

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, July 15, 2019

Mayor Grenier called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 8:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Regular Meeting

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Remillard, Otis, Morgan, Gentili, Higbee, Rozek, Berthiaume, and Theberge

Absent: None

Also present: James Wheeler, Susan Tremblay, Shelli Fortin, Pam Laflamme, Gina Welch, Jamie Welch, Marc Lauze, Leo Robichaud, Julie King, Steve Dion, and Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun.

c. Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Otis, to accept the minutes of the July 1, 2019 Regular Meeting and Work Session. So moved, the motion carried.

Disbursements:

Disbursement Summary Draft #1843 start date 07/02/2019 end date 07/15/2019 for a total cash disbursement of \$1,600,496.10. Councilor 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 carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS –

Marc Lauze of 52 Twelfth Street advised the Council that he did not write the letter about the Board of Assessors because he was upset about the denial of his abatement request, but because he felt that it should be looked into as it is not fair. Mr. Lauze advised that there were 30 abatements approved for persons other than the Board and Council, which amounted to a reduction in value of \$134,000. Mr. Lauze stated that the total reduction in property value for just the Board of Assessors and Council was \$111,000. Mr. Lauze pointed out that Mr. Goddard has 40 years of appraising experience, and listed on his abatement request that the value of his property should be \$62,000. The Board set the value at \$55,000. Mr. Lauze also pointed out that the land value for Mr. Goddard's property was \$44,000 in April of 2017, and is now at \$14,000. Mr. Lauze stated that Mr. Goddard spent time during the work session discussing how the process works and reviewing Mr. Lauze's application, but that there was no justification given for the values assigned to the Board's properties. Mr. Lauze also mentioned that in reference to the rust on the Public Works equipment, he feels it is due to the amount of slush on the roads, and that the slush and salt stick to the vehicles. Mr. Lauze suggested that they plow and salt at the same time, rather than just salting the roads until the snow accumulates.

Leo Robichaud of 465 Sweden Street mentioned that his land is currently valued at \$26,000, which is not even one acre, and agreed that it is not right and something needs to be done. Leo Robichaud also asked that the City trim the branches on Sweden Street from 10th Street to Balsam Street.

Steve Dion of 100 Jasper Street advised that Berlin High School Building Trades built his house 27 years ago, and that he is proud of it, and would never lower the construction grade from good to average, nor would he ever file an abatement for that reason. Mr. Dion advised that he applied for an abatement this year for the first time, and was denied for not having enough comparables. Mr. Dion pointed out that only 40% of the total abatement requests were granted, however 100% of the requests from the Board and the Council were granted.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Council Committee Reports – There were no Council Committee Reports.

NEW BUSINESS

2. Al and Kate Duncan – 2019 Summit Salute – This was handled during the Work Session.

3. City Manager's Report

1. We have been notified by Primex that the City will receive a Premium Holiday of \$14,245.81 on our Worker's Compensation insurance and \$6,601.35 on Property Liability effective July 1, 2019. The amounts can either be applied to next year's (FY21) premium or the total cash can be sent to the City as a refund check in this fiscal year. These refunds are based on each member's as well as the pool's overall performance. As we typically do, we will receive these are lump sum payments in this fiscal year.
2. As you know, the new skate park opened officially on Wednesday, July 10th. The event was well attended and Councilor Higbee provided the opening remarks. Rules for the skate park, as agreed upon by the Council, are attached. These ruled will be printed in tomorrow's Berlin Daily Sun.
3. A pre-construction meeting was held on Friday, July 12th at the Airport with members of the design team, NHDOT, City and Contractor present. The Airport will be "closed" during the construction period which is anticipated to start on August 12th and last up to 31 calendar days. The apron adjacent to the Jet-A fuel system will remain open during construction to allow for helicopter operations. The airport will be closed to airplane traffic including all navigational aids (FAA included). The project should be complete for peak foliage season.
4. The Police Department statistics are attached.
5. Public Works Monthly Report is attached.
6. Property transfers for June, provided by the Assessing Department, are attached.
7. NH Public Radio has been and is doing a series in the North Country for their "Word of Mouth" show. Among other things, the program focus on the transitioning economy of Berlin. It can be accessed at the following web site: <https://www.nhpr.org/post.north-country-mill-complex#stream/0>.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to accept the City Manager's Report and place it on file. So moved, the motion carried.

4. Mayor's Report

Mayor Grenier addressed the public in attendance about their concerns over the abatements. Mayor Grenier stated that he met with City Manager Wheeler on two occasions and that he can say with absolute certainty that their goal is to have the DRA look at the complaint with an unbiased eye to be sure the process is fair and equitable. If the DRA feels that it was inappropriate, they will make the City aware in writing. The City will abide by what the DRA decides. Mayor Grenier stated that the City has a professional Board of Assessors, and it may appear bad or look like it is off, but there may be a reason for it. Mayor Grenier states the public should trust the process, and it should be fair and just for everyone. Mayor Grenier encouraged the public to attend the informational session in September or October about how to fill out tax appeal forms.

a. Letter from Marc Tremblay

Mayor Paul Grenier and
Member of the Berlin City Council,

I have served on the Berlin Police Commission from 04/2015. I have been honored to work closely with Chief Peter Morency, Commission members and the Berlin Police Department as a whole, and feel that my experience on the Berlin Police Commission has been a valuable one.

As my term expires in August, I respectfully request the Mayor and Council to consider reinstating me for a full term to the position of Commissioner on the Berlin Police Commission. I would consider it an honor to serve again. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Marc D. Tremblay

Councilor Rozek moved, with a second from Councilor Morgan, to appoint Marc Tremblay to the Berlin Police Commission for a term to expire July 31, 2022. So moved, the motion carried.

b. Letter from Cynthia Mackin

Dear Council Members,

I was the one who originally petitioned to have the sign that said "Slow Children Playing" at the beginning of Derrah Street off Lancaster Street. It is now rusty and put on the second telephone pole behind some lilac bushes where no one can see it. I wish to have the sign replaced and put at the beginning of the street where motorist will take notice of it before they turn the corner and hit some children who live here. Some cars and trucks tend to go fast on our street starting at the corner. The beginning of the street is now populated with children again.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,
Cynthia Mackin
395 Derrah Street

Councilor Rozek moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to send a letter to Cynthia Mackin acknowledging receipt of her letter, to forward the letter to Public Works and the Police Department, and remand the letter to the Traffic Safety Committee for review.

Councilor Theberge stated that he felt it should just be a work order to replace the sign. Councilor Rozek disagreed, as Ms. Mackin is requesting the sign be moved.

So moved, the motion passed. Councilor Theberge was opposed.

c. Letter from Stacey Wilson

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

I would like to bring an idea to life for our youth here. I am looking to set up a Sidewalk Chalk Competition on July 31st and August 1st. So we can showcase our youth at one of our biggest events here in our city. I have done some research and talked to a few businesses here in town and they would be willing to sponsor and donate to this event. As well as speaking to many of the children and parents who are very excited about the idea.

I am looking for this to be held on 2 separate days do to the fact of splitting up the age groups. And am hoping to have at least no parking on Main Street from Mechanic Street to Mason Street during the hours of the event on these days for the children's safety. Which hours would be from 4-7:30 on July 31st and 4-9:30pm on August 1st. Which we are hoping would not interfere with local business hours.

My children and I as well as other volunteers are willing to clean the chalk off the sidewalks the following week as so this is also not a problem for local businesses.

We would like to invite you (Mayor and Council members) to be our judges. I hope that this is something that you would like to participate in and support our local youth.

Thank you for your time and thank you for the opportunity for bringing this idea to life.

Sincerely,
Stacey Wilson

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to have the City Clerk get in touch with Stacey Wilson to attend the next meeting to discuss putting a plan together. However, it will not be the dates suggested in the letter, as resources are already stretched thin due to the ATV Festival. So moved, the motion carried.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Marc Lauze suggested that it would be nice to be able to meet with the company that does the assessment, or to be able to represent yourself at the meeting of the Board of Assessors.

Barbara Tetreault asked why the letter was originally shared during a non-public session, as it concerns public officials. Ms. Tetreault felt that it should have been done in a public meeting. City Manager Wheeler advised that the City did consult with legal counsel, and that since the letter was not about the Council, which was the body meeting, but the Board of Assessors, it was decided to present it in non-public under the citation that it would affect the reputation of a person or persons. City Manager Wheeler advised that Councilor Rozek recused himself from that meeting.

Steve Dion advised that he had asked about meeting with the Board of Assessors and was advised that it not how it was done, and that a letter would be sent with the decision. Mr. Dion felt that being able to be present at the meeting would give taxpayers an opportunity to explain any items on their abatement form. Mayor Grenier stated that is a point well taken.

6. Council Comments – Councilor Remillard advised the public present that everything they have brought up is important and that the Council would be getting someone not affiliated to evaluate the complaint. Councilor Remillard also stated that taxpayers can file an appeal, which she would strongly recommend.

Councilor Rozek asked if the Board of Assessor meetings were public and was advised they are.

7. Adjournment

At approximately 8:37 p.m. Councilor Rozek moved with a second by Councilor Morgan to adjourn the 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.