

CITY OF BERLIN

New Hampshire

Minutes of Council Budget Session of 4/10/2023

City Council Chambers

6:30 pm

Members:

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

Police Commissioners:

Gerard Nault
Pierre Morin

City Staff:

Phillip Warren, Jr, City Manager
James Watkins, Fire Chief
Justin Jacques, Fire Department
Daniel Buteau, Police Chief
Nathan Roy, Deputy Police Chief
Cpl. Noah Dumas
Kimberly Bijeau, PD Administrative Assistant
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk
Holly Larsen, Finance Director

Public:

Rep. Corinne Cascadden
Lori Korzen
Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting. Mayor Grenier thanked long-time Police Commissioner Gerard Nault for his service, along with Commissioner Pierre Morin.

1. Safety Division

a. Police

Chief Daniel Buteau presented the proposed Police Department budget. Chief Buteau advised there are increases due to the cost of living and inflation. They are maintaining the current level

of service in this budget, and applying for grants to help with enforcement efforts and equipment needs. The operating budget is up 7.3% over last year, and includes salary increases per the contract.

The Council asked about the not-to-exceed rates for insurance, which were 17.9% non-union and 14.7% for union, and Holly Larsen advised that these did not decrease. Councilor Berthiaume asked about the Captain position, and Chief Buteau advised it was not funded. Councilor Robert Theberge asked about drills in the schools, and Chief Buteau advised they are working with the schools on active shooter policies. Councilor Robert Theberge also asked about flashing signs for the crossing guards and Deputy Chief Roy advised he would look into that. Councilor Morency advised that these were purchased for the crossing guards several years ago, but they were defective and broke.

Councilor Morency asked Chief Buteau to elaborate on the increase in training and Chief Buteau explained that there has been an increase in the amount of training required. What started as eight hours per year is now up to 24 hours. This includes ethics training, de-escalation, bias, PTSD, firearms, CPR, medical training, defensive tactics, fitness, and intoxilyzer certification. This does not include specialized training that is also needed, such as DRE, which Cpl. Dumas has attended. Councilor Roland Theberge asked about the ERT team and Chief Buteau advised that they are available to respond state-wide if needed to assist.

Councilor Robert Theberge asked about body cameras, and Chief Buteau advised all patrol officers are equipped with cameras. Chief Buteau advised this will be a growing expense to upgrade equipment and for storage services. Councilor Robert Theberge also asked about vehicles, and Chief Buteau advised that overall they are in good condition. They are planning to replace two again this year and there has been a significant increase in the cost of the vehicles and setup. Deputy Chief Roy advised that the Tahoe is now less expensive than the Explorers, however they were able to find one 2022 Explorer to purchase. Chief Buteau advised he will reach out to other departments to see who could use the vehicles they are replacing. Councilor Roland Theberge asked about the brake issues that the Explorers had, and Chief Buteau advised this has been cleared up.

Chief Buteau advised that the Animal Control expenses are for transportation to the Conway Humane Society, as they are unable to keep them at the Police Department for more than a short time. They do have a contract with the Conway Humane Society.

Mayor Grenier asked about the Capital Improvement items, and noted that they may need more than the \$14,000 budgeted for the body cameras and the amount may need to be adjusted. Deputy Chief Roy advised they should get pricing this week or next, and are hoping to get trade-in value for the equipment they are trading in. Mayor Grenier asked about the building repairs, and Chief Buteau advised they expanded the conference room upstairs for training last year, and are hoping to work on the downstairs floor and walls this year.

Mayor Grenier asked about the turnover rate, and Chief Buteau advised two more officers will be retiring this year and they have been working on hiring. Deputy Chief Buteau advised that he has tested candidates from PA, MA, NY, ME, and as far away as Texas. It was noted that NHSP and the prisons are also in the same boat, and they are all pulling from the same pool of candidates. They are able to have internships again, after stopping this program during Covid. Mayor Grenier noted his support for law enforcement and stated that the criticism locally, statewide, and nationally is unjust.

Councilor Robert Theberge asked about the opioid problem and Chief Buteau advised they are still facing issues on that front. Chief Buteau noted the need for prevention, treatment, and recovery services and advised that Councilor Morency has been working on the issue of recovery services with money from the opioid settlement. Councilor Morency advised that the group working on it will meet a couple more times before bringing recommendations to the Council.

Mayor Grenier thanked the Chief and the members of his department for the work they do and stated that we need a good, solid Police Department.

b. Fire

Chief James Watkins advised the budget is not up too much this year, and includes contractual changes. They are budgeting to replace three sets fire gear and SCBA cylinders each year, so that they do not have to replace all of them at once. This will also allow for the firefighters to have a backup set of gear when needed.

The Council asked about the testing of the SCBA cylinders and Chief Watkins advised that a company comes with a mobile unit to test them. Councilor Roland Theberge asked about the hazardous chemicals the firefighters come in contact with and Chief Watkins advised they are required to wash all the gear after responding to a call, and use the backup gear until it is ready to be worn again. Councilor Robert Theberge asked about the PFAS in the fabric and how this is being addressed, and Chief Watkins advised that he is waiting on the Federal government to address this issue.

Councilor Morency asked about the training budget and Chief Watkins stated that it is not where he would like to see it, however they have not spent it all in the last three years. Chief Watkins advised that he is working a training program, and will adjust the budget next year.

Mayor Grenier asked if they were on track for the delivery of the new fire trucks, and Chief Watkins advised it would be about 2 ½ years, but they have been ordered. Mayor Grenier commended Chief Watkins for involving the firefighters in the process of selecting the vehicles and the equipment to be used.

Councilor Roland Theberge asked about the EMS incentive which was not budgeted. Chief Watkins advised this was not included in the collective bargaining agreement. Mayor Grenier advised that the Council voted to go with a private company for EMS services after the study

that was done. City Manager Warren advised that they are analyzing this and that when the EMS contract comes up for renewal they can discuss whether to renew or to provide the services in-house. City Manager Warren advised that there were two studies done, and that the cost of the contract is a good reason to revisit the discussion as the cost is going up and we are assisting them with dispatch and record keeping. Councilor Robert Theberge noted that Milan is potentially interested in working with Berlin for EMS services.

Councilor Morency asked about building inspections and Chief Watkins advised they are busy. Chief Watkins noted that they have good collaboration between the Fire Department and Code Enforcement, but that it is definitely a full-time job, which he will cover for the short-term. Chief Watkins advised they did set up a system to track when inspections are due, but time is needed for follow-up to be sure what needs to be done is getting done.

c. Ambulance

City Manager Warren advised that the budget is straightforward, as it is a contracted amount. The contract is in effect for another two years.

Mayor Grenier invited Rep. Corinne Cascadden to update the Council on legislation. Rep. Cascadden advised that there was an amendment on the floor to increase base adequacy aid and disparity aid, which will give Berlin an additional \$964,000 if it passes. Rep. Cascadden also advised that constraints were added to the Education Freedom Bill. Accidental death benefits were increased from 50% to 100% for police and fire. The Family Resource Center will get additional funds, with Medicaid expansion, as will the nursing homes. State employees will receive at least a 10% increase in pay. Money was added for affordable housing, and the bill to legalize cannabis passed the House, with money in that bill earmarked for education and recovery. Rep. Cascadden advised that there are two bills to increase eligibility for free and reduced lunches, and the vote concerning the Burgess Biomass plant will be tomorrow.

A motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Remillard and seconded by Councilor Morgan. So moved, the motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:49 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Shelli Fortin, City Clerk