

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, January 17, 2022

Public Hearing

Mayor Grenier opened the Public Hearing at 7:30 pm for Resolution 2022-02 Sale of Brown School to TKB Properties.

Lori Korzen of 788 Kent Street spoke in opposition. Ms. Korzen started by reading back words that the Councilors had spoken in previous meetings. Ms. Korzen noted that Councilor Berthiaume had stated that she did not want this deal to happen and did not want subsidized housing back in December of 2019. Ms. Korzen noted that the Mayor had also stated that the City could not continue to sponsor subsidized housing. Ms. Korzen noted that in July of 2020, it was stated that the residents did not feel this proposal was good for the neighborhood. Ms. Korzen stated that she called 57 houses in the Brown School neighborhood. She was able to speak to 13, of which 1 said it should have been brought up sooner, one did not care either way, and the other 11 did not want low-income housing. Ms. Korzen submitted a copy of a petition with signatures of those opposed to the sale of the school for \$1. Ms. Korzen asked what would happen if the grant application was not approved, and if TKB Properties would just keep the building for \$1. Ms. Korzen suggested that as stewards of the taxpayer's money, the Council should edit the agreement, as they need to be sure that TKB Properties cannot just turn around and sell it at fair market value.

John Seabury of 43 Spring Street advised that he has been in the City for 11 years. Mr. Seabury noted that in his time, he has seen a lot of good results for the City's work, and stated that he has personally witnessed TKB Properties work to build nice buildings. However, he noted that they do not care about the people they put in the buildings. Mr. Seabury noted that he has heroin dealers across the street from him. Mr. Seabury stated that for a property near the river, it should have more value than one in some back alley. Mr. Seabury suggested standing back and giving it a shot to market for more than the current agreement.

Richard King of 107 Jericho Road stated that he has issues with the sale of Brown School for \$1 regardless of who the developer is. Mr. King noted that we should be trying to bring investors in to start businesses and questioned the message it sends to those out of the area. Mr. King stated that 90 days on the market would be a good start, and advertise throughout the whole East coast. Mr. King stated just about anybody would be willing to do the work if they are getting government money to fix it up. Mr. King noted that it would be better used for traveling doctors and nurses, however stated he has nothing against low-income or HUD people.

Theodore Bosen of 13 Bisson Road stated that he feels that he is in the movie, Groundhog Day, as people keep coming to repeat comments on the same issue. Mr. Bosen stated it is clear the opponents of the sale do not understand that the government has an obligation to be sure the project does not damage the neighborhood or is bad for the City. Mr. Bosen noted that the property has an estimated tax revenue for the City of over \$40,000 per year. Mr. Bosen noted that it was advertised, and they received two good suggestions. Mr. Bosen suggested that using the property for short-term rentals would hurt others in this community who are earning income doing the same and contribute to the local economy. Mr. Bosen noted that this is not low-income housing, as only 10 units will be below market rate. Young families cannot currently afford to live in town, as rents are through the roof and wages are not keeping up. Mr. Bosen believes the current project will increase the value of the whole neighborhood and is a beautiful solution. Mr. Bosen noted his opposition to the property being used as a charter school with public funds.

Dylan Bridge of 225 Blanchard Street spoke in opposition to the sale. Mr. Bridge stated that he has witnessed businesses both small and large suffering and closing down. Mr. Bridge noted that the building could be better used for something other than low-income housing, such as a gym. Mr. Bridge stated that Berlin is a beautiful place but nobody wants to live here. Mr. Bridge suggested that the Council consider other alternatives, as other businesses would pay more than \$1 and it would bring in more revenue for the City.

Kathy Trumbull of 348 First Avenue advised she is not in favor of the sale. Ms. Trumbull advised that she has done research on CDFA guidelines, which require public involvement, and believes that the lack of involvement will disqualify the loan. Ms. Trumbull stated that she has to look both ways before stepping out these days, as Berlin is a Zombie apocalypse. Ms. Trumbull noted the drug use and that things are left in entryways. Ms. Trumbull stated that not all low-income people act this way. Ms. Trumbull requested the Council consider what happens now instead of ramming through due to a deadline.

Micah Bachner of 59 High Street stated he is new to the community, moving here in October. Mr. Bacher stated he is not going to throw his hat in the ring one way or another, however reminded those in attendance that no matter the outcome, we are a community. Mr. Bachner suggested that the passion we have for this community be used for something else, and not let this decision get in the way of future development.

Roland Berthiaume of 46 Franklin Street advised that he is in support of the current sale and proposal. Mr. Berthiaume noted there is a significant difference between subsidized housing and housing for low- to moderate-income families. Mr. Berthiaume noted that there is a need for workforce housing to bring people to work in our community. There are good paying jobs available, but no places to live. Mr. Berthiaume stated that projects like Brown School will bring necessary housing to the area. Mr. Berthiaume noted TKB Properties success with Bartlett School and advised that he has friends who live by that property and have no complaints. Mr. Berthiaume noted that as a contractor, he was involved in a possible renovation of St. Joseph's School years ago, which would have been purchased for \$7,500 and renovated into housing. Mr. Berthiaume advised that a realtor got involved, telling the church that they could make more money on the market, and the building still sits empty and dilapidated today. Mr. Berthiaume noted that discussions on Brown School did not begin three weeks ago, but started years ago and it was out for public bid.

Steven Korzen of 788 Kent Street advised he is opposed to the sale of Brown School for \$1, as it is not a sale, it is a give-away. Mr. Korzen stated he does not feel that the developer was vetted enough, as they had a complaint filed against them in court a few years ago. Mr. Korzen noted that we should be sure people living there are safe and have the best protection they can get. Mr. Korzen also stated that it was negligent to not add a contingency plan to the sale in case the grant is not awarded.

Mayor Grenier closed the Public Hearing at 7:56 pm.

Mayor Grenier opened the Public Hearing at 7:56 pm for Resolution 2022-03 Brown School Community Development Block Grant.

Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme advised there was an informational document available on the Proposed Brown School Affordable Housing CDBG application.

Community Development Block Grant funds are available to municipalities through the NH Community Development Finance Authority. Up to \$500,000 annually is available for economic development projects, up to \$500,000 for public facility, up to \$500,000 for housing projects, and up to \$500,000 for emergency activities. Up to \$25,000 is available per planning study grant. All projects must directly benefit a majority of low and moderate income persons.

This is a proposed application to the Community Development Finance Authority for up \$500,000 in CDBG Housing funds of which \$25,000 will be retained for administrative costs and approximately \$475,000 will be subgranted to TKB Properties, LLC toward the renovation of the Brown School Building, 190 Norway St, into approximately 21 units of primarily affordable housing units for low and moderate income households

This project conforms with Berlin's Housing and Community Development Plan's goals of encourage a varied stock of safe, sanitary, decent and affordable housing for persons of all age and income groups.

The public was asked for comments.

Lori Korzen of 788 Kent Street advised that she has been doing research on CDBG grants and they care about public input. Ms. Korzen stated that the majority of the public is reaching out to her against this grant for low- to moderate-income housing and they feel disrespected by the Council. Ms. Korzen noted that she was told to sit down, had her comments stricken from the record, and feels it was not a fair process. Ms. Korzen stated that her fight does not end tonight and she will be writing letters. Ms. Korzen again noted that they should add a contingency in case the grant is not approved.

Richard King of 107 Jericho Road also stated he is opposed to giving people the grant for housing. Mr. King stated that it is bad enough they are getting the building for \$1, they should come up with their own financing. Mr. King stated that he would also be writing letters. Mr. King stated there is lots of "buddiness", and that if one Council member votes one way, they all do. Mr. King stated he is against the sale and grant and would like to see the building put on the market.

Theodore Bosen spoke in favor of the grant. Mr. Bosen noted that he never dreamed he would see people protest receiving free government money. Mr. Bosen noted that the grant is for housing, which is what the proposal is, that that there is no other grant money with fewer strings attached. Mr. Bosen stated that the median household income in Berlin is \$39,000 and rents have gone beyond \$900 per month, which is more than a third of income to rent. Mr. Bosen stated that Berlin needs some apartments available at less than market rate to retain young families. Mr. Bosen stated it is a beautiful proposal and asked the Council not to change it. Mr. Bosen advised he will also be writing letters in support.

Mayor Grenier closed the Public Hearing at 8:02 pm.

Mayor Grenier opened the Public Hearing at 8:02 pm on the Residential Antidisplacement and Relocation Assistance Plan.

Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme advised that this plan outlines measures, under the Uniform Relocation Act, required for CDBG projects that 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. This project does not anticipate displacement or relocation.

The public was asked for comments.

Richard King of 107 Jericho Road asked for clarification and was advised it would apply only to those displaced by this proposal.

There were no other public comments.

Mayor Grenier closed the Public Hearing at 8:04 pm.

Councilor Morgan moved, with a second by Councilor Remillard, to approve the submittal of the CDBG Brown School application and to authorize the City Manager, or Interim City Manager, to sign and submit the CDBG application, and upon approval of the CDBG application, authorize the City Manager, or Interim City Manager, to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate the CDBG contract, and any amendments thereto. So moved, the motion carried. Eastman - opposed

Councilor Berthiaume moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to adopt the Antidisplacement and Relocation Assistance Plan. So moved, the motion carried unanimously.

Regular Meeting

Mayor Grenier called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 8:07 p.m.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Roll Call

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

Also present: Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Chief Daniel Buteau, Peter Morency, Denise Morency, Kem Rozek, Roland Berthiaume, Theodore Bosen, Micah Bachner, Amber Bachner, Stuart Light, Lori Korzen, Steven Korzen, Robert Theberge, Kathy Trumbull, John Trumbull, Richard King, Dylan Bridge, John Seabury, other members of the public, and William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun.

c. Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to accept the minutes of the January 3, 2022 Regular Meeting and Work Session, and Work Session of January 10, 2022. So moved, the motion passed.

Disbursements:

Disbursement Summary Draft #1904 start date 01/04/2022 end date 01/17/2022 for a total cash disbursement of \$2,347,717.77. 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.

2. Resolution 2022-02R1 Sale of Brown School to TKB Properties (tabled 1/3/2022)

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-Two

A RESOLUTION authorizing the sale of the Brown School building located at 190 Norway Street to TKB Properties, LLC for the sum of One Dollar (\$1.00) to revitalize said property into taxable residential living units.

Resolved by the City Council of the City of Berlin as Follows:

Whereas, the City of Berlin currently owns a building at 190 Norway Street known as the Brown School and the Mayor and Council have determined that the City of Berlin has no further need for the property; and

Whereas, there are significant costs and no tax base derived from the City's maintaining an unused building; and

Whereas, the City of Berlin advertised statewide the sale of the building by means of a Request for Proposal (RFP) advertised in October 2019 and again in September 2021; and

Whereas, the Proposal tendered by TKB Properties, LLC was found to be the most advantageous by the subcommittee reviewing the proposals for the City in that they have a proven track record of experience in rehabilitating properties throughout the City of Berlin; and

Whereas, the TKB Properties LLC proposal will result in approximately 21 residential living units resulting in an estimated annual tax revenue at the current tax rate of \$44,000.00; and

Whereas, the City of Berlin will put a right of first refusal into the purchase and sales agreement with TKB Properties, LLC per NH RSA ~~464:64~~ 161:61 and notify the Charter School Administrator of this agreement and the right of first refusal as required by statute.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Berlin as follows:

That the City Manager and City Attorney are authorized to do all things necessary to effectuate a purchase and sale agreement and to sell 190 Norway Street for the sum of One Dollar (\$1.00) to TKB Properties, LLC.

This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after passage.

Councilor Rozek requested to discuss the Resolution and asked what would happen in the event that the CDBG application was not approved. Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme advised that there will be a contingency in the Purchase and Sales agreement, and the City is waiting on the attorney to send it back. Ms. Laflamme also advised that she has had a pre-meeting with CDFA and the application is expected to be approved.

Councilor Eastman stated that he believes the contingency should also be in the Resolution and was advised that he could make a motion to amend the Resolution. Ms. Laflamme advised that the Purchase and Sales agreement will be brought to the Council for review before it is finalized, and that it still has to go to the Charter School Administration per the RSA.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to remove this item from the table. So moved, the motion carried. Eastman-opposed

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to amend Resolution 2022-02 by revising the RSA from 164:61 to 161:61. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to read Resolution 2022-02R1 as amended by short title for a second time. So moved, the motion carried. Eastman-opposed

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to read Resolution 2022-02R1 as amended by short title for a third time. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, that Resolution 2022-02R1 as amended be passed.

Councilor Eastman requested to amend the Resolution and was advised there is already a motion on the floor for it to be passed.

Councilor Remillard withdrew her motion, and Councilor Morgan withdrew her second.

Councilor Eastman moved, with a second by Councilor Rozek, to amend Resolution 2022-R1 by including a contingency that if the grant is not awarded, the building will not be sold to TKB Properties. So moved, the motion failed by roll call vote. Higbee – no, Rozek – yes, Berthiaume – yes, Remillard – no, Morgan – no, Eastman – yes, Theberge – no, Grenier – no

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, that Resolution 2022-02R1 as amended be passed.

Councilor Higbee noted that they are just authorizing the City Manager and City Attorney to effectuate a Purchase and Sales Agreement, so the additional wording for the contingency was not necessary. Councilor Rozek noted that the process is just starting.

So moved, the motion passed by roll call vote. Higbee- yes, Rozek – yes, Berthiaume-yes, Remillard-yes, Morgan-yes, Eastman-no, Theberge-yes, Grenier-yes

3. Resolution 2022-03R1 Brown School Community Development Block Grant (tabled 1/3/2022)

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-Two

A RESOLUTION authorizing an application for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) in an amount of up to Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00), of which approximately \$475,000 be subgranted to TKB Properties, LLC toward the renovation of the Brown School Building, 190 Norway St, into approximately 21 units of primarily affordable housing units for low- and moderate-income households.

Resolved by the City Council of the City of Berlin as Follows:

Whereas, up to Five Hundred Thousand (\$500,000.00) each is available annually on a competitive basis for housing and public facility CDBG projects that primarily benefit low- and moderate-income households/persons; and

Whereas, if awarded, Four Hundred Seventy-Five Thousand Dollars (\$475,000) of the funds would be subgranted to TKB Properties, LLC to use toward the construction costs of renovating the Brown School Building into approximately 21 units of primarily affordable housing for low- and moderate-income households; and

Whereas, Twenty-Five Thousand Dollars (\$25,000.00) will be used to pay the City's administration, audit and legal costs.

Now Therefore Be It Resolved by the City Council of the City of Berlin as Follows:

That the City Manager is authorized to apply for a Community Development Block Grant for Housing in an amount up to Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$500,000.00) and upon approval of said application, Four Hundred Seventy-Five Thousand (\$475,000) of the grant to be subgranted to ~~New England Family Housing~~ TKB Properties, LLC, and

the City Manager is authorized to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate the CDBG contract and any amendments thereto.

Be it further resolved that the City Manager is authorized to receive said grant, and the grant proceeds are hereby appropriated for the purpose of the grant, and all grant proceeds shall be deposited with the City Treasurer, and any additional use of these funds beyond the scope of work as listed in the application shall require prior approval of the City Council.

The City Council adopts the Residential Anti-displacement and Relocation Plan.

This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after passage.

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

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to amend Resolution 2022-03 by revising New England Family Housing to TKB Properties, LLC. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to read Resolution 2022-03R1 as amended by short title for a second time. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to read Resolution 2022-03R1 as amended by short title for a third time. So moved, the motion carried. Eastman-opposed

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, that Resolution 2022-03R1 as amended be passed. So moved, the motion passed by roll call vote. Higbee-yes, Rozek – yes, Berthiaume-yes, Remillard-yes, Morgan-yes, Eastman-no, Theberge-yes, Grenier-yes

Councilor Morgan moved, with a second by Councilor Eastman, 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	Paul Grenier
Councilors – Elect	Diana Berthiaume
	Peter Morency
	Lucie Remillard
	Robert Theberge

Mayor Grenier recognized the strong municipal servants that he has worked with. Mayor Grenier stated that he has worked with Councilor Rozek for a number of years in different capacities. Mayor Grenier noted that Councilor Rozek is a strong Councilor and a staunch conservative and made sure that public money was spent carefully. Mayor Grenier advised that he has deep admiration and respect for Councilor Rozek, who is community oriented and also serves on the board for AVRDD, and brings a wealth of knowledge to the board. Mayor Grenier advised they did not always agree, but were always agreeable, and he will be missed. Mayor Grenier described Councilor Rozek as a phenomenal Councilor, a straight shooter, a hard worker, and a champion of the City.

Councilor Rozek thanked the citizens for electing him to serve on the Council, previously on the school board, and also as a state legislator. Councilor Rozek stated that he never considered himself a politician, just a concerned citizen. Councilor Rozek advised that he has always tried to keep an open mind and to make decisions in the best interest of the citizens with a conservative viewpoint. Councilor Rozek advised that he never realized how much time Councilors put in, especially during budget hearings, and he is looking forward to Monday nights at home with his wife. Councilor Rozek noted that there are two wonderful people ready to take over, who have a tremendous amount of experience and love for this City.

Mayor Grenier presented a plaque thanking Councilor Rozek for his service to the City.

Mayor Grenier read a letter from Councilor Otis, as he was unable to attend.

To the Citizens of the City of Berlin,

Thank you for electing me to the City Council to serve as your representative for the past 10 years. I have been a resident of Berlin for most of my life. Being born, raised, and educated here, I take a lot of pride in this city I call home. Every vote I made was made in the best interest of the city, not persuaded by personal interests. I am thankful to have worked with city boards and department heads productively without conflict. I believe the city is in a position to grow in the future and to remain united.

I was driven to run for City Council when there was uncertainty of the biomass plant coming to Berlin. I believed the biomass plant would benefit this city and supported the building of it from the beginning. To this day, I believe that this decision was pivotal in helping the city prosper.

Scholastic football is still a dream on mine for the city. I believe that it will bring this community together. It has been proven sustainable through the successful Gladiator Football Program. It is a building block for the youth of this community. I also believe this will support and grow a strong scholastic hockey program.

The biggest game changer for this city would be to continue to pursue the installation of the downtown snow melt system. The studies have proved that the project is feasible and the return on the investment will far outweigh the cost for decades to come. I seriously hope the Mayor and the City Council continue to pursue this.

Congratulations to the newly elected Mayor, City Councilors, and School Board Members. Thank you for supporting the City of Berlin.

Russell Otis

Mayor Grenier advised that he will give the plaque for Councilor Otis to him at a later date.

Councilor Roland Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan to rejoin the meeting at 8:43 pm. So moved, the motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

4. Resolution 2022-04 Fire Department Donations (first reading)

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Berthiaume, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for February 7, 2022. So moved, the motion carried.

5. City Manager's Report

There was no City Manager's Report.

6. Mayor's Report

a. ZBA Appointments

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to approve the Mayor's nomination of Mark Evans as a member of the Zoning Board of Adjustment to fill an unexpired term until April 30, 2022 and a full term to expire April 20, 2025. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to approve the Mayor's nomination of Scott Losier as an alternate member of the Zoning Board of Adjustment with a term to expire April 30, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

b. Letter from Kathy and John Trumbull

Dear Mayor Grenier, Ms. LaFlamme and City Council Representatives;

This letter is in response to Peter Higbee's angry rant that ended the recent City Council meeting with an ugly tone. Several people, including other council members, attempted to speak following his outburst, and all were shut down, as the meeting was adjourned abruptly.

This behavior is exactly what is creating the problem we are facing with the Brown School decision. Councilor Higbee scolded those who disagree with the proposal the Brown School Subcommittee had brought forth. For this subcommittee to have worked for over two years without informing or involving the taxpayers was remiss. Further, the subcommittee is not represented on the city website, nor were their agendas, meeting schedule, or minutes made available. When the Jefferson Elementary School became vacant and was offered to the town by the school district, the Board of Selectmen mailed out surveys to every resident requesting their input on potential future uses. There was a clear attempt to solicit public opinion on how the community wanted to repurpose their school. Berlin also should have involved its citizens because it was the right thing to do.

Instead, no one knew the school was even being sold until the Daily Sun published an article stating that the City had selected a developer and entered into an agreement, pending approval vote. Many people do not understand why no sale of this valued school building was attempted, and the initial and second attempt to seek a new owner/developer was through a Request for Proposal (RFP). As recently as July of 2021, Councilor Higbee was quoted at a Council meeting stating that the Brown School neighborhood did not want a low-income housing project to replace the school, and now he is claiming the reverse. When and why did the people of that neighborhood change their mind?

Under the new law requiring all New Hampshire charter schools be allowed 60 days from notification of the contract to sell the Brown School building for \$1.00 to match that offer, this proposal could ultimately result in a charter school taking possession of the school with no requirement to pay any more than \$1.00. No tax dollars at all will be coming to the city if that occurs. Had this been managed differently and offered for sale on the open commercial real estate market, a charter or private school, developer or other organization, would likely have paid a fair price for the building assessed at \$1.2 million. Just this week Colebrook Academy was listed for sale with a real estate broker for \$1,150,000. We believe the only financially responsible decision the city can make now is to postpone the agreement with NEFH and attempt to sell this school building properly.

Additionally, we are curious if the subcommittee and council considered repurposing the Brown School as the City Hall and Berlin Police Department offices. This would eliminate climbing so many stairs (difficult access) for the older and less ambulatory people of Berlin and allow for ample parking. Any unused space could be leased to other organizations or used as community conference/meeting rooms, recreation areas, etc. The existing City Hall could then be sold or repurposed as residential apartments.

As taxpayers and voting residents of Berlin we look forward to more public notice regarding Brown School and all topics that come before council and hope to count on there being no repeat of Monday, January 3, when I and my fellow citizens were disrespected. The people who attend City Council meetings to learn and to voice their concerns do not deserve to be shouted at and silenced.

Sincerely,

Kathy & John Trumbull
348 First Avenue
Berlin, NH 03570

c. State of the City Address

Before I begin my comments, I would like to take a moment of silence for all the citizens who have passed away this year as a result of this dangerous COVID-19 pandemic.

I want to thank Councilor Mike Rozek and Councilor Russ Otis for their many years of service to the citizens of Berlin. Council people by City Charter are paid a maximum of \$750 per year to sit in committees, work the annual budget process and interact with the public on a host of issues the city faces. I also want to recognize former Board of Education member Scott Losier for his years of service as well to ensure our schools operate efficiently and our children here receive the best possible education with our available resources.

I want to welcome to the Berlin City Council our two newly elected members, longtime State Representative Robert Theberge and former Berlin Police Chief Peter Morency. Both of these gentlemen together bring over 50 years of public service experience and will serve Berlin extremely well.

The City of Berlin is well into wholesale changes as a community. Some good, some challenging. Some of the challenges we face are daunting. Single family residential property values, as a segment, have risen over 65% since 2019 alone. With commercial and utility values lagging the same percentage increase, we must be vigilant in making sure we have housing that folks can afford. Though I personally have misgivings about open ended construction of small houses or building in dense areas, the City Council and Berlin Planning Board and the ZBA have supported and codified this effort to address this area. So too is the Berlin City Council's effort at putting Brown School on the tax rolls. In 2019, pre-pandemic and somewhat before the explosion of housing values, the City Council looked to award the property to a developer who made a good proposal. The council and developer could not come to terms on price and conditions and they withdrew. The city subsequently sat on the property, spending over \$52,000 in only two years for heat and utilities. A recent burglary also did significant damage inside and with the cost of building materials escalating to prohibitive prices, the City Council made its decision to make this a productive property with a developer with a proven track record of excellence.

We will closely follow and advocate on the city's behalf any issues that affects state policy and revenues. Berlin generates 135 MW of renewable power within the confines of Berlin. This represents over 37% of taxable property and any hiccup is a fiscal disaster waiting to happen.

A real concern for all of Berlin should be the lack of people entering the work force. Popular Berlin businesses have either curtailed hours of operations or even closed because of the lack of labor. Our response shouldn't be it is happening everywhere. It should be how to make ourselves attractive for middle class folks to live here. Our schools, churches and health care facilities all play an important role in attracting people. Despite the hugely negative comments on social media about our community by a handful of malcontents, our schools do a great job. Kids who want to succeed succeed. Parents need to take an active role in the education of their children and understand guidance begins at home. Parents and grandparents, whether we like it or not, are our kids' frontline teachers. Denigrating our schools is both a cheap shot toward our professionals and shortchanges our efforts at growing our city. Our Police and Fire Departments, and employees, are first rate. Berlin's Public Works Department and related services do a superior job given the small size of their crews and the lack of planning resources. Berlin Water Works, owned by the city but managed separately, have 8 years left of loans to pay on tens of millions of dollars of infrastructure improvements and is paid for by Burgess Biopower's water purchase revenues.

Moving forward, we have a number of immediate must dos. First, we must hire a City Manager. That person needs to be dynamic enough to understand what we've gone through economically in the last 12 years, yet skilled enough to lead Berlin through it's two most important initiatives. First, assisting and guiding the North Country Growers project to final completion and operation. Second of all, City Council has committed itself to helping develop the Jericho corridor. All the entities who pleaded with council to extend the compact line now need to follow through and work with the City Manager and Economic Development Director to bring their projects to site plan review.

Once we have a new City Manager in place, I plan to sit with senior city staff to begin tackling an annual infrastructure repair plan. In FY2026, the last of the Route 110 bond will be satisfied. That has an annual debt service of \$438,815. Along with North Country Growers PILT payments, that should allow for roughly \$700,000 plus annually to begin work. Also, the entrance to the city from the Gorham town line to Green Square is on the NH DOT's 10-year reconstruction plan. Together, Berlin will finally be able to address this critical need.

There is much to be done and Berlin is in a different place than even a generation ago. No longer constrained by the odor of sulphur dioxide, we are a safe community with scores of attributes. If we are willing to work together, Berlin's potential is limitless.

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second from Councilor Morgan, to accept the letter from Kathy and John Trumbull and enter it into the record and accept the Mayor's Report and place it on file. So moved, the motion carried.

7. Public Comments

Stuart Light of 213 High Street welcomed the new City Councilors. Mr. Light reminded the Mayor and Council of their place; that they are not our leaders or rulers, but our agents. Mr. Light quoted Article 8 and Article 10 of the NH

Constitution, noting that power is derived from the people, and reminded the Council that the people are watching, and that if they stay in their place, all will be well.

Lori Korzen of 788 Kent Street asked the Council to remember that they are here for the public, not for Mayor Grenier, and asked them to think for themselves. Ms. Korzen noted that if we all work together, we can do good. Ms. Korzen stated that she has offered her services and is here to do whatever is wanted, but the minute there is opposition you are treated badly. Ms. Korzen stated she was mortified that Mayor Grenier asked for the information for Majestic Maintenance and feels it is a bully tactic to get him to stop speaking out. Ms. Korzen stated that the Council needs to listen to the public, and can't just listen to those that say good job that are in their pocket. Ms. Korzen stated that when she spoke to residents of the Brown School neighborhood, they did not want their names mentioned. Mr. Korzen stated that she wanted to be involved in the ZBA, but others were assigned to the positions. Ms. Korzen stated that she would love to see an ethics board in Berlin. Ms. Korzen again noted that when she asked Councilor Remillard about her nephew, she was told she was wrong, and she screenshotted that conversation. Ms. Korzen stated she is asking for transparency and honesty and would like to sit together and talk.

Richard King of 107 Jericho Road stated that it was apparent that the Council already had their minds made up for Brown School and it did not matter what anyone said. Mr. King noted that the Council is supposed to be representing the people, not their personal feelings. Mr. King stated that when he was a shop steward in the mill, he worked for what the union members wanted, even if it was not what he wanted. Mr. King reminded the Mayor of how many votes he won by against a candidate who was deceased, and asked the Council members to keep that in mind as they need to be voted in to their positions. Mr. King stated that he did not want to see Brown School sold for \$1, and believes the Council was not listening. Mr. King also noted that he has the list of money he has earned working for the City and will show that if requested. Mr. King stated that he has been on top of the jobs and is dedicated. Mayor Grenier responded by stating that he is making sure the purchasing agreement in the City Charter is being followed, as anything over \$5,000 must be put out to bid. Mayor Grenier advised that he plans to follow the Charter and hopes Mr. King will get the work.

Theodore Bosen of 13 Bisson Road advised that he has seen a lot of workings of municipal government over the years and the elected officials here are some of the finest he has seen. Mr. Bosen stated that he does not agree with Ms. Korzen. Mr. Bosen stated that there has been more public participation than anything he has seen and everyone is entitled to their opinions and their vote.

8. Council Comments

Councilor Robert Theberge thanked the voters for electing him and stated he is honored to be a member of the City Council. Councilor Theberge advised that as a state representative, he will be looking to protect the interests of the City on the finance committee. Councilor Theberge noted that he, along with Representative Laflamme and Representative Kelley, voted against HB607, the Freedom Savings Accounts, which would take money away from public schools and would be disastrous to the city.

Councilor Eastman welcomed the new members of the Council and stated he was looking forward to working with them.

13. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Roland Theberge, seconded by Councilor Morgan, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:16 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.
Amended Copy per City Council motion on February 7, 2022