

May 2, 2016

City Council Work Session

Present were Mayor Grenier, Councilors Otis, Remillard, Gentili, Rozek, Morgan Allain and Theberge; Councilors Nelson and Higbee were absent

Others present included City Manager James Wheeler, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, Sally Manikian, Phoebe Backler, Dick Huot, and Barbara Tetreault from the Berlin Daily Sun.

Rivers Management Protection Program Presentation

Dick Huot opened by saying that he used to attend the Androscoggin Watershed Council meetings as part of his duties with CAP. He could see that a lot was happening on the Androscoggin in Maine and there is not the same degree of activity on the NH side. He sees the Androscoggin as another opportunity to create commerce in the area. The Androscoggin River Committee was formed and River Day was proclaimed and observed in 2011. No further action was taken.

Today there is the opportunity to have the Androscoggin in a Rivers Management Protection Program. Having the river in the program would provide DES with a local view when they are reviewing permits. A River Management Plan could prevent activity like what goes on at the Saco River. Councilor Theberge asked what the vision is and Ms. Manikian reported that the vision has stayed the same: to promote the river and make sure that it is properly cared for.

Ms. Manikian stated that when DES reviewed the Errol Town Forest, it was noted that the Androscoggin is not in the Rivers Management Protection Program. The Connecticut and Amonoosuk Rivers are in the program. Ms. Backler explained that the program will not add additional regulation to the river or to property along the river. It will bring communities from Errol to Shelburne together to improve access points and to take on projects along the river. When DES is reviewing a permit application, they can come to local people for input on their decisions. In June, the group wants to submit the nomination for the Androscoggin and the review process would last over the summer. There will be a public hearing and then there is a legislative process in the fall.

Mayor Grenier confirmed that participation is voluntary and he could not support the nomination. He feared having Berlin's section of the river in the program could delay or deter potential development. Councilor Remillard asked why we would want to complicate things by adding the river to the Management Program. Ms. Manikian reasoned that the Program does not create a new layer of bureaucracy; it provides local input for DES to consult with.

Councilor Rozek made the point that the Saco River is very shallow with a sandy bottom, nothing like the Androscoggin and he stated that he could not see the comparison. He asked if the group would like to see more or less recreational use than what is there now. Ms. Backler affirmed that the River Committee would like to see increased recreation and economic activity and make sure it is done properly.

Councilor Rozek noted that there is already 1320 feet of shoreland protection and State of NH's regulations. Would we want to add another level of bureaucracy? Ms. Manikian commented that the Committee is not regulatory and has no regulatory authority. Councilor Rozek asked if the management team would support the project at the Balsams. Dick Huot stated that economic activity is supported; however moving water from one watershed to another would be prevented. Councilor Rozek commented that Berlin has an industrial base with existing infrastructure and we don't want to add another level to existing regulations. Federal Shoreland Protection will be there.

Ms. Laflamme acknowledged that if a project comes to the City, it will go to DES for permitting. The perceived benefit of having the river in the Rivers Management Program is DES gets to reach out to local people for input on their review; there is no extra review. Mayor Grenier recounted that the committee of communities along the river could have strong opinions about what happens on Berlin's section of the river. There are also environmental groups that could slow down a process enough that it goes away. He added that development along Berlin's section of the river should be decided by voters of Berlin.

Councilor Rozek asked if the designation were to be in place, could the City opt out and have their section of the river removed from the Program. Ms. Backler replied that it would be another legislative process. Mayor Grenier concluded by saying that he would prefer not to put Berlin's future in the hands of the Legislature.

William Hounsell Consulting Contract and References

Mr. Wheeler reported that he was asked to check references on Bill Hounsell prior to entering into a contract for support services and the results were favorable. He is highly respected in Concord and knows everyone. The City has applied for State Aid on the waste water treatment project; however the State underfunded the program. Mr. Hounsell's contract will be hourly and authorized by the City Manager. The City will use him as needed with the first priority being to see if we can get the Department of Transportation to participate in Route 16. Councilor Remillard stated that she would like a "not to exceed" limit in the contract and an update on Mr. Hounsell's progress now and then.

Councilor Remillard moved to authorize the City Manager to enter into a contract with William Hounsell for an amount not to exceed \$10,000 for support services on the Route 16 project and on wastewater projects; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried.

Other

Councilor Rozek asked if there was a problem with getting construction started on Hutchins Street. Mr. Wheeler stated that AB Excavating has been given the notice to proceed and they are getting their bonds and paper work in place. Any delays in the project have been worked out. Substantial completion is expected to be by July 8. Mr. Wheeler also noted that Sargent wants to start the Route 16 project in mid-July.

There being no further business in work session, Mayor Grenier called for a five minute recess and he moved on to the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant