

City Council Discusses District Energy and Taser Review Committee

by Nat Frothingham

The April 13 meeting of the Montpelier City Council was dominated by two agenda items: first, a discussion of continued developments in the city-state district energy project; and second, a discussion of specifics for a committee to review a request to purchase and equip the Montpelier Police Department with tasers.

City-State Biomass Project

Montpelier businessman Steve Everett, who owns three downtown buildings on State Street, appeared before the council alongside city planning director Gwendolyn Hallsmith.

Everett told the council that between his three buildings, “we currently burn about 12,800 gallons of heating oil every year.” Everett’s heating bill has been discounted down to about \$3.50 per gallon. At \$4 per gallon (a price that some experts are predicting for this fall), his annual heating costs would come to about \$50,000 per year.

“In the next 20 years,” Everett said, “I will spend \$1 million on fuel oil.” He also said he would much prefer to spend that money on a biomass system that’s part of a community heating project. He added, “This is very simple economics.”

The district energy biomass project includes a Clean Energy Assessment District. Anyone in the city can take advantage of the loan program offered through the assessment district.

In a discussion with councillor Sarah Jarvis, Hallsmith explained some of the advantages of a city clean-energy-district loan program for businesses and homeowners.

“The money goes out to building owners

and homeowners, and they pay it back as a rateable charge on their property,” Hallsmith said. “That has some real advantages. [The loan] runs with the building instead of with the owner.” That means that if someone only lived in Montpelier for three to five years, there would still be ample time to pay the loan back. Hallsmith said that a city loan program could offer money at lower-than-commercial lending rates.

Taser Review Committee

The council, with assistance from Montpelier Police Chief Tony Facos, deliberated at length about a taser review committee.

As part of its January 2011 budget discussion, the council delayed a decision about whether or not to purchase tasers for use by the Montpelier Police Department. Instead, the council decided to form a committee to review the issue.

On April 13, the council discussed the composition of the committee, the wording of a charge that would define the committee’s work, and the beginning and end dates of the committee. The council will invite public participation on the committee from residents of Montpelier only, although outside people will be welcome to attend and participate committee meetings.

While the charge to the committee was discussed at length, the exact wording was not precisely determined. City Manager Bill Fraser was asked to provide specific wording.

Fraser shared this provisional, but near-final, version of a charge to the taser committee:

“The Montpelier City Council wishes to convene a committee of Montpelier residents to consider the question: Under what circumstances would use of tasers by the Montpelier Police Department be acceptable?

“In answering that question, the council would like the committee to specifically consider and make recommendations about the following: Assessment of need, Appropriate Policy and standards, Training requirements and Public Accountability for use or display. Additionally, the council would like the committee to recommend a public engagement process for both the committee and for the city council after receiving the committee’s report. The council is interested in all perspectives but would like to hear, specifically, from the mental health community, law enforcement, schools, the medical community and the legal community.

“The City Council wishes to receive the committee’s report by Friday, September 30th for discussion at the October 12th City Council Meeting. It is expected that the committee will meet during the summer in order to meet the deadline. All committee meetings are subject to the open meeting and public records laws. The final decision about taser use will be made by the City Council after considering the committee report and completing a public process.”

Other Business

In other April 13 action, the council reappointed Rick DeAngelis as the city’s town service officer. The council reappointed John Bloch for another two-year term on the Planning Commission.

The council set dates for two special elections: for reconsideration of tax exemption for the ice-skating rink at the Civic Center, the election date is Tuesday, May 17; for consideration of a proposed district energy project, the projected, though not confirmed date is Tuesday, June 14.

News Briefs

Showing of Documentary Film by Bess O’Brien at Kingdom County Productions

Ask Us Who We Are, a just-released film about the often-invisible lives of foster-care children will play on Saturday, April 30 at 7 p.m. at Montpelier’s Unitarian Church.

According to Doug Racine, secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services, the new film “will dispel the many stereotypes around foster care, raise consciousness and start a conversation in Vermont about the children who need our help.”

Tickets to the screenings are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students. Discount tickets for foster families in need are available. All tickets will be available at the door. For further information, call 592-3190 or visit kingdomcounty.com.

Seeking Community Assistance for China Exchange Program

Montpelier and nearby local communities will be hosting a group of 30 high school students from China this summer.

The program seeks host families from June 26 to July 9. The students will spend evenings, weekends and mealtimes with host families. Host families are being asked to transport the visiting students to and from Montpelier on weekdays. There is a small stipend to cover expenses.

The program seeks students at U-32 and Montpelier High School to serve as peer leaders. Interested students are asked to fill out an application, be interviewed and attend a training session at Vermont College of Fine Arts on May 3.

For more information, please contact Bill Merrylees at Community Connections: 223-3456 or bmerrylees@u32.org.

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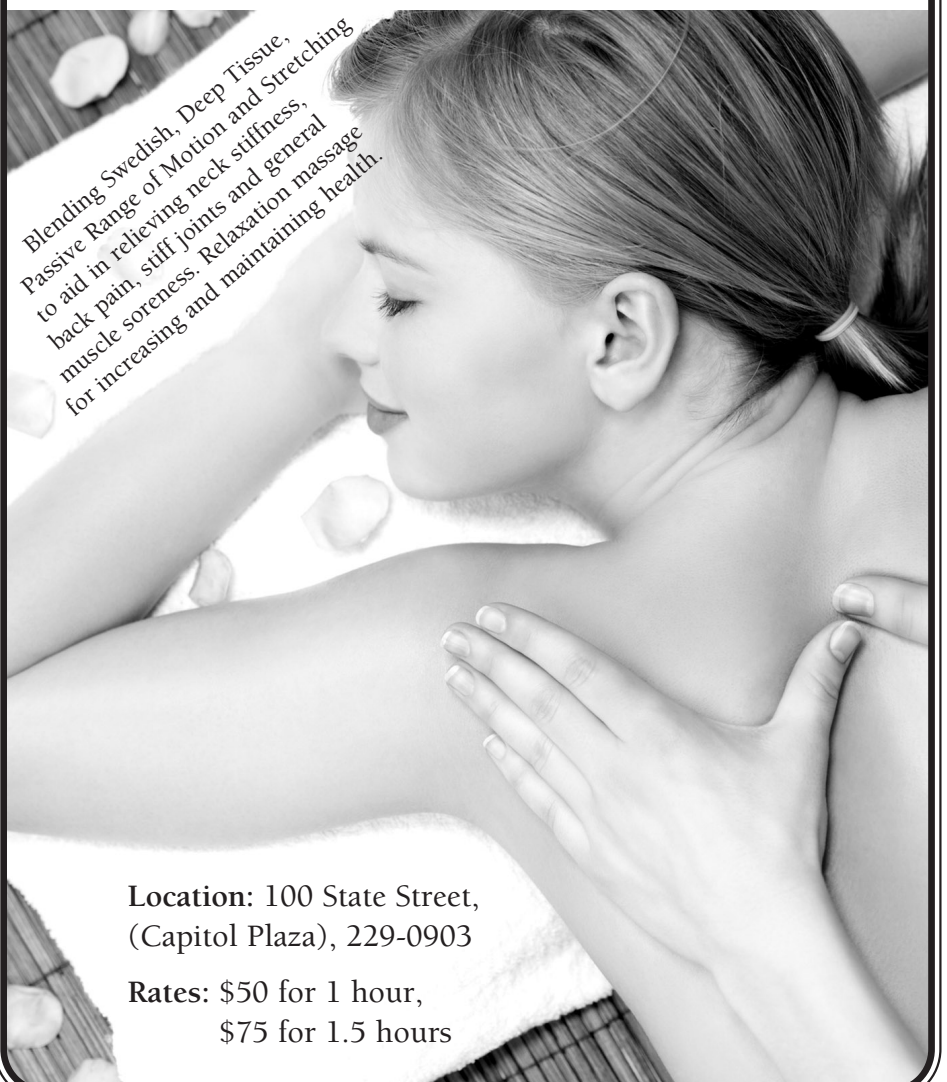
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