

CITY OF BERLIN

New Hampshire

Minutes of Council School Budget Session of 3/10/2022

City Hall Auditorium

6:30 pm

Members:

Mayor Grenier
Councilor Morency
Councilor Remillard
Councilor Higbee
Councilor Eastman
Councilor Morgan
Councilor Roland Theberge

City Staff:

Pamela Laflamme, Interim City Manager
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk

School Board, Administration and Staff:

Superintendent Julie King
Administrator Marion Moore
School Board Member Matt Buteau
School Board Member Ann Nolin
School Board Member Jeanne Charest
School Board Member Nathan Morin
School Board Member Eamon Kelley
BMHS Principal, Michael Kelley
Bryan Lamirande, Buildings and Ground Coordinator

William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun

Other members of the public

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting.

Mayor Grenier invited School Board Chair Ann Nolin and Superintendent King to present the FY23 Berlin Public School proposed budget.

Superintendent King advised that enrollment continues with a downward trend, and pointed out their goals, stating that they work hard with the money they are given to provide an adequate education to every child. Ms. King stated that she realized test scores have not been good, but that is just one measurement and there are other measures in place, such as the NWEA which they have been tracking for many years. They use this data to make decisions as to what to do

within the school system. Ms. King noted that if you look around the community, there are many people in leadership positions who graduated from the Berlin school system. There are also many who leave the community and become successful. Ms. King noted the hockey team is going to the state championship again this year, which brings pride to the city. Ms. King stated that the staff and administration work hard, and there is no place like Berlin, in which you find school spirit, kindness, tolerance, and acceptance.

Ms. King reviewed the 2023 proposed School Budget, advising that this is a starting point. Their expenditures are up \$869,543, and revenues have declined in the amount of \$392,917, which increases the budget by \$1.26 million this year. Ms. King advised there are many unknowns with legislative bills that will affect the school. Ms. King advised much of the money given back to the city last year was from hiring differences. Ms. King noted that they have recently come to an agreement with the last union, and will be bringing this to Council soon. They have used the not to exceed rate for health insurance, as they do not have the final figures yet. Ms. King noted that the largest increase in the budget is in salaries and benefits, and that they have learned through the pandemic that people are important in education, as they have seen the turmoil created both socially and emotionally by isolation. Some students have struggled academically, and did not show growth from fall to fall, as remote learning is difficult for some students to remain engaged, as it takes discipline.

Mayor Grenier noted that education begins at home, and the school cannot be blamed for everything. Ms. King agreed, however stated that there are some students who need extra encouragement and an extra push to get motivated, which the school can provide when they are present.

Ms. King advised that for Capital Improvements, they have a plan for upgrades with Federal funds, however the cost may exceed what is available. They intend to apply for building aid, and the application is due by July 1. Building aid would be a 60/40 split, with 60% covered by state funds. Mayor Grenier noted that the 60% is only for principal, not interest. Ms. King noted that they are still in the process of assessing the buildings, and are still trying to form a building committee. Mayor Grenier asked about the condition of the buses, and Ms. King advised they are waiting on the state to approve ordering one with Federal funds, as they were heavily used during the pandemic for meal deliveries to students, and for extra runs when the students returned due to the need for social distancing. The other buses will be replaced in the normal rotation. The bus they will be replacing is bus #9. Mayor Grenier asked about the lead time for ordering, and was advised it is about 3 months.

Ms. King noted the reasons for increases in salaries, including reorganization due to an increase in registrations over the summer, the need for more counselors in the elementary school, the need for extra days before school starts and after it ends, and extra supervisory duties. Ms. King discussed the high percentage of special education needs in the district, and the need to keep office management staff to help with organization. There were also two teaching positions which were grant funded that are now included in the budget.

Ms. King stated that energy costs under Supplies and Materials have increased by \$44,000, but does not include the rebate coming to the school.

In reviewing revenues, Ms. King noted that the State Adequacy Aid is an estimate, as it will not be finalized until October 1, as is the same with tuition. Ms. King advised Medicaid revenues are fluid, as they are never sure what will get approved after billing. Special Education placement costs are high, as the needs of some students cannot be met in the district. Some placements are also court ordered. A summary of projected placements was included with the budget, along with the adequacy formula to see how Berlin compares to other districts. Mayor Grenier asked if the \$1,009.047 is the amount we can expect for placements and Ms. King advised it is, as they do a lot in-house to avoid placements if possible. Ms. King noted that they have been working with GSABA to provide services in the school.

Mayor Grenier stated that the school does a fantastic job for the community and do as much as they can to help students become successful.

Councilor Remillard asked how common it is for a student to come back to the district after a placement and Ms. King advised they always try to have a plan to transition them back. Ms. King noted that they have a contract with ELC and they work with students who are transitioning back to the school.

Councilor Morency asked if the cost for the placement is per year and Ms. King advised it is.

Marion Moore advised that the current budget does not reflect the increased cost of fuel that we may be faced with. Mayor Grenier stated that we will all grapple with that, but noted that the savings in energy costs with having one less building, along with the energy upgrades they have done, will help save from what it was 10 years ago. Ms. King noted that they had to put new filters in the HVAC system due to Covid, which require more energy consumption. Mayor Grenier asked if they will be able to cut back on this in warmer weather, and Ms. King advised she will check with Bryan Lamirande on this. Ms. King stated they are still trying to have the HVAC system upgraded, and the filtration is making up for deficits in other areas.

Ms. King and Mayor Grenier noted that our students and teams are a source of pride for our community.

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Shelli Fortin