

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, January 20, 2020

Mayor Grenier called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:33 p.m. in the Auditorium.

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, Pamela Laflamme, Shelli Fortin, Councilor-Elect Eastman, Rachel Eastman, Glen Eastman, Janice Eastman, Melvin Heidt, Gary Croteau, Colette Theberge, Eric Grenier, Christine Grenier, Brenda Grenier, Matthew Buteau, Jeanne Charest, Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun, and others.

c. Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Otis, to accept the minutes of the January 6, 2020 Regular Meeting and Work Session, and the January 13, 2020 Work Session. So moved, the motion carried.

Disbursements:

Disbursement Summary Draft #1855 start date 01/07/2020 end date 01/17/2020 for a total cash disbursement of \$664,077.33. 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.

PUBLIC COMMENTS –

There were no public comments.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Council Committee Reports - There were no Council Committee reports.

Councilor Rozek moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee to adjourn the old order of business. So moved, the motion carried.

INAUGURATION CEREMONY

Swearing in Ceremony by:	Shelli Fortin, City Clerk
Mayor – Elect	Paul Grenier
Councilors – Elect	Denise Morgan
	Peter Higbee
	Roland Theberge
	Mark Eastman
School Board – Elect	Matthew Buteau
	Jeanne Charest

Councilor Gentili thanked the Mayor and members of the City Council and stated it has been a pleasure to serve. Gentili advised he originally was selected to fill a vacancy, and then ran for his own term. Gentili shared that serving has been a learning experience, having worked in the public sector for 50 years and usually working against a Council for better pay and working conditions. Gentili stated that however votes have turned out, the Council has always worked well together. Gentili closed by sharing a speech that Theodore Roosevelt gave 100 years ago, “The Man in the Arena”.

Councilor Eastman thanked the Council and Mayor. Councilor Eastman stated that Berlin is on the up and up, and is filled with volunteers who work tirelessly to bring outside people in to see this beautiful city. Councilor Eastman stated it is up to the Council and Department Heads to make the City safe and inviting for those who want to live and buy a home here. Councilor Eastman stated he is excited to work with this great group of people.

Chuck Henderson read a letter from Senator Jeanne Shaheen, who was unable to attend.

Ben Belanger read a letter from Senator Maggie Hassan, who was unable to attend.

Mayor Grenier called the New Business portion of the meeting to order at 7:52 pm.

Roll Call

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

Absent: None

NEW BUSINESS

2. Ordinance 2020-01 Proposed Zoning Change (1st read)

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Otis to table the Ordinance and schedule a public hearing for February 3, 2020. So moved, the motion carried.

3. Resolution 2020-02 Census Awareness Grant \$6,000 (1st read)

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Berthiaume to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for February 3, 2020. So moved, the motion carried.

4. Resolution 2020-03 Re-appropriating \$24,287.45 to Bridge Inspection/Repairs (1st read)

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for February 3, 2020. So moved, the motion carried.

5. City Manager's Report

There was no City Manager's Report.

6. Mayor's Report

a. Letter from Paul Robitaille – BIDPA Appointment

Pam Laflamme, Berlin City Planner

Mayor Paul Grenier, Berlin City Council

RE: Letter of intent to serve on BIDPA

Dear Pam, Mayor Grenier and Berlin City Council members,

I am writing this letter to inform you of my intent to ask to serve on the BIDPA committee. Former Mayor Dick Huot informed me that the BIDPA committee does allow members of neighboring communities to serve on the BIDPA board. In my many conversations with Mr. Huot we often discussed economic development in the Androscoggin valley and that I felt the economic development should be approached with both of the Berlin/Gorham communities pursuing economic development together as both of our economies are so completely intertwined that although we are a city and a town with two different governments in reality we are one community with a six mile long main street from the Town & Country Motor Inn to White Mountain College.

I am a former selectman for the town of Gorham and have served the community in some elected position since 1980. I am currently chairman of the Gorham Planning board and serve on the newly formed Gorham Economic Action Team. I served three terms as selectman served on the budget committee and served 25 years on the Gorham Library board of trustees. I served on the Library board in Gorham when the new Library was built. Interesting when I was chairman of the Gorham Public Library board of trustees, I was also working part time as librarian at the Berlin Public Library under Denise Jensen. I am also currently serving the town as one of the Commissioners to North Country Council and serve North Country council as a member of their Board of directors. I am also the Gorham representative to the transportation advisory committee. I also served the state of NH on the Rt. 2 and Rt. 16 studies during Governor Shaheen's terms as governor.

I believe that my experience in public life and my experience as the former manager of ServiceLink give me insight into the economic potential of our communities and the region. I hope you will consider my request to serve both communities on the BIDPA Board.

Paul Robitaille

Mayor Grenier advised that he has looked at the bylaws for BIDPA, and as long as a 2/3 majority of the members are Berlin residents, others can serve. Mr. Robitaille would be the only member from a neighboring community. Mayor Grenier advised that he spoke with members of BIDPA who would be glad to have Mr. Robitaille serve on the board.

Councilor Rozek moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to accept the Mayor's nomination of Paul Robitaille to the Berlin Industrial Development and Park Authority for a 3-year term to expire February 28, 2023. So moved, the motion passed.

b. Inaugural Address

I first want to thank all of you for attending tonight's Inauguration ceremony and for your enthusiastic effort in making Berlin a success story. I want to take a moment to recognize some very special people who made Herculean efforts above and beyond to make Berlin and our children a better place to live, work and play. Councilor Mike Gentili proved to be the man who carried the big stick! Mike never entered in to a discussion unprepared. Councilor Gentili didn't always take part in every little detail in every little item of discussion. When he did speak, however, it was factual, from the heart, and made a huge difference in helping all of us deal with some really tough issues. Mike, you shall be missed. I want to thank outgoing Board of Education members Lynn Moore, Denise Valerino, and Nicole Plourde for your tireless advocacy for Berlin's children at a time of declining resources and ever increasing demands and regulation. Your work in the eyes of the vast majority of the citizens were heroic and your efforts inside and out of the district were performed at great sacrifices in both your time and personal money. I would like all of you to stand and be recognized for your service.

As you all know, Berlin is in a transitional phase of its reinvention as a destination city. The process has been both exceedingly difficult and very rewarding. I would not be giving an accurate assessment of where we are by describing all is well. The issues we face far outnumber the resources available to our city. There is real energy, however, with focus of local government, interested citizens and outside agencies working collaboratively to map a strategy for the redevelopment of Main Street. This will be a process that will take time and resources, but I view Main Street's redevelopment, whatever form it takes, as the real key to Berlin's new identity. Until a concrete plan is in place, no ideas or discussions are off the table. One thing is for sure, it will take all hands on deck. The City Council has lots of responsibilities and we surely don't have all the answers for Main Street. We are in the process of removing two buildings that are owned by the city through tax deed. The old Princess Theater and 121 Main Street that formerly housed Woolworths look to be demolished this spring. That will create some space in the downtown that I think will enhance the remaining business community there.

The Berlin School System last year went through a painful transition from three buildings to two. Like many small to medium sized school systems across the country, many grade levels are housed in a singular building. Our facilities, though built long ago, are very well maintained. The strength of our schools remain our dedicated staff at all levels. Our teachers are phenomenal people and I'm proud of their efforts despite the challenges of resources. We have a window here this year, hopefully to address needs that have been identified by both the Board of Education and the City Council. As your mayor, my primary focus has always been to maintain a close working relationship with you, and to enhance the trust necessary to succeed in delivering quality educational opportunities for our children.

Berlin Public Works this past year received some much needed investment in newer snow removal equipment. More still needs to be done. Immediate needs include a Sno-Go that moves snow into trucks and a newer garbage packer. We will also be looking to replace more of the aging snow removal Deere equipment. New PWD Director Ben Hall has done a fantastic job since his hire in October. The Hutchins Street resurface project will be prioritized in the upcoming budget process and the NH DOT is hopefully finally ready to commence the Riverwalk Project on Upper Main Street.

Jay Watkins, Berlin's new Fire Chief, assimilated quite well into the department and was well received by our professional personnel. There is a huge concern within Androscoggin Valley communities that as volunteers who

make up the backbone of fire and EMS services age out, the number of replacement people are much less available. Chief Watkins, who previously served as Gorham Fire and EMS Chief, is working on long term solutions to these issues. This will mean all of us in the valley need to be more flexible so the services we all have come to count on are delivered professionally and cost effectively. Jay has also re-applied for funding for a new pumper through the federal government. Here's to the third application being the charm?

In the latest six month review with Berlin Police Chief Morency, calls for routine service are up a bit but arrests for major criminal activity have taken a measurable drop. Our Police Department personnel do fantastic work and I am proud of their professionalism. We are fortunate to have such pros and I have always had their backs when needed. Entering the law enforcement profession comes with great personal safety risks. Full, undivided support from elected officials is essential to having a police department that has the respect of the community. I want to thank you for all your efforts to maintain a still safe community.

I want to thank City Manager Jim Wheeler and former Superintendent of Schools Corinne Cascadden for serving on critical state boards in Concord. Jim serves on the Assessing Standards Board which is critical to maintaining taxation regulations in our state. Corinne was nominated to serve on the Education Funding Commission that was created by the last NH budget negotiation in Concord. Both of these committees are critical to ensuring that the voices of communities who are not positioned for rapid growth are heard.

I would like to close with this. With the smaller greenhouse project coming to Site Plan soon and hopefully closing on the larger facility next month, Berlin will again be positioned in a very unique place. Within the borders of our resilient city, roughly 135 mw of renewable power is generated along the mighty Androscoggin River and the Great North Winds and Woods. Add to that the potential hundreds of thousands of tons of fresh vegetables and greens grown annually. 50 years ago we would have been laughed out of the building. Remember 10 years ago how some people scoffed at renewable energy? 15 years from now, people will be talking about the miracle renaissance called Berlin, NH. I'm extremely proud to call Berlin home.

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

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS –

There were no public comments.

8. Council Comments –

Councilor Rozek asked about Council assignments, which Mayor Grenier advised would be assigned at the work session next week.

9. Adjournment

At approximately 8:20 p.m. Councilor Rozek moved with a second by Councilor Berthiaume 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.