

CITY OF BERLIN

New Hampshire

Minutes of Council School Budget Session of 3/24/2021

6:30 pm

Via Zoom

Members:

Mayor Grenier
Councilor Theberge
Councilor Berthiaume
Councilor Remillard
Councilor Morgan
Councilor Higbee
Councilor Eastman
Councilor Otis (until 7:05 pm)

Police Commissioners:

Gerry Nault

City Staff:

James Watkins, Fire Chief
Peter Donovan, Assistant Fire Chief
Peter Morency, Police Chief
Dan Buteau, Assistant Police Chief
Kimberly Bijeau, PD Administrative Assistant
Jenn Cloutier, Police Department Dispatch Supervisor
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk
James Wheeler, City Manager
Holly Larsen, Finance Director

Public:

Chris Boldt, City Attorney

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting. Due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04 this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to the meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, this is to confirm that we are:

- a) *Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means;*

We are utilizing the Zoom platform for this electronic meeting. All members of the Council have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through the Zoom platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone # 1-646-558-8656, meeting ID 844 1941 6633; Passcode 877841, or by clicking on the City Council agenda on the City's website, www.berlinnh.gov.

b) Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting:

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom or telephonically. Instructions have been provided on the City of Berlin's website of the Council at City Council-agendas

c) Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access:

If anybody has a problem, please call Pam Laflamme at 603-752-8587 or e-mail at: plaflamme@berlinnh.gov

d) Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting.

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, we will adjourn the meeting and have it rescheduled at that time.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote. By roll call, each member is to state their presence, and whether there is anyone in the room during this meeting, which is required under the Right to Know law.

Mayor Grenier advised he would like to change the order of business in the Work Session and move item number 2, BTLA Decision, to be discussed first.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee to move the BTLA Decision to the first item on the agenda. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote. Higbee- yes, Theberge – yes, Remillard – yes, Otis – yes, Morgan – yes, Eastman – yes, Grenier – yes

BTLA Decision

Mayor Grenier advised that he asked for and received resignations from all three members of the Board of Assessors, which were effective yesterday, March 23, 2021. The City will advertise for new members. Mayor Grenier advised he has also asked City Manager Wheeler to work on compatibility of offices with the City Attorney. Mayor Grenier advised that the non-compatibility of offices should extend to the Board of Assessors as well. Mayor Grenier advised it was difficult to ask these citizens to step aside, but it was in the best interest of the City, as the

integrity of City government needs to remain high. Mayor Grenier thanked the BOA members, as it is a difficult job, and they spent numerous hours serving.

City Manager Wheeler read parts of the BTLA decision and also advised that the Council will consider additional policies beyond what is recommended by the BTLA. The first remedy is that the members and one family member will have to pay back the amount that was abated in 2018 and 2019 within 60 days and that amount will include interest. Mr. Goddard will also have to pay back an additional amount for the higher percentage of completion for his property in 2019. They will also review the 35 properties that were decided without input from KRT, and they are also ordered to re-assess the Dean property. The BTLA also indicated that the docket will be closed when the 2020 tax year update is complete. The BTLA also noted that the Board had an obligation to increase their knowledge of assessing and appraisal standards. City Manager Wheeler advised this incident was unfortunate and it is understandable that public trust was eroded. City Manager Wheeler advised he will be working with the City Attorney to bring forth policies and recommendations, and they will also better define the role of the BOA and their relationship with the contracted assessor, along with establishing education requirements. City Manager Wheeler noted that during this process, the validity of the 2018 update was called into question, and wanted to make it clear that the process validated the 2018 update, and it was done appropriately. City Manager Wheeler advised that he believes the same will be true for the 2020 update.

Councilor Higbee moved to enter a non-meeting per RSA 91-A:2, I (c) Legal Consultation at 6:45 pm. The motion was seconded by Councilor Theberge. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote. Higbee- yes, Berthiaume – yes, Theberge – yes, Remillard – yes, Otis – yes, Morgan – yes, Eastman – yes, Grenier – yes

The regular order of business resumed at 6:54 pm.

Mayor Grenier invited Fire Chief James Watkins to present the Berlin Fire Department Fiscal Year 2021 Budget. Chief Watkins reviewed a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the roster, along with a SWOT analysis of the budget. Strengths include the personnel salaries, as this helps with retention. Weaknesses include the overtime and leave budget and vehicle repair. Opportunities include FEMA grants and Homeland Security grants. The SCBA's from the FEMA grant were delivered this week. Threats include aging equipment. There was an increase of 1% per the contract for the Fire Chief's salary. There were no changes in other salaries, however due to time of service, all firefighters will be class 1 in this budget. Chief Watkins did add money for the Emergency Management Director position, which has not been negotiated with the City Manager yet. The biggest increases to the budget include retirement and health insurance, vehicle repair, and building maintenance. There was a decrease in holidays, callback for alarms, worker's compensation, and social security. Overall the budget is up \$42,619.28, which is mostly contractual obligations or benefits.

Mayor Grenier asked about the grant applications for apparatus, and Chief Watkins advised that they should start awarding the grants in April.

Councilor Eastman noted the great job Chief Watkins has done getting grants. City Manager Wheeler advised that he was able to see the new SCBA equipment that was delivered to the Fire Department

yesterday. The total cost was \$167,000, of which the City's match was \$8,300. Chief Watkins advised it included 25 harnesses, 50 cylinders, and 25 masks, along with 10 additional face masks and a pack tracker.

Mayor Grenier advised just the NHRS increase is \$22,000, so essentially the budget is flat. Mayor Grenier thanked Chief Watkins for his work.

Councilor Theberge noted the professional work of the Fire Department at the accident yesterday.

The Council reviewed Capital Improvements. Chief Watkins advised most of the Capital Improvements have been carried over, and the one that should be looked at this year would be the ladder truck. Mayor Grenier asked about replacement of pagers and radios. Chief Watkins advised the radios were a lease-purchase, so this is a yearly fee. Chief Watkins advised they are deciding whether to do pagers or alerts through cell phones. Chief Watkins advised he is hoping for the replacement of Engine 1 with the FEMA grant.

Mayor Grenier invited Police Chief Peter Morency to review the Berlin Police Department budget.

Chief Morency advised that it has been a tough year for the Police Department, which will show in the budget. Chief Morency provided a review of the department's activity history over the last 15 years. Chief Morency also advised that they have had some changes in personnel.

Chief Morency advised that the Chief's line item has been adjusted to bring the cost back to filling the position for a similar size community. Chief Morency advised he does have a tentative agreement to continue his services until January, which may reduce this line item. Chief Morency advised they have re-filled the Captain's position and removed the Detective Lieutenant's position. Grade 4 patrol is bumping up to grade 3, which is an \$80,000 increase which is offset by a \$79,000 decrease. There is an increase for a stipend for training. Clothing allowance was up with the new hire this year. Training was listed at \$27,000, the new additional training they wanted to put in place would have been \$70,000, but they were able to successfully argue that this was a burden on communities, and it should be done in phases. Radio Repairs is for an upgrade to Windows 10 on the dispatch computers. Building Maintenance is for Covid related costs. Chief Morency noted overtime was overspent this year, but much of this was covered by Covid funds that came back to the City. Gas prices are anticipated to go up this year. Heating is a \$3,500 savings due to the new furnace that was installed. The budget has increased \$70,000 or 3.1%. Chief Morency advised that NHRS for police was a 5.45% increase and insurance is up 9%, so a large part of the increase is beyond their control. They are not asking for anything additional.

Councilor Eastman noted that the budget is annotated with justifications for the requests. Councilor Eastman stated that the police department has always had a responsible budget, and with the drug problems in the City, he could not justify any reduction in personnel. Chief Morency advised they have been successful getting a team up and running to combat the drug problem in Coos County.

A review of the capital budget began with Chief Morency advising that the majority of the money that was for the third floor renovation ended up being needed for a sewer problem. Jennifer Cloutier advised that the power supply connected to the radio equipment at the police department and at the Cates Hill tower are at the end of life and need to be replaced. The audio-visual system request is to put equipment in the interview room, and replacing a camera outside the police department that faces the building. A radar unit needs to be replaced, and they are hoping to replace two with a grant. Chief Morency advised they did not get vehicles on-time last year due to Covid, and also traveled less last year due to Covid, so they will only need one vehicle this year rather than two. However, they still need to set up two cruisers, at a cost of \$17,000 each. Therefore, they are looking to budget one car, plus two set-ups. A paved

parking area has been included for years, but the Mayor noted that we need to look at priorities. Communications equipment includes a surge protector between the service to the building and the building itself, to protect the radio equipment and other electronics. It also includes chargers for the radios, and networking equipment. Chief Morency advised the Cates Hill tower is aging, and they are looking to work with a partner to put up a new one. The City's cost would be \$25,000 per year for a lease to own agreement. Chief Morency advised he did look at a grant opportunity, but the City would need to own the land, which they do not. The tower includes equipment for BPD, BEMS, AVH, Milan, BFD, and BWW. Chief Morency advised they have two cruiser radios that need to be replaced. They would like to fund the second half of what is needed for winter jackets, along with two laptops for the cruisers, which are \$5,000 each. Body cameras is for the continuation of the contract with that company. The State may have funding available for body cameras or car cameras. Mayor Grenier asked about policies concerning body cameras, and Chief Morency advised there are regulations for when they are on or not. Building Maintenance is in the budget for \$20,000. They have already done windows, furnace, and the sewer line.

Councilor Remillard asked how many body cameras they currently have. Deputy Chief Buteau advised they have around 14. Councilor Remillard asked how many cruisers they have. Deputy Chief Buteau advised they have 5 marked cruisers. Chief Morency advised all uniformed officers wear body cameras.

Mayor Grenier asked about Police Standards and Training. Chief Morency advised classes were done remotely over the last year, however the current academy is about half remote and half in-person. A lot of things, such as driving and shooting, need to be done in a professional setting. Mayor Grenier noted that the Police Department does a fantastic job hiring good people.

Commissioner Nault noted that it was his 12th budget season, and stated he respected the challenges that the City faces. Commissioner Nault stated that police are being more scrutinized and underappreciated and recruiting is becoming more difficult. Commissioner Nault commended the personnel of the Police Department for their professional work.

A motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Remillard and seconded by Councilor Morgan. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote. Higbee- yes, Berthiaume – yes, Theberge – yes, Remillard – yes, Morgan – yes, Eastman – yes, Grenier – yes

Adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Shelli Fortin, City Clerk