

Council Minutes

August 17, 2026

A duly warned meeting of the Newport City council was held on Monday, August 17, 2026 in the council room in the Newport Municipal Building. Present were Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase, Council President Carter Finegan, council members Sharon Pare', John Monette, Andrew Touchette, City Clerk/Treasurer James Johnson, City Manager Joe Gunter, Finance and Office Administrator Kari Schulze, Tom Bernier, Kevin LaCoss, Frank Cheney, Lyle Jepson, Dave Snediker, Stephanie Clark, Dave LaForce, members of the Legislature, members of the Press and Public.

A reception was held to welcome our new City Manager Joe Gunter. Refreshments were provided by NCUHS, Mobile Mug.

Mayor Ufford-Chase opened the meeting at 6:00 pm.

Additions/Deletions

Mr. Monette moved to have Mr. Gunter say a few words after the consent agenda. Seconded by Ms. Finegan, motion carried.

Consent Agenda, Minutes of 8/3/26, AP Warrants of 8/5/26, 8/7/26, 8/13/26, PR Warrant 8/4/26, LEMP Spending Limit

Chief LaCoss spoke on the Local Emergency Management Plan which has a spending limit of \$400,000 in emergency situations

Mr. Monette moved to approve the consent agenda as presented. Seconded by Ms. Finegan, motion carried.

Mr. Gunter Spoke on his job as City Manager and thanked the community for the warm welcome he and his wife have received.

Report to Council and Community Regarding Acquisition of the Development Block

Mayor Ufford-Chase explained the acquisition of the block. NVDA will purchase the block from the receiver for 1.1 million dollars. They will conduct the Brown Field study and remediation and continue to pay the taxes on the property. The City has been awarded a 3 million dollar grant to upgrade the infrastructure and street scape on Main St. Mayor Ufford-Chase read a list of the organization involved

in in making the acquisition of the property happen. Dave Snediker (NVDA), Lyle Jepson (Econ Development), Rep. Page, Sen. Ingalls, Sen. Morley, Rep Labor, Rep Marcotte, Dave Laforce(NDD) all spoke on the Acquisition and what it means for the future of Newport. Emily Smart gave a presentation on the Community survey.

Action Regarding MOU between City of Newport and NVDA

Mr. Touchette moved to approve the MOU between the City and NVDA. Seconded by Mr. Monette, motion carried. Ms. Finegan abstained.

Report from Charter Task force and Recommendations for timeline for any Proposed Changes

Ms. Pare' and Mr. Pronto presented the draft of proposed changes to the City Charter. Ms. Pare' thanked the Task force members for the many, many hours involved in updating the Charter. Mr. Monette moved to set a special meeting for Thursday, August 20, 2026 at 6:00 pm for the purpose of moving forward with the proposed charter update. Seconded by Mr. Touchette, motion carried.

Public comment on any Matters not covered on the Agenda

Ms. Gerade commented on the public hearing regarding air quality.

Mr. Gaines commented on the undesirable conduct on the board walk moving to another area.

Ms. Dillon commented on the proposed air quality permit.

New Business

None

Old Business

None

Next Meeting

Special Meeting August 20, 2026 at 6:00 pm

Adjournment

Ms. Finegan moved to adjourn at 8:17 pm. Seconded by Mr. Monette, motion carried.

Attested _____ this _____ day of _____ 2026

_____ Mayor

Memo to Council

From: Mayor Rick Ufford-Chase

Re: Plan for unusual city council meeting on Monday

Date: 8/13/26

Council Members,

Though I've spoken with each of you individually this week, I wanted to make sure you all understand what I have in mind for our agenda and for our change of location on Monday evening the 17th.

Because I am expecting a much larger crowd than usual for this meeting, we made the decision to move the meeting down the hill to the Gateway. We have added a reception with light appetizers that will be served starting by Mobile Mug starting at 5:30. Mobile Mug is the great catering business started by students at the high school that was at Weds on the Waterfront each week this summer. This will be a chance to shake hands and have some conversation with Joe Gunter, who started on Monday and has hit the ground running. Unfortunately, Joe's wife Bree will be out of town and unavailable to be with us, so we'll need to create other opportunities to welcome her to the community.

On Thursday, the Governor's office and the City of Newport both released public documents regarding the plan for acquisition and control of the empty block on Main Street. You can read those two statements following this memo in your packet.

This is a very big deal, and we expect to welcome some folks who were involved in making things come together at our meeting on Monday. I am hoping to dedicate considerable time to explaining the process that got us to this milestone, answering any questions you may still have, and taking questions from community residents and stakeholders. I suspect that will take up the entire first half of the meeting.

We also will have a report from Sharon and Charlie regarding next steps with the Charter (see my accompanying memo regarding that conversation).

I'm looking forward to this meeting, and hope you are too.

Rick

Governor Phil Scott and Department of Economic Development Announce Latest Round of Rural Industry Development Grants

Funding supports restoration of vacant properties, strengthening community vitality in Newport and Montpelier

Montpelier, Vt. – Governor Scott and the Department of Economic Development today announced \$1.79 million in Rural Industry Development Program (RIDP) grants to return two long-vacant, blighted downtown properties to productive use in Montpelier and Newport.

"These grants will help Montpelier and Newport transform properties in their downtowns and put them back to good use," said Governor Phil Scott. "By giving them the tools they need, they'll have an opportunity to revitalize their downtowns for both residents and visitors to enjoy for years to come."

Both Newport and Montpelier have contended with vacant and underutilized property in their downtown. RIDP funding will provide a catalyst to help both communities reclaim these sites, removing blight and create space for future housing and businesses. RIDP provides grant funding to regional and local development corporations in areas that can accommodate business and residential growth. Grants can be used to purchase, remove, build, or renovate a property.

"Both of these sites are ready for redevelopment and have the potential to showcase how important our downtowns are to economic and community development. RIDP is helping give both communities the ability to move forward in positive ways," said Commissioner Lyle Jepson of the Department of Economic Development. "RIDP is an important tool for restoring vacant and blighted properties and for clearing the way for economic and community vitality in places that need it most."

The Northeastern Vermont Development Association has been awarded a \$1 million RIDP grant to purchase the 1.31-acre Newport Main Street Block, creating an opportunity to redevelop a vital downtown property. Future redevelopment will create jobs and housing, expand commercial and retail opportunities, and foster a more vibrant downtown Newport.

The 87 State Street Local Development Corporation has been awarded a \$790,000 RIDP grant to purchase and maintain the former post office property in Montpelier while future development options are finalized. This will provide an opportunity to address Vermont's housing needs and provide additional commercial and retail space by bringing back into use a building impacted by the 2023 flooding.

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109 State Street | The Pavilion | Montpelier, VT 05609-0101 | www.vermont.gov
TELEPHONE: 802.828.3333 | FAX: 802.828.3339 | TDD: 802.828.3345

NVDA Announces Plans to Acquire Newport Development Block

Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA), the Northeast Kingdom's regional development corporation, has signed an agreement with Michael Goldberg, the court-appointed receiver for the Newport Development Block (formerly "The Pit"), to purchase the site for \$1,100,000.

How is the purchase of the Development Block being funded?

NVDA is the recipient of a \$1,000,000 Rural Industry Development Program Grant (RIDP) from the State of Vermont. NVDA will cover the balance of the purchase and carrying costs with funds on hand. The closing is expected to take place in October, 2026.

Why is NVDA—and not the City of Newport—purchasing the Development Block?

The City does not have the funds immediately available to purchase the property. RIDP is only available to regional development corporations and often provides substantial funding that is not otherwise available to municipalities. Additionally, NVDA has the resources to manage the brownfields testing and remediation work that will be required in order for the property to be developed.

Is the City still planning to take ownership of the property? If so, when and at what cost?

The plan is to transfer ownership of the Development Block to the City or to an appropriate developer or partner for a nominal fee. Newport's City Council will work with NVDA to vet potential proposals from developers.

Will NVDA continue to pay property taxes on the property while brownfields testing and remediation work is carried out?

Yes - This is part of the carrying cost that NVDA will cover during this time.

What will happen to the Development Block once NVDA takes possession of the property?

NVDA will commence brownfield assessment and remediation immediately upon closing, which is expected in October.

Who is paying for the environmental study and site clean-up efforts?

NVDA has EPA grant funds to complete this work.

Will the Development Block remain as is during this transition period?

The Newport Initiative team is evaluating different options to make the property an asset rather than an eyesore during the pre-development period. That effort is not likely to commence until the spring of 2027, after brownfield work is completed. This work will require removing trees that have grown in that space.

What is a realistic timeline for actual development projects to take place on the property?

The purchase of the property is the first step in a multi-phased approach for intentional and transformative redevelopment of this prominent property in the downtown core. Recognizing that development is time consuming and challenging in this current construction environment, the team is hopeful that construction could commence as early as 2028.

MEMORANDUM of UNDERSTANDING

**NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, INC.
and
CITY of NEWPORT**

It is understood by and between Northern Vermont Development Association ("NVDA") and the City of Newport that the Parties hereto will work in good faith to accomplish the following transactions:

- A.) NVDA will purchase real property consisting of 1.31 acres, more or less and known and numbered as 151-189 Main Street, 35 & 47 Second Street and 32 Central Street, located in the City of Newport (the "Property") from Michael I. Goldberg, Receiver for \$1.1 million.
- B.) NVDA will complete necessary environmental work at the Property to the satisfaction of the City of Newport.
- C.) The City of Newport or an appropriate developer or partner approved by the City Council will purchase the Property from NVDA for any carrying costs incurred by NVDA beyond the anticipated Taxes and Insurances for the first year that NVDA holds the property.

Agreed to this _____ day of _____, 2026.

NORTHEASTERN VERMONT DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

By: CYNTHIA STUART, its President, duly authorized

CITY OF NEWPORT

By: Rick Ufford-Chase, Mayor, City of Newport

City Manager..... (802) 334-5136
City Clerk/Treasurer 334-2112
Public Works/Parks 334-2124
Zoning Adm./Assessor 334-6992
Recreation 334-6345
Fax..... 334-5632



City of Newport
222 Main Street
Newport, Vermont 05855
www.newportvermont.org

The Charter Task Force is pleased to share the working draft that has been used throughout the review and update of the current City Charter.

Please note that this document is a **draft** and will be revised as needed following public input at the public hearings (to be scheduled).

We sincerely appreciate the thoughtful input provided by residents who have attended our meetings, and we encourage continued participation at the public hearings.

Residents who are unable to attend the public hearings may share their feedback with Task Force Co-Chairs **Sharon Pare** (sharon.pare@newportvermont.org) or **Charlie Pronto** (charliepronto@rocketmail.com).

Recordings of Charter Task Force meetings are available on the NEK-TV YouTube channel for anyone who would like to follow the discussion and progress. The public hearings will also be available.

We hope the residents of Newport will participate in this important process as we work together to shape the future governance of our city.