

City Council Work Session
December 12, 2016

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

Others present included City Manager James Wheeler, City Clerk Elaine Riendeau, School Superintendent Corinne Cascadden, School Board Member Scott Losier, School Board Chair Nicole Plourde, School Business Administrator Bryan Lamirande, State Representative Larry Laflamme, State Representative Bill Hatch, State Representative Wayne Moynihan, State Representative Yvonne Thomas, State Representative Robert Theberge, Barbara Tetreault *Berlin Daily Sun* and public

State Education Stabilization Grants

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. and stated that Franklin Mayor Maryfield held a meeting for those communities affected by the reduction of State Education Stabilization grants. He went on to explain that Stabilization Grants are directly related to the community's ability to pay. The Legislature created fiscal capacity disparity aid because they recognized that some towns had a different ability to pay. In 1999 a statewide property tax to fund education was created.

In 2011 HB 337 eliminated the fiscal capacity grants and issued stabilization grants and then in 2015 the legislature gradually eliminates stabilization grants over time. Mayor Grenier noted that eliminating \$200,000, the approximate amount of stabilization grant is .50 on the Berlin tax rate. If we raise taxes, it puts the community at a disadvantage to attract new investment. We are imploring the help of the Legislature. LSR 725 was filed by Werner Horn and we are hoping that all Coos County reps can sign on as co-sponsors. Senator Jeff Woodburn is supportive and feels we can get others on board.

Representative Moynihan asked what is proposed as a solution and Mayor Grenier replied that freezing further reductions is paramount. Representative Theberge informed that LSR's are not on the State web site until they are given bill numbers. Representative Hatch made the point that there is only so much money for education and how to cut it up becomes the primary question. Re-shifting money has to be part of the conversation.

Ms. Cascadden reported that when the State determines equitable or adequacy or adequate education aid they use \$3,561.27 as the amount that it costs to educate a child. The actual however, is \$14,344.93. There are additional sums added depending on the number of free or reduced lunch, special education students, English language learning and Grade 3 assessments.

Bryan Lamirande established that losing 4% per year every year will result in Berlin losing over \$1 million by fy 21, in a community with 9000 residents. We will have to take drastic measures to sustain such a loss. Ms. Cascadden estimated that by Year 3 five to eight positions will be affected. She added that she is Chair of the North Country superintendents and they also plan to take action.

Mayor Grenier reasoned that there are two avenues, with one being to approach the legislature and the other is to go into the legal arena and sue the State. The preference is to work with the legislature. He

noted that the City will not likely recover the reductions made in the last two years. He pledged to testify at the legislature to support a bill that would reinstate stabilization aid.

Representative Theberge indicated that committee hearings should be attended by as many members of the public as possible. Representative Moynihan said that he's heard the expression that the legislature works by law suit, giving the examples of funding education, and prison upgrades. He stated that there will be support in the Legislature but he suggested not giving up on the concept of having to sue because it seems to be the way the system operates.

Representative Hatch stated that HB 1 and HB 2, that established the reduction in aid, were not passed through the regular process. There is not the political willingness to impact revenues negatively. There has to be an answer to, how will we pay for that?

Mayor Grenier thanked the Representatives for attending. He stressed that this is important for Berlin and for the County. All Coos County representatives should be united in an effort to re-establish State Stabilization Grants.

School Update

Ms. Cascadden indicated that Berlin is one of 12 towns invited to participate in a NH Forum on education. There is a team that will participate in the event. She invited legislators if they are interested to attend adding that she would like a city councilor to attend as a team member. The discussion will be about consolidating districts with city structure and town structure.

Ms. Cascadden went on to describe new techniques to deal with students' education as well their social behaviors. The School Board updated its vision mission statement. There is a State assessment given to all students in grades 3 to 8. Grades 4, 5, 7 & 8 have made greater growth than the state average. SAT College Board tests are given to all 11th graders putting an emphasis on college prep. The schools are adapting to social demographics.

In a 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey 6% of Berlin students reported using heroin. This drew statewide attention and there was a realization that something had to be done. Educators are not trained as mental health counselors; however an integrated team was formed to deal with social issues. The School Board agreed to train school nurses on the use of Narcan and it is now available as a tool.

There were several community events to bring awareness of the problem such as the Herron Project, community forums with NH Listens and a Red Ribbon Week Drug Free Campaign. Berlin was invited by the State to apply for Project AWARE funding of \$500,000 over five years which would increase access to mental health services.

Three tier learning is available to all students where added support is given based on need. 125 adults have been trained in youth mental health including signs and symptoms as well as suicide prevention. Since the behavioral teams were put in place, 216 students have been referred. The future of education is parent/teacher home visits for all students. There is a lot going on and the focus of education is shifting to social and emotional learning as well as academics.

DES Administrative Order

Mr. Wheeler reminded the Council that the DES Administrative Order by Consent is the result of the City not going forward with replacing the fuel farm at public works. It was a bad time because all of the fuel facilities in the City were making the change at the same time. The timeline in the order says that by May 15th we have to have the tanks closed. We will have a temporary system with cards to go to local vendors to buy fuel. Mayor Grenier confirmed that it would be six weeks of construction before there is an operational fuel farm. Councilor Otis asked about the cost and Mr. Wheeler noted that there is \$125,000 set aside. We will be taking out two 15,000 gallon tanks and replacing them with 9,000 gallon tanks.

Non-public Session

Councilor Theberge moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3II(d) land matters; so moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Mr. Wheeler gave an update of a potential sale of land. No vote was taken.

Councilor Theberge moved to come out of non-public session; Councilor Morgan Allain seconded and the motion carried by roll call.

At 8:20 p.m. Councilor Theberge moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to go into non-meeting per RSA 91-A:2 (b) collective bargaining

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant