

**CITY OF BERLIN**  
New Hampshire

**Minutes of Council Work Session of 3/27/2023**  
**City Council Chambers**  
**6:30 pm**

**Members:**

Mayor Grenier  
Councilor Robert Theberge  
Councilor Morgan  
Councilor Higbee  
Councilor Eastman  
Councilor Morency  
Councilor Berthiaume  
Councilor Roland Theberge

**City Staff:**

Phillip Warren, Jr., City Manager  
Pamela Laflamme, Director of Strategic Initiatives  
Holly Larsen, Finance Director/Tax Collector  
Duane Johnson, Recreation Director  
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk

**Public:** Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun  
Rep. Corinne Cascadden

At 6:35 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting.

**1. Public Works Division**

**a. Sewer User**

City Manager Warren advised that the increases in the budget are due to collective bargaining agreements or increases in the cost of doing business. Debt service has increased due to the state revolving fund loan payment. The budget has a 4.69% increase over last year. There are no new programs or services. Capital Improvement projects are included for good stewardship, as the infrastructure requires constant maintenance. The system includes the pump stations, collection system, and the sewer plant. The goal is to treat 100% of the sewage, however they are allowed to open the gate for overflow, which goes directly into the river, in an emergency. They only had to do that twice this year. Mr. Warren noted that the superintendent, Jon Goodreau, does a wonderful job. Mr. Warren advised that revenues are in the budget as a placeholder, and they are hoping to set the sewer rate in April so that bills can be sent out.

Councilor Eastman asked if the usage was up or down and Mr. Warren advised it is mostly constant. Mr. Warren stated that there are seasonal increases, which is why they have been

working on I&I projects to reduce the clear water getting into the system. Public Works also has a new camera for sewer lines and staff have been trained on the use of this and the grading system. Councilor Roland Theberge asked about the chemicals used for treatment, and was advised the amounts vary based on the strength and composition of the effluent. Councilor Roland Theberge asked about the PH, and was advised they are within the parameters of their permit.

Mayor Grenier noted that the chemicals used to treat water and wastewater have skyrocketed in price, and that they will need to prepare for new EPA standards for PFAS.

City Manager Warren recommended to the Council that when setting the sewer rates they should not use all of the unexpended fund balance to stabilize the rate. Councilor Roland Theberge asked what the rate was last year, and Pamela Laflamme advised it was \$8.83.

#### b. Recreation

Duane Johnson provided a handout for the Council listing some of the projects and activities they held over the last year at the Recreation Department. Mr. Johnson advised that the company that refinished the floor just came back to clean it and add 2 more coats of varnish. Mr. Johnson advised that the bathrooms in the building need work, and provided pictures for the Council of the bathrooms, the new floor, and the organizing that has been done in the storage areas.

Mayor Grenier noted that the increase in the budget is about \$13,000, and stated that this is the best spent money in the community. The Council commended Mr. Johnson on the work he has done on the building, on programs, and for providing a safe place for kids to go after school. Councilor Eastman suggested increasing publicity and Mr. Johnson advised that he is working on the website. Councilor Berthiaume suggested sending information on programs to the Chamber of Commerce as the City is a member and they will share information on their Facebook page as well. Councilor Morency applauded Mr. Johnson's efforts to teach the older kids to mentor the younger ones.

#### c. Street Lighting

City Manager Warren advised the budget is the same as last year, \$95,500.

Mayor Grenier asked about traffic lights and if they are outdated. Mr. Warren stated that they are older, but still maintainable. Mr. Warren advised upgrading the control box would be a minimum of \$275,000. The Cleveland Bridge lights were a mechanical failure and will be fixed with loops. Mayor Grenier noted that Glen Avenue is on the NHDOT 10-year plan, and Pamela Laflamme advised it is, but only to the Cleveland Bridge intersection and the lights were not included.

#### d. Public Works Department

City Manager Warren advised that increases in the budget are due to the collective bargaining agreement. There are also two major things, one was to add money to paving based on the road

management program, and the other an increase in salt based on the new snow policy. Councilor Roland Theberge stated that this seems to be a more effective way to treat the roads, and it also makes for less sand to sweep up in the spring. Mayor Grenier noted that he was going to ask about help from the Federal Prison to remove weeds from the sides of the roads this summer. The State Prison has not been able to provide a work crew due to staffing issues.

City Manager Warren advised that the only Capital Improvement items included in the Public Works budget are for things they have already acquired, including the loader lease payments and segregated funds for a truck that was already ordered. Mr. Warren has curtailed money for drain line replacement and wall repairs, as he is sensitive to increases in the tax rate and would like to take time to see what needs to be done.

Councilor Roland Theberge asked about the salt shed, and Mr. Warren advised it will be ordered as soon as the funds are accepted. The Public Works staff are preparing the area, and the old shed will be used for cold storage.

City Manager Warren advised that the Parks budget is the same, with no new services. They will be fully staffed shortly, as they are in the process of interviewing for the open position. Councilor Morency asked if the additional position requested by the Main Street Program was included in the budget and was advised that it is.

#### e. Solid Waste

City Manager Warren advised that there is a slight decrease in the budget, as the new finance software provides the actual figures for staffing. Mr. Warren advised that he will be gathering data on how much is being brought to the recycling facility to see how the recycling program may need to change, as participation seems to have greatly decreased. Recycling here is not single stream, but separated out. Pamela Laflamme noted that one of the Public Works employees has been very enthusiastic about getting residents to recycle. Mayor Grenier noted that AVRRDD costs are down.

Mayor Grenier noted that his goal this summer is to enforce the number of unregistered motor vehicles on properties in the City.

#### 2. Assistant Fire Chief Position

City Manager Warren advised that Chief Watkins will be filling the role of doing inspections in the short-term while they re-work the Assistant Fire Chief job description. The compensation for the extra work will be \$15,000 annually, while acting as the assistant chief. Mr. Warren advised it will be a minimum of 6 months. Councilor Roland Theberge asked if they will fill the position in-house, and noted that Asst Chief Donovan and Michel Salek made a great team for code enforcement. Councilor Berthiaume noted that it has not been beneficial for firefighters in-house to take the position due to the pay structure, and agreed it would be good to look at it. Councilor Morency shared concerns that doing the additional work plus his own may get to be too much for Chief Watkins. Councilor Roland Theberge noted that code enforcement is swamped.

Rep. Corinne Cascadden updated the Council on items in the legislature. Rep. Cascadden advised that a lot of bills were tabled. The bill concerning Education Freedom Accounts was tabled and is now in the Finance. Governor Sununu advised that there will be an increase in adequacy aid in the budget, however there will be a decrease in stabilization. Rep. Cascadden advised that she, Rep. Noel, and Rep. Kelley are working on a press release for the newspaper to let citizens know what they have been working on. Rep. Cascadden noted that while in Concord, she was proud to see two former Berlin graduates working there, one in the State House and one for the Secretary of State. Mayor Grenier asked if they would be legislating the education bills absent of court decisions. Rep. Cascadden advised that there have been motions filed in the ConVal case, and that the Rand case will be heard in September, so there will be no final judgement before the budget passes. Rep. Cascadden stated that it is hard to say what will be done for needy communities.

There was no other business.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Berthiaume and seconded by Councilor Morgan. So moved, the motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Shelli Fortin