

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Tuesday, January 16, 2024

Regular Meeting

Mayor Grenier called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 6:50 pm.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Robert Theberge, Higbee, Berthiaume, Morency, Valerino, Morgan, Eastman, and Roland Theberge.

Absent: None

Also present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Dir. Of Strat. Initiatives and Asst. City Mgr. Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Chief of Police Dan Buteau, Deputy Chief of Police Nathan Roy, Library Director Ann Brungot, Atty. Chris Boldt, Mark Evans, Elizabeth Holland, Sarah Boone, Bryan Lamirande, Mayor-Elect Robert Cone, Katherine Cone, Councilor-Elect Steven Korzen, Councilor-Elect Mia Qualls, School Board Chair Ann Nolin, Lori Korzen, Jamie Welch, Brenda Grenier, Eric Grenier, Christine Grenier, James Wheeler, Keith Roberge, Ben Belanger, Debra Ackerman, Micah Bachner, Amber Bachner, Sarah Mafera, Paul Robitaille, Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun and other members of the public.

c. Councilor Berthiaume moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to accept the minutes of the January 2, 2024 Regular Meeting and Work Session. So moved, the motion passed.

Disbursements:

Disbursement Summary Draft #1953 with a start date of 01/03/2024 and an end date of 01/16/2024 for a total cash disbursement of \$876,487.97. Councilor Roland Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to accept the disbursement summary and pay all bills as recommended by the Committee on Accounts/Claims. So moved, the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Council Committee Reports

There were no Council Committee Reports.

Councilor Higbee moved with a second by Councilor Morency, to recess the meeting to swear in new elected officials. So moved the motion carried.

INAUGURATION CEREMONY

Swearing in Ceremony by:	Shelli Fortin, City Clerk
Mayor – Elect	Robert Cone
Councilors – Elect	Peter Higbee
	Steven Korzen
	Denise Morgan
	Mia Qualls
	Brian Valerino
School Board Members	Ann Nolin
	Mark Evans
Library Trustees	Debra Jane Ackerman

Mayor Grenier thanked Councilor Roland Theberge and Councilor Mark Eastman for their service to the City and noted how fortunate the City is to have such excellent Council members. Mayor Grenier also thanked the Board of Education for their work, along with City Managers James Wheeler and Philip Warren, Jr., Pamela Laflamme, and Holly Larsen. Mayor Grenier noted the many projects and grants they have worked on and stated he is proud of their accomplishments. Mayor Grenier stated leaving was bittersweet, however he is happy to see a Berlin native taking over as Mayor. Mayor Grenier asked the citizens to give them some slack as it takes time to learn and make decisions. Mayor Grenier thanked his wife for her support over the years.

Councilor Morency presented plaques thanking Councilor Roland Theberge and Councilor Eastman for their service to the City.

Councilor Morency presented a plaque to Mayor Grenier thanking him for his 30 years of service to the City.

Ben Belanger read a letter from Senator Hassan to Mayor Grenier:

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your more than 30 years of service to the city of Berlin and Coos County. Your dedication to your community and its people has had a profound impact and have set Berlin up for decades of future success.

As City Councilor, County Commissioner, and Mayor you have exemplified the “all-hands-on-deck” ethos of Granite Staters, always willing to step up and work with others to solve problems and make a difference for your community. Following the collapse of the paper and pulp industry, you helped shepherd the city through a period of economic uncertainty, and have worked to reinvent Berlin as an outdoor recreation destination. You have also worked to attract new, innovative businesses to Berlin, which provide good jobs, contribute to the local economy, and ensure that everyone can participate in our shared prosperity. Your vision has also helped usher in a period of revitalization in Berlin, making investments to develop the Riverwalk for residents and visitors alike to experience the beauty of the Androscoggin River, and securing federal funding to help redevelop Main Street’s transportation infrastructure.

Day-in and day-out, you have been willing to take on steep challenges to cement Berlin’s place as a leading destination to live, work, visit, and raise a family. Thank you again for your friendship and your years of dedicated service -- and best of luck in your future endeavors.

With every good wish,

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

City Clerk Shelli Fortin read a letter from Representative Kuster to Mayor Grenier:

Dear Paul,

It is with great pride and admiration that I offer my thanks for your decades of remarkable service to the City of Berlin. As City Councilor, County Commissioner, and Mayor, you championed causes destined to help the community grow and thrive. As a fierce advocate for your hometown, your enthusiasm was infectious, and you never missed an opportunity to celebrate a local accomplishment.

As a result, Berlin has benefitted extensively from your commitment to this community and your vision for its future. Thanks to your leadership and stewardship, investments in infrastructure, recreation, and economic development have yielded tangible results that will help Berlin for years to come. Your passion and dedication have improved the lives of countless neighbors and families, and your legacy will continue to create a bright future for the City of Berlin and its residents.

On behalf of New Hampshire’s Second Congressional District, thank you again for all you have done for this community. I wish you the best in what comes next.

Best Wishes,

Ann McLane Kuster

Member of Congress

Mayor Robert Cone thanked the voters, the election workers, and his family. Mayor Cone stated that they will work together with mutual respect to find common ground. Mayor Cone stated that his platform was, “A Mayor for the People”, and that he will be available to hear questions and concerns. Mayor Cone stated that his priority is the city budget, and to be fiscally responsible. Mayor Cone stated that the school is also a priority for him. Many people base their decision to come to a community because of the school system and he is hopeful Berlin will become one of the better schools in the state. Mayor Cone stated that with good will, hard work, and commitment, Berlin’s best days are ahead.

City Clerk Shelli Fortin read a letter to the new Mayor and Council from Senator Shaheen:

Dear Friends,

I join you all in spirit at Berlin City Hall to celebrate the start of a new municipal term.

Serving in local government is an exercise of dutiful citizenship. In your roles as Mayor and Members of the City Council, you will be the voice of the people as the City continues to find innovative ways to attract local businesses and grow the local economy, celebrate and support the tireless efforts of the City’s police and firefighters, improve its infrastructure and so much more. It is a calling that I know you will answer with eagerness and optimism for what can be achieved when we work together for the common good.

As your United States Senator, I look forward to working with you in efforts to write the next great chapter in the long and proud history of the City of Berlin. Congratulations once again to Mayor Cone and all Councilors. I wish you all the best for the future.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Benjamin Belanger read a letter to the new Mayor and Council from Senator Hassan.

Dear Friends,

I regret that I can’t be with you today, but I join in celebrating the bright future of Berlin.

Congratulations to Mayor Robert Cone, and to all of the newly elected and re-elected City Councilors. I am grateful to you – and to all Granite Staters who have stepped up to serve – for your commitment to your fellow citizens. I look forward to the opportunity to work together.

To all of the outgoing public officials, thank you for your dedication to making progress for the people of Berlin. Whether you are transitioning into a new role or making room for a new class of leaders within your community, your service represents the very best of our state, where we roll up our sleeves and pitch in to help our neighbors.

Berlin has endured as a city for years because each successive generation has been committed to its success – and always believed that its best days are ahead. In good times and bad, this belief in your city’s promise has allowed for your city to flourish. I know that the elected leaders here today will continue to help Berlin realize its fullest potential. By working together, we can continue to build economic growth, prosperity, and opportunity for people in Berlin and throughout the Granite State.

With every good wish,

Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

City Clerk Shelli Fortin read a letter to the new Mayor and Council from Representative Kuster:

Dear Friends,

Mayor Cone, Councilors Steve Korzen and Mia Qualls, I write to congratulate you on your elections as new Mayor and members of the Berlin City Council.

Councilors Peter Higbee, Denise Morgan, and Brian Valerino, congratulations on your re-elections. Councilors Diana Berthiaume, Peter Morency, and Robert Theberge, thank you for your ongoing public service.

Your commitment to public service is inspiring, and your collective experience and insights will be invaluable to the future growth of Berlin and its residents.

Mayor Grenier, Councilor Mark Eastman and Councilor Roland (Lefty) Theberge, I offer my sincere thanks for your remarkable service to the City of Berlin. Your tireless advocacy for this community and its enduring legacy in the North Country are unparalleled. The City of Berlin has benefited extensively from your commitment to ensuring this community remains a great place to live, work, raise a family, and visit.

On behalf of New Hampshire's Second Congressional District, congratulations and thank you for your leadership. If there is anything my office can do to support you, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Best wishes,

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second from Councilor Berthiaume, to re-convene the meeting at 7:12 pm.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Resolution 2024-1 Approval of Hazard Mitigation Plan (1st read)

Councilor Berthiaume moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for February 5, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

2. Resolution 2024-2 DES GSCF Fire Truck Replacement (1st read)

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for February 5, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

3. Resolution 2024-3 DES GSCF Recycling Truck Replacement (1st read)

Councilor Berthiaume moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for February 5, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

4. City Manager's Report

1. Attached is the December 2023 Real Estate Transfer Report.
2. The traffic light has not been repaired as of yet, weather has created a delay. Anticipated time of replacement is unknown at this time.
3. The tennis court construction rehabilitation project quote is in -- \$304,761, which exceeds the funding by \$4761. The quote was signed and the excess funds can come from remaining ARPA funds.
4. The bid came back for the fiber optic interconnect project -- \$178,692 -- which exceeds the funding by \$8692. It can be handled in the aforementioned way.
5. We have had a few back to back snowstorms. Staff is working hard to remove the snow and complete snow cleanup. The frequency and type of storms received have added to the difficulty. The first priority will always be to open and clear streets, then sidewalks. Snow pickup occurs after the streets are clear and generally at night for the school and downtown areas.
6. Repairs still continue on storm damaged areas; final work will occur in the spring. Reimbursement requests have been submitted to HSEM and FEMA.

7. A tree came down on the power service to the City's public safety communications equipment located at Cates Hill, damaging a radio transmitter. We are using temporary loaner equipment at present. An insurance claim will be filed.

City Manager Warren advised that despite reports to the contrary on social media, they did not clear snow from the Riverwalk before the schools.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Robert Theberge, to accept the City Manager's Report and place it on file. So moved, the motion passed.

Councilor Higbee asked about the tennis courts and City Manager Warren advised that they will rehabilitate two courts and build a third one at Horne Field. The court on Glen Avenue will be repaired and lined by the Public Works Department as a pickleball court.

Robert Theberge asked City Manager Warren to discuss the salt shed. City Manager Warren advised that costs ran over by about \$80,000, and the Coos County Commissioners have approved adding \$80,000 to the project to cover the additional cost.

5. Mayor's Report

a. Letter of Resignation – G. Nault

Honorable Mayor and Council,

Please accept this letter as confirmation of my resignation from the Berlin Police Commission as of March 1, 2024.

My wife Karen and I have spent five of the last fourteen months in Florida, most recently from October through December 2023. We are currently planning arrangements to return as early as March 2024. Our appreciation for sunshine and warmer temperatures seems to be increasing with age!

I was appointed to the commission more than fifteen years ago by former Mayor Bertrand and council. Though I never expected to sit as a member of Berlin's police commission, I must state that it has been both enlightening and rewarding. I have learned a great deal about law enforcement and have gained a very deep appreciation and respect for those men and women who dedicate their lives to "protect and serve".

I wish to thank former and current fellow colleagues on the police commission, Steve Griffin, the late Tony Urban, Mark Tremblay, and Pierre Morin for their service and guidance along the way. I also wish to thank Mayor Grenier, and each of the members who have served on the council during my tenure, for the support provided to the police commission. Finally, I would like to congratulate incoming Mayor Cone on his recent victory and pass along my very best wishes as he and the new council lead the way to an even better Berlin!

Respectfully,

Gerard R. Nault

Councilor Berthiaume moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to accept the letter of resignation from Gerard Nault. So moved, the motion carried.

b. Letter of Intent for Police Commission – S. Mafera

Honorable Mayor and Council:

I am writing today to express interest in appointment to the Berlin Police Commission to fill the upcoming vacancy.

I have an interest in serving our community, to help strengthen it and uphold it. As a parent of young children in the public school system and a daughter with local parents who are retired, I believe that I have a perspective that is thoughtful and broad. I have a deep respect for the BPD, and recognize that this respect is also borne out of the hard work provided by our Commissioners.

I believe that with my background in federal regulation along with my personal disciplines on budgeting and finances I have much to offer our in serving the Commission.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns. I am available to meet in person or by phone at 603-767-7530.

Kind regards,

Sarah Mafera

Councilor Morency suggested that since this department carries one of the highest liabilities of the City, due diligence should be done to find the right candidate. Councilor Morency noted that Ms. Mafera may be the right choice, but it should be advertised before filling the vacancy. Councilor Valerino also noted that it is an important position and should be opened up to the public to apply. Councilor Berthiaume thanked Ms. Mafera for her interest, however agreed with Councilors Morency and Valerino. Councilor Theberge suggested that all persons being appointed to Boards should come before the Council. City Manager Warren suggested that they leave the position open for a couple of weeks and advertise that applications will be accepted during that time. Interviews could be done at the February 5, 2024 meeting.

Councilor Berthiaume moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to place Ms. Mafera's letter on file and to advertise the vacancy for the Police Commission. So moved, the motion carried.

6. Public Comments

Micah Bachner of 59 High Street shared the story of a Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach who worked hard to build the team, only to leave before their successful season. Mr. Bachner stated that outgoing Mayor Grenier should be thanked for all the work he has done to set up Berlin for success. Mayor Cone publicly thanked Mayor Grenier for all of his hard work.

Stuart Light of 213 High Street stated he was going to yell a little now, so he would not have to yell a lot later. Mr. Light referred to the Oaths of Office that the candidates took, noting their promises to uphold the Constitution of the State of NH. Mr. Light referenced Article 1, Article 3, Article 8, and Article 10 of the NH Constitution. Mr. Light noted that the government originates from the people and they are the servants and agents of the public, that power is derived from the people, that government should be open, accessible, accountable, and responsive and there should be a means for the public to have concerns heard and addressed. Mr. Light noted that the City Charter states that the Mayor is equal to the Council and they act together as one body. Mr. Light reminded the Council that they have the power to say no. Mr. Light noted that the public is watching and they are wary and distrustful, and asked the Mayor and Council to remember their place.

7. Council Comments

Robert Theberge suggested that nominations for boards, such as the Planning Board or Zoning Board, come from the Board Chairperson, with a letter written in support.

Non-Public Session

Councilor Berthiaume moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to enter non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) at 7:41 pm. So moved the motion carried by roll call vote. Valerino – yes, Morgan – yes, Qualls – yes, Korzen – yes, Theberge – yes, Morency – yes, Higbee – yes, Berthiaume – yes, Cone – yes

The Council moved to Council Chambers for the session.

A discussion was held on a City owned property. No votes or action was taken.

The Council returned to the auditorium.
Councilor Berthiaume left the meeting.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to leave non-public session at 8:16 pm. So moved the motion carried by roll call vote. Valerino – yes, Morgan – yes, Qualls – yes, Korzen – yes, Theberge – yes, Morency – yes, Higbee – yes, Cone – yes

8. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Higbee, seconded by Councilor Morency, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:17 pm. So moved, the motion carried.

A True Record, Attest:

Shellie Fortin
City Clerk

Note: Minutes are unofficial until they have been accepted by the Council by motion.