

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, December 18, 2023

Public Hearing

Mayor Grenier opened the Public Hearing at 7:22 pm for North Country Growers PILT Agreement.

Mayor Grenier noted that this is a public-private partnership with the City and will save the City money by not having to hire a special property appraiser to look at the building. North Country Growers will provide the City with jobs and tax revenue, and will connect to the City water and sewer systems.

Steven Korzen spoke in favor of the agreement. Mr. Korzen noted that he is excited to see what is happening, with not only the job creation and the revenue stream, but also food sustainability. Mr. Korzen stated that down the road this will be a benefit to everyone.

Mayor Grenier closed the Public Hearing at 7:25 pm.

Regular Meeting

Mayor Grenier called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:25 pm.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Roll Call

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

Absent: Councilors Berthiaume and Morgan

Also present: City Manager Phillip Warren, Jr, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Director of Special Initiatives Pamela Laflamme, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Mayor-Elect Robert Cone, Councilor-Elect Steven Korzen, Councilor-Elect Mia Qualls, Jamie Welch, Gina Welch, and Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun.

c. Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to accept the minutes of the December 4, 2023 Regular Meeting and Work Session. So moved, the motion passed.

Disbursements:

Disbursement Summary Draft #1951 with a start date of 12/04/2023 and an end date of 12/18/2023 for a total cash disbursement of \$3,694,811.94. Councilor Roland Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, 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.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Resolution 2023-42 Unanticipated Bridge Aid (1st read)

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for January 2, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

2. Resolution 2023-43 NHCT Library Technology Grant (1st read)

Councilor Roland Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Valerino, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for January 2, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

3. North Country Growers PILT Agreement

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second from Councilor Morency, to approve the negotiated PILT agreement between North Country Growers, LLC and the City of Berlin.

Councilor Higbee noted that North Country Growers first approached the City in 2015, and it sometimes takes time to get good things to happen.

So moved, the motion carried.

3a. Rite Aid Lot

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to authorize the City and BIDPA to acquire the property owned by Rite Aid for the amount authorized by BIDPA. So moved, the motion carried.

4. City Manager's Report

1. Attached is the November 2023 Real Estate Transfer Report.
2. Attached is the 2024 AVRRD budget, for your information.
3. Due to the heavy rain today, we had instances where the water overflowed from brooks and culverts. The problem is that when our stormwater collection system was designed and installed the definition of the maximum catastrophic storm (100-year storm) was much less than regular events. Efforts are being made to correct this – as you can imagine the issue is a costly, city wide one. We have applied to FEMA for mitigation funds when possible.
4. As a reminder, it is a violation of city ordinances to pump, discharge or otherwise direct water from private property to the road. We are finding instances where groundwater is discharging directly on city roads and where water is directed on to a driveway that discharges directly into the road. During freezing conditions these areas become a hazard to all very quickly.
5. As part of the Capital Plan applications were made to DES for grant funds to replace a recycling truck and Engine 4. We were notified last week that tentative approval has been granted. The benefit is that the fire engine will cost \$575,000, match will be \$115,000 and the recycling truck will cost \$212,890, match will be \$42,578. We will be replacing 2 critical assets.

City Manager Warren also updated the Council on flooding issues from today, including Alpha Street, Coos Street, Johnson Brook, and the Landry Farm. Mr. Warren advised they will begin cleaning up tomorrow, and will document the efforts, as they have received FEMA funds in the past and expect an emergency declaration for today's event. Mr. Warren noted that the City does not own the brooks or streams, and do the best they can with the streets and drainage system. Mr. Warren also reminded those present that the City does not maintain drainage on private property, however the Fire Department can assist with pumping out basements. Mr. Warren noted that everyone worked well together today.

City Manager Warren advised that the reminder about discharging water into the road from private property does not apply to today's storm.

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

5. Mayor's Report

a. Letter from Theodore Bosen re: Civics Education

Dear Councilors,

I am a 10-year resident of Berlin who retired here after a 40-year career as a Massachusetts lawyer. While there, I also taught paralegal courses as an adjunct instructor at the Community College level.

Since being in Berlin, I have engaged my fellow citizens on social media and other forums on issues of public concern. In the course of that, I have been alarmed at the lack of basic understanding among many citizens about how our American government is designed to function at all levels, Federal, State, and Municipal. Increasingly, people who have limited education in civics are entering the political arena in Berlin, both as campaigners and candidates, and actually spreading disinformation about how government works, mostly unchallenged.

In response to this phenomenon, as I find my efforts to educate these citizens on social media most overwhelming, I am requesting that this board rise to the occasion to provide a free public resource for all who choose to access it, providing facts about the structure and function of American Government, perhaps on a weekly basis, at City Hall. This can be done just as it is in most college courses, with a textbook on the subject and an attached lesson plan. It need not be re-invented. Any number of experienced civics educators could teach it, or some combination thereof, and I am convinced none would require compensation, as I know several who are equally disturbed by this growing deficiency in public citizenship. If you agree, I would be happy to be asked to teach it, either alone, or with other similarly experienced civics educators. I look forward to your response.

Respectfully,

Ted Bosen

Mayor Grenier noted that many people move to New England from other parts of the country and do not understand the tax structure here or municipal government. Mayor Grenier asked City Manager Warren to contact Mr. Bosen about his letter.

Mayor Grenier thanked the employees of the Public Works Department, Berlin Water Works, Berlin Fire Department, and Berlin Police Department for fighting today's storm.

Councilor Roland Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Valerino, to accept the Mayor's Report, including the letter from Mr. Bosen, and place it on file. So moved, the motion carried.

6. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

7. Council Comments

There were no Council comments.

8. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Higbee, seconded by Councilor Morency, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:49 pm. So moved, the motion carried.

A True Record, Attest:

Shelli Fortin
City Clerk

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