

CITY OF BERLIN
New Hampshire

Minutes of Council Budget Session of 3/23/2022
6:30 pm

Members:

Mayor Grenier
Councilor Remillard
Councilor Higbee
Councilor Morency
Councilor Roland Theberge
Councilor Berthiaume

City Staff:

Pamela Laflamme, Interim City Manager
Holly Larsen, Finance Director/Tax Collector
Angela Martin-Giroux, Health and Welfare Director
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk

Other Public:

Barbara Patry, AV Home Care Services
Paula Kinney, Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce
Jeanne Robillard, Tri-County CAP
Patti Stolte, Family Resource Center
Tom McCue, Main Street Program
Ralph Collins
William Carroll, Berlin Sun

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting. Mayor Grenier welcomed those in attendance who are representing the outside agencies that are contributing to our community.

Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme spoke concerning the City's membership with NHMA. Ms. Laflamme advised that the dues are based on population and equalized valuation. NHMA provides training, assistance with legal questions, and data when needed. NHMA also does a great job representing the communities who are members with concerns about legislation.

Interim City Manager Laflamme advised the City's relationship with North Country Council has been stronger over the last 2-3 years. Ms. Laflamme advised that they have done a lot of work on broadband and transportation and have helped with the Northwoods Learning Center CDBG planning grant. Ms. Laflamme advised that North Country Council works hard for the whole region, and Mayor Grenier added that they are the regional planning district through which any state project for infrastructure gets funneled. North Country Council has also been much more involved with the Northern Border Regional Commission grants.

Mayor Grenier invited Paula Kinney to speak on behalf of the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Kinney advised that the Chamber of Commerce supports businesses in Berlin and surrounding towns and helps to attract visitors to the area. Ms. Kinney presented two requests, one for \$1,500 for support of marketing efforts, which is used to double their money with a JPP grant for a professional marketing plan, and \$3,000 for the ATV Festival, which will be renamed Journey to Jericho and held August 5-6, 2022. Ms. Kinney and Councilor Berthiaume advised that planning is underway for the festival, and businesses are aware of the dates and help with donations as needed. The City also pays dues to be a member of the Chamber of Commerce. Councilor Remillard asked about the \$1,500 for marketing, and Ms. Kinney advised that last year they were able to get at total of \$16,000 with the grant, and prior to Covid it was even more.

Barbara Patry spoke on behalf of AV Home Care Services. Ms. Patry advised that they provide service to the elderly and chronically ill, including running errands and homemaking services, in the hope of keeping seniors and the disabled in their homes instead of having to go into a nursing home. Ms. Patry noted that they serve 180 clients in Berlin, making over 100 visits per week. They also provide services in Lancaster, Groveton, Gorham, and Colebrook, and request funds from municipalities to assist those clients who are unable to pay for services. Mayor Grenier advised that these services are needed now more than ever, with the shortage of staff at nursing homes. Councilor Remillard asked about the number of people they serve, and Ms. Patry advised the total number is 265. AV Home Care also employs 50 staff members.

Jeanne Robillard, was invited to speak on behalf of Tri-County Community Action Program. Ms. Robillard advised that they like to say that everyone knows someone who receives services from Tri-County CAP programs. The programs offered are energy assistance for heating and electric, the weatherization program, the homeless program, Tyler Blaine House, guardianship, transportation, Head Start, RSVP, Senior Meals, ServiceLink, USDA commodity foods distribution, and the Tamworth Dental Center. Ms. Robillard advised that municipal funding is important to them as a match for federal and state grants. Ms. Robillard advised that CAP served 2,348 Berlin residents through their programs this past year, providing \$2,933,786 worth of services. They are also launching a new program, T-CAP Connect, and will have a mobile unit equipped with satellite and internet capability which will go to those who are unable to travel for services. Ms. Robillard advised that the formula they use to request funds is on a per capita basis, \$2.50 per resident, for each community they serve. Mayor Grenier also noted that CAP provides transportation for veterans to appointments. Councilor Remillard asked about the program over and above fuel assistance for those renting. Ms. Robillard advised that it is the NH Emergency Rental Assistance Program with GOFERR funds, which provides housing stability and case management, hoping to assist families with maintaining permanent housing. Angela Martin-Giroux stated that she works with CAP helping those who are waiting for HUD or other programs to kick-in. Ms. Robillard advised they also have another new program which will help with water and sewer payments for low-income clients. Councilor Morency asked if there was a program to assist homeowners with taxes and Ms. Robillard advised it is through NHHFA. Mayor Grenier noted how valuable the Servicelink resource is for those retiring to assist with changing to Medicare and other insurance options. Ms. Robillard advised Servicelink provided services to 1,026 clients last year, and provided an updated list to the Council of the number of clients they serve with their programs.

Tom McCue spoke on behalf of the Berlin Main Street Program, which is a non-profit agency that provides a voice for downtown businesses, which are the heart of our City. Mr. McCue advised they work with Northern Human Services to keep Bickford Place clean, and pay for the music that is piped in. They also work with NHS to keep the flower pots watered. They plan the annual Day of Caring, at which volunteers help clean up areas of the City. They are working on a project to help better coordinate communication between the local businesses and the City authorities. Mr. McCue advised that a problem they face is that a lot of the buildings on Main Street are older, but the building codes are modern. Mayor Grenier suggested the Main Street Program also work with BIDPA, who may assist in promoting the downtown area. It was also noted that a chapter of SCORE would be useful in assisting the businesses.

Patti Stolte spoke on behalf of the Family Resource Center. Linda Lamirande was also in attendance from the Center. Ms. Stolte advised the FRC was started in 1997, and now has five centers in Colebrook, Lancaster, Littleton, Berlin, and Gorham. Ms. Stolte noted that community support of the program is important to federal and state grants. The FRC programs impacted 470 people last year, and provide programs to assist families. Councilor Remillard, who works for the FRC, advised that they also employ 28 staff here in the Berlin office. Councilor Remillard noted that their recovery program has also been very successful, helping parents to be well, which leads to healthy families, and strong communities. Mayor Grenier also noted the number of grandparents who are raising grandchildren, whom Ms. Stolte advised would receive services from the Kinship Navigation Program. Ms. Stolte stated that their programs have won statewide awards from DCYF, and are leading the way for services for families in the state. Councilor Morency stated that he sees the programs they offer to help pick up the pieces from the destruction of addiction, and asked if the FRC would want to be part of the discussion on the opioid litigation. Ms. Stolte stated that there is a group through CCFHS, which would be a good collaboration.

Interim City Manager Laflamme noted that North Country Home Health was not able to be in attendance. Ms. Laflamme will contact them to reschedule for April 4, 2022.

Patti Stolte spoke on behalf of CASA of NH, which provides a voice for children through the court process. Councilor Higbee noted that being a CASA volunteer is a huge responsibility, but rewarding. It was noted that there is a great need in Berlin for CASA workers, and Mayor Grenier thanked them for the work they do and stated that their presence in the community is needed.

Angela Martin-Giroux presented the 2023 budget for Health and Welfare to the Council. Ms. Martin-Giroux advised that the City is required by law to provide assistance to cover the basic needs that someone cannot provide for themselves. Ms. Martin-Giroux noted that they also need to be fiscally responsible for the taxpayers. Last year, the City provided \$27,639.56 in assistance, which was \$219.36 per family served. Ms. Martin-Giroux noted that many families took advantage of other programs available because of Covid, so that kept expenses down for the City. Ms. Martin-Giroux advised that she works with other agencies in the area to assist those needing help. They are currently facing a housing shortage, and shelters were not available due to Covid. Many hotels are full with long-term guests that were displaced due to the housing

issue. Ms. Martin-Giroux noted that the budget for 2023 is pretty much the same as last year for Health, Welfare, and Housing. Mayor Grenier asked about code violation complaints, and Ms. Martin-Giroux advised that she and Michel Salek handle these as they come in, but do not usually involve the police department unless there is a concern for safety. Mayor Grenier stated it is a priority of his to clean up the City this year, as many residents have unregistered motor vehicles in their yards and junk is being left on the sidewalks. Ms. Martin-Giroux advised that people should file a complaint when they see something, and that landlords are being encouraged to take responsibility for their tenants. Councilor Remillard noted that Ms. Martin-Giroux is doing a fabulous job for the amount of money spent.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Berthiaume and seconded by Councilor Higbee. So moved, the motion carried.

Meeting adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Shelli Fortin