate-payers, and on whether all expenses are allocated appropriately to Water and Sewer budgets.
2. To Review plans for long-term maintenance and improvements to our facilities.
3. To Review income from other entities and whether the costs for plant operations and service delivery are being billed appropriately.
4. To determine the potential shortfall between the FY25/26 expense budget and the current rate structure.
5. To recommend the most fair and responsible way to address the rate structure and develop short-term recommendation (2 to 3 year plan) for regarding rates that the Council should consider setting for metered and non-metered accounts and for residential and commercial accounts. (NOTE: Initial recommendations must be provided to the Council by Friday, April 18th at noon in order for the Council to consider rate adjustments at its meeting on April 21, 2025. If necessary, the Task Force may request that the Mayor consider calling a special meeting later in the month of April in order for the Council to consider rate adjustments before the deadline of May 1, 2025.)
6. To develop a plan for Council consideration that will allow the City to complete meter installations asap and begin collecting data on actual usage.
7. To develop recommendations (possibly in consultation with the Financial Reporting and Fiscal Practices Task Force) for the Council's consideration regarding the best approach to address the deficit created by the failure to address these questions earlier. These recommendations can include (if necessary) any analysis of how much of the current deficit can legitimately be attributed to Water and Sewer Operations, and how much can/should be attributed to the City Operating budget.

Term: The Council authorizes the work of the Task Force for Water and Sewer for six months (with the possibility to extend the commitment at the Council's request) or upon completion of its work, whichever comes first.

Boundaries and Expectations to the Special Task Force's Authority:

1. The Special Task Force shall meet as often as it deems necessary.

2. Meetings of the Special Task Force shall be warned at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting, and posted on the City website and in physical locations at the Post Office, the Goodrich Library, and the Municipal Building.
3. Meetings of the Special Task Force shall be governed by the same Open Meetings laws that govern the City Council:
 - a. All deliberations of the Task Force will be open to the public. Permission for the public to speak in the Special Task Force meetings will be at the discretion of the Chair of the Task Force.
 - b. If more than two members are involved in a task requested by the Task Force, it shall be deemed a meeting of the entire task force and therefore subject to the Open Meeting requirements.
4. The Task Force shall have the authority only to make recommendations to the Mayor and Council. No authority to implement policies or recommendations is given to the Task Force or its individual members.
5. The Task Force shall have access to all public documents of the City.
6. While the press is welcome at all public meetings of the Task Force, it should bear in mind that the Task Force has no approval to take action on its recommendations. Only the Mayor and Council can implement the recommendations of the Task Force.
7. The Council is volunteer and has no budget. With the Mayor's approval, the Council may request staff assistance from Department Heads who have particular expertise in the work before the Task Force. If the Task Force determines that it would be helpful to contract for professional help for some portion of the work, it must make a request that the Council consider doing so.

Committee Membership, Nominations and Appointment: Task Force members will be appointed by City Council at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 17th or at any other time it deems appropriate to support the Task Force's work.

The Mayor and One Council Member will serve as members of this Task Force, and the Council member will either chair the meetings or delegate that responsibility to another member of the Task Force.

The Task Force will have no fewer than 3 and no more than 7 additional members. Since there is no authority for the Task Force to act on its recommendations, there may be an even or odd number of members of the Task Force at the Council's discretion.

The process for nominations for appointment is:

1. Interested parties (~~who may or may not be residents of the City of Newport~~) will have until Friday, March 14th at noon to submit a brief written statement of their interest and qualifications to the Mayor.

2. Interested parties must be present in person or by video conference at the Council Meeting scheduled for March 17th to answer any questions the Council may have.
3. Task Force Members serve as volunteers at the pleasure of the Council, and may be removed by action of the Council at any time.

Memo: Recommendation for Council Consideration

From: Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase

Regarding: Financial Reporting and Practices

Date: 3/7/25

Recommendation: That the Council establish a Special Task Force to be called “Financial Reporting and Fiscal Practices” with the following mandate:

1. To review best practices from other municipalities and make recommendations to Council to implement financial reporting to ensure that the Council and City Staff will have the best possible access to timely and accurate financial reporting. This should include concise reports on Assets and Liabilities, Profit and Loss Statements, and Cash Flow/Financial Projections that change monthly based actual expenses to date and any new information regarding budgeted or unforeseen expenditures for the rest of the fiscal year.
2. To assess the deficit and develop a strategy for Council’s consideration to re-establish solid, long-term fiscal practices.
3. To determine the best strategy and make recommendations to Council to re-establish a fiscally responsible cash reserve for the City of Newport.
4. To make recommendations to Council regarding the creation of a policy to guide the City that will discourage unnecessary debt and encourage fiscally responsible planning for significant capital expenditures.

Term: The Council authorizes the work of the Task Force for Financial Reporting and Fiscal Practices for six months (with the possibility to extend the commitment at the Council’s request) or upon completion of its work, whichever comes first.

Boundaries and Expectations to the Special Task Force’s Authority:

1. The Special Task Force shall meet as often as it deems necessary.
2. Meetings of the Special Task Force shall be warned at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting, and posted on the City website and in physical locations at the Post Office, the Goodrich Library, and the Municipal Building.
3. Meetings of the Special Task Force shall be governed by the same Open Meetings laws that govern the City Counsel:
 - a. All deliberations of the Task Force will be open to the public. Permission for the public to speak in the deliberations of the Task Force will be at the discretion of the Chair of the Task Force.
 - b. If more than two members are involved in a task requested by the Task Force, it shall be deemed a meeting of the entire task force and therefore subject to the Open Meeting requirements.

4. The Task Force shall have the authority only to make recommendations to the Mayor and Council. No authority to implement policies or recommendations is given to the Task Force or its individual members.
5. The Task Force shall have access to all public documents of the City.
6. While the press is welcome at all public meetings of the Task Force, it should bear in mind that the Task Force has no approval to take action on its recommendations. Only the Mayor and Council can implement the recommendations of the Task Force.
7. The Council is volunteer and has no budget. With the Mayor's approval, the Council may request staff assistance from Department Heads who have particular expertise in the work before the Task Force. If the Task Force determines that it would be helpful to contract for professional help for some portion of the work, it must make a request that the Council consider doing so.

Committee Membership, Nominations and Appointment: Task Force members will be appointed by City Council at its regularly scheduled meeting on March 17th or at any other time it deems appropriate to support the Task Force's work.

The Mayor, ~~the Treasurer~~ and One Council Member will serve as members of this Task Force, and the Council member will either chair the meetings or delegate that responsibility to another member of the Task Force.

The Task Force will have no fewer than 3 and no more than 7 additional members. Since there is no authority for the Task Force to act on its recommendations, there may be an even or odd number of members of the Task Force at the Council's discretion.

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2. Interested parties must be present in person or by video conference at the Council Meeting scheduled for March 17th to answer any questions the Council may have.
3. Task Force Members serve as volunteers at the pleasure of the Council, and may be removed by action of the Council at any time.

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Memo: Information and Request for Council Consideration

From: Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase

Regarding: Initial Council Assignments and Opportunities

Date: 3/7/25

Council Members,

I believe it is critically important to fill the empty Financial and Administrative Position as soon as and with as much care as possible. Ideally, I would like Council members to divide responsibilities over the coming two months as follows:

- 1 Council Member to serve as Council President, which will involve being fully aware of all the balls that the Council is juggling and being willing to step in to facilitate meetings or cover other responsibilities in the event that I am unable to do so.
- 1 Council Member to serve on the Special Task Force for Water and Sewer
- 1 Council Member to serve on the Special Task Force for Financial Reporting and Fiscal Planning
- 1 Council Member to work directly with the Mayor to identify a candidate to fill the empty position titled "Financial and Office Administrator" for the Council's consideration, and potentially to work with me on other personnel matters that may arise.

In addition, Council members are welcome to coordinate with me to attend any of the following events (the coordination is to ensure that we do not inadvertently trip up on Open Meeting Law requirements):

- Weekly meetings I will be holding with Department Heads on Tuesdays at 10 am (starting March 18th).
- Meetings between NDD folks and White and Burke or other consultants with whom the City has contracted for the TIF Feasibility and Potential Application Process
- Meetings of Standing Commissions or Committees of the City (Planning, Rec Committtee which Carter already serves on), Cemetery Commission, Forever Young Club, Fire Department, etc. – these should always be arranged in advance and at the invitation of the people who are responsible for those groups.
- Related entities that the City supports through appropriations – again – with the permission and invitation of the responsible parties. This includes a standing invitation to attend meetings of the various committees of Newport Downtown Development.
- Community events where Council representation might be appreciated. Please bring brief written summaries back to share with the Council as you see fit.
- VLCT Select Board Training

Given the heavy workload I anticipate for Council over the next few months, I recommend that we hold off on naming Council members to function as liaisons to

individual departments of the City. If the Council members agree with that recommendation, we can take it up again in June, or at any time that the Council would like.

In the meantime, as I have said to each of you privately, you are welcome to speak with our Department Heads or other City staff at any time, with three requests:

1. Please be sensitive to the amount of time you are taking with our Department Heads. Like you, they are going to be extremely busy over the next few months. Ask if it is a good time to talk, and be willing to find another time if they have other obligations or priorities in that moment.
2. Please refrain from speaking with other City Staff about City matters without consulting with me first so that I can involve the Department Heads appropriately. Of course, normal interactions at the grocery store or Pick and Shovel are just fine.
3. Please do not give specific instructions to Department Heads about tasks you would like them to address, either on your behalf or on behalf of City residents who may have spoken with you about a concern. For those matters, please bring the requests to me and I either respond immediately if it is an emergency, or I will share the concern with the Department Heads at our weekly meeting and agree on a timeline that will allow them to fit it in with their other priorities.

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Memo: Information for Council Consideration

From: Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase

Regarding: Process to fill the Financial and Office Admin Position

Date: 3/7/25

Council Members,

I would like to make two requests:

1. Council approval to ask Chris Vachon to serve as a volunteer to help with creating Council packets and posting warnings and minutes appropriately for up to three months until we have filled the Financial and Office Administrator position and that person has been oriented to those tasks appropriately. This would not include access to any confidential materials that the Council would consider in Executive Session.
2. That we name a Council member on March 17th to work with the Mayor to address the vacant "Financial and Office Administrator" position with a qualified candidate as soon as possible. The steps involved will likely be as follows:
 - a. Review the job description for the Financial and Office Administrator Position as previously approved by Council to ensure that it is appropriate.
 - b. Review the applicants to date
 - c. Determine whether it is advisable to advertise the position again (allowing those who have already applied to be considered for the position)
 - d. Organize necessary Council interviews with candidates (likely in executive session).
 - e. Implement a plan to appropriately manage the City's office and financial administrative needs - in place no later than May 1