

## **CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, January 21, 2019**

Mayor Grenier called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:35 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

### **PUBLIC HEARING**

Resolution 2019-03 CDBG Economic Development AHEAD

(Informational packets available)

### **Mayor Grenier Opened the Public Hearing on Proposed CDBG Economic Development AHEAD at 7:38 pm.**

Pamela Laflamme advised that the Community Development Block Grant funds are available to municipalities through the NH Community Development Finance Authority. Up to \$500,000 annually is available on a competitive basis for public facility and housing projects, up to \$500,000 for economic development projects and up to \$500,000 for emergency activities. All projects must directly benefit low and moderate income persons. Up to \$12,000 per study is available for Planning Grants.

There is a proposed application to the Community Development Finance Authority for up to \$500,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds to be Sub-Granted to AHEAD and then loaned to an entity to be created/named for job creation/retention, up to 25 jobs available primarily to low and moderate income persons, at the proposed Wellness & Health Center, 121 Main Street.

This project conforms with Berlin's Housing and Community Development Plan's Goal of Continued Development of Medical Center and other Non-Profit Service Agencies – Assist Non-Profit services agencies in expansion, consolidation, and relocation efforts.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – Mayor Grenier asked if this is a loan that needs to be repaid and Pamela Laflamme advised it is a grant and will not need to be repaid.

### **Mayor Grenier Closed the Public Hearing at 7:38 pm.**

### **Mayor Grenier Opened the Public Hearing on the Residential Antidisplacement and Relocation Assistance Plan at 7:38 pm.**

Although this project does not involve any displacement or relocation of persons (or businesses), if the City were to undertake a CDBG project which involved displacement or relocation they would follow this plan. The plan outlines the measures they would take to find comparable, suitable housing for persons (or businesses) displaced or relocated.

PUBLIC COMMENT – There were no public comments.

### **Mayor Grenier Closed the Public Hearing on the Residential Antidisplacement and Relocation Assistance Plan at 7:38 pm.**

### **Mayor Grenier Opened the Public Hearing on the CDBG Elevator Feasibility Study at 7:38 pm.**

PUBLIC COMMENT – There were no public comments.

### **Mayor Grenier Closed the Public Hearing at 7:39 pm.**

### **Mayor Grenier Opened the Public Hearing on the CDBG Downtown Snowmelt Feasibility Study at 7:39 pm.**

PUBLIC COMMENT – There were no public comments.

## **Mayor Grenier Closed the Public Hearing at 7:40 pm.**

Councilor Remillard moved with a second from Councilor Otis to adopt the Antidisplacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Morgan Allain moved with a second from Councilor Otis to approve the submittal of the AHEAD CDBG application authorizing the City Manager to sign and submit the application, and upon approval of the CDBG application, authorizing the City Manager to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate the CDBG contract and any amendments thereto. So moved, the motion carried.

## **Regular Meeting**

### **a. Pledge of Allegiance**

### **b. Roll Call**

Present: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Otis, Morgan Allain, Remillard, Berthiaume, Rozek, and Theberge.

Absent: Councilors Gentili and Higbee

Also present: Jim Wheeler, Susan Tremblay, Pamela Laflamme, Shelli Fortin, Larry Berg, and Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun

c. Councilor Remillard moved with a second by Councilor Otis to accept the minutes of the January 7, 2019 Work Session and Regular Meeting, and the January 14, 2019 Work Session. So moved, the motion carried.

## **Disbursements:**

Disbursement Summary Draft #1830 start date 01/08/2019 end date 01/18/2019 for a total cash disbursement of \$1,327,263.55. Councilor Theberge moved with a second by Councilor Berthiaume to accept the disbursement summary and pay all bills as recommended by the Committee on Accounts/Claims. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second by Councilor Otis to add Proposed Tax Rate as 3A under New Business. There was no discussion. A roll call vote was taken. Councilor Rozek – Aye, Councilor Berthiaume- Aye, Councilor Theberge – Aye, Councilor Remillard – Aye, Councilor Otis – Aye, Councilor Morgan Allain – Aye, Mayor Grenier – Aye. The motion passed.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS** – There were none.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

1. Council Committee Reports – Councilor Rozek advised the Council that the Traffic Safety Committee met, but were not able to finish the agenda. The committee spent the majority of the time discussing the issue with vehicles turning around in Mrs. Gemmitti's driveway at the end of Willard Street due to the one-way. There are not any changes being made to the traffic pattern, but they are trying to enforce the existing rules. There may be unintended consequences of new signs, and they are still reviewing options. Mrs. Gemmitti was in attendance at the meeting. The committee will meet again this coming Monday to finish the agenda.

Councilor Theberge moved with a second by Councilor Morgan Allain to accept the report of the Traffic Safety Committee. So moved, the motion carried.

### **2. Resolution 2019-03 CDBG Economic Development AHEAD (tabled 1/7/2019)**

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Otis, to remove this item from the table. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Otis, to read Resolution 2019-03 by short title for a second time. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Otis, to read Resolution 2019-03 for a third time by short title. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Otis, that Resolution 2019-03 be passed. So moved, the motion passed.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **3. City Manager's Report**

There was no City Manager's Report.

### **4. Mayor's Report**

Mayor Grenier shared the State of the City Address:

Despite some serious challenges we faced down this past year and some new ones we will deal with this year, the City of Berlin remains resiliently in good shape. After working the phones and numerous visits to the State House, we were able to marshal through SB577, the Burgess Biopower bill. The bill gives Burgess three years beyond the expiration of a provision in the power purchase agreement approved by the NH PUC to allow Burgess to operate at slightly above wholesale markets. The impact of that extension on the average ratepayer ranges from fifty cents to two dollars a month, depending on the time and the year, power demand, and availability of power outside of ISO-NE control. In fact, last year during the long cold snap, Eversource ratepayers saved well over \$2,000,000 just in power serviced by Burgess over spot market purchasing. Given Burgess Biopower's footprint in Berlin of 30 high paying jobs, \$1.4 million in property tax payments this year, 35% of the Berlin Water Works operating budget and over \$20 million of purchased goods and services last year, the hard work and effort was well worth the prize. I thank Governor Sununu for signing this bill, he understands that Burgess is also a critically important part of generation infrastructure in our state. The parent company who is the owner/operator of Burgess, Cate Street Capital, announced two months ago that they too will be a partner in establishing a hydroponic facility onsite where the brick storage warehouse used by the mills for pulp bales is located. That building will be razed for a new venture. The facility will use excess hot water and steam from the cooling side of the operation to provide power and heat.

Speaking of hydroponics, the City of Berlin is still very actively engaged with North Country Growers to site their facility in the northern industrial park land. Representative Laflamme, along with Representative Noel and Representative Thomas and Senator Starr, have co-sponsored a bill which would allow the City of Berlin and NCG to enter into a payment in lieu of tax agreement (PILT). Currently, any facility that generates electricity with the volumes that NCG want to produce is subject to a myriad of state taxes. The bill amends the law to provide that if the generated power remains and is utilized on-site, the generation assets are not subject to the state tax structure and would allow the city to negotiate a tax agreement fair to all. This project is a big deal, very complex, and this hurdle has been the issue delaying construction. City Manager Jim Wheeler, BIDPA Chairman Mike Caron, and I have been quite busy working through the issues. Nothing seems to come easy, especially here in Coos County. But this is worth the fight.

The Berlin Board of Assessors, chaired by long time property appraiser Robert Goddard, accepted the property value statistical update after amendments made by the board. For those who are not familiar, for the last 18 to 24 months, properties in Berlin have been selling at an accelerated rate with prices in most categories well above the values recorded on the city's tax cards. That created issues with utility values, which have to be updated annually by law. When equalizing the utility values to the three year old values of the other property categories, there was a loss of \$14M in utility property value. Utility values are set April 1<sup>st</sup> of every year and reported out only in June. The Board of Assessors did one heck of a job and spent weeks analyzing months of sales data on all categories of residential and commercial properties in Berlin. We are quite fortunate to have Bob, Kem Rozek, and Mark Eastman as members. All three are long time business owners with vast experience in these matters. The NH DRA must still sign off on the changes.

The 10,000 pound elephant in the room still is where education funding is going. As most of you already know, the Berlin Board of Education has made a very emotional and painful decision to close Brown School. Let's be frank about this decision. Closing Brown School is a direct result of the State of New Hampshire not fulfilling their constitutional requirement to provide for an adequate education for ALL students. The legislature, despite being on the losing end of two Supreme Court decisions (Claremont I and Claremont II), made a wholesale change to the

“disparity aid” formula and called it “stabilization aid”. Those funds were to be reduced by 4% annually starting in 2016. Berlin has now lost over \$850,000 in education aid, while closing Brown School will save the district about \$330,000. I testified before the House Education Committee last Thursday on the damaging effects those kind of unsustainable reductions are having in our schools. I do believe going forward there will be changes to funding schools and I am committed to ensuring Berlin schools get state funding that is required by the NH Constitution. In Berlin, we should be thankful and proud of our board, Nicole Plourde, Louise Valliere, Scott Losier, Denise Valerino, and Lynn Moore. They’ve done a remarkable job in the face of this firestorm. Along with Superintendent Corrine Cascadden and Bryan Lamirande, they’ve worked tirelessly to make our schools great. In fact, despite the funding crisis, none of our schools are on any state list as needing improvement and our schools are fully accredited. Here is my pitch to ask these dedicated folks, including Superintendent Cascadden, to continue serving our city to ensure the building transition goes smoothly.

Finally, a pitch to Washington. Time for both sides to stop back from their entrenched positions and negotiate a deal. Not all will be happy, conservatives and liberals alike, but we have many people here in Berlin who aren’t getting paid for their work. Time we take care of those folks too.

God Bless,  
Paul Grenier, Mayor

Councilor Rozek moved with a second by Councilor Berthiaume to accept the Mayor's State of the City Address and place it on file. So moved, the motion carried.

**7. PUBLIC COMMENTS** – There were none.

**8. Council Comments** – Councilor Rozek reminded the Council that the Traffic Safety Committee will be meeting on Monday, January 28, 2019.

Councilor Remillard shared the Council's appreciation to the Board of Assessor's for the time they have taken on the statistical update.

Councilor Rozek thanked the Mayor for his time testifying on behalf of the City in Concord.

**9. Adjournment**

At approximately 7:58 p.m. Councilor Rozek moved with a second by Councilor Remillard to adjourn the regular meeting. 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.