

City Council Work Session September 7, 2021

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Eastman, Remillard, Rozek, Higbee, Morgan, Theberge and Otis. Councilor Berthiaume was absent.

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Community Development Director Pam Laflamme, Assessing Coordinator Lise Barrette, Fire Chief James Watkins, Finance Director Holly Larsen, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, William Carroll Berlin Daily Sun and Member Services Consultant Toni Flewelling from Primex via zoom.

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:31pm. He advised that the Purple Heart Community item on the agenda is postponed till September 20, 2021.

Primex – Toni Flewelling

Ms. Flewelling discussed and presented to Council the City Manager recruitment process. She questioned if Council had a target date for hiring. Mayor Grenier responded mid-December. She advised since the City advertised it was accepting resumes till October 15, 2021 target dates should be set for the different steps of the recruitment process. She asked Council if they were planning on establishing a review subcommittee. Mayor Grenier commented forming a review subcommittee is very helpful. He would like this subcommittee to include five Council Members, two or three outside professionals and two in house department heads for a group of ten individuals. Ms. Flewelling commented that it is up to the City to establish the review committee. She mentioned to Council setting up a date for reviewing candidate's resumes. Council agreed on the week of October 18, 2021 for review by the ten members of the subcommittee. Council agreed to start the first round of interviews by November 5, 2021 and narrow it down to three candidates and have them take the disc assessment by November 12, 2021. Primex provides the disc assessment tool at the cost of \$40 per individual. The next step would be the second round of interviews of the three selected candidates to be completed by November 20, 2021. The second round of Interviews is done by Council only. Mayor Grenier asked Ms. Flewelling if it would be acceptable for the City to hire an outside facilitator for the recruitment process. Ms. Flewelling responded that it is acceptable and Primex would not take offense if Council chooses to do so. Councilor Rozek questioned if MRI was an option in the event no one applies. Mayor Grenier commented that it could be an option but it is very costly. He stated it was costing \$150,000/year for Pat MacQueen for only three days per week.

Route 110 Draft Agreement

Mr. Wheeler presented to Council a draft extended maintenance agreement between the City of Berlin and the NHDOT for NH 110 that he put together in collaboration with Bill Cass from NHDOT. Councilor Remillard questioned if this would allow the City to reduce the speed limit. Mr. Wheeler responded yes. Mr. Wheeler presented to Council a report showing the estimated maintenance costs for Rte. 110 over a period of 35 years to include winter maintenance and paver shim which came out to an estimated total of \$1,369,880. The report also showed an increase in tax rate over the 35-year period identifying the need for an additional approximate \$600,000 in yearly tax revenues for the City to break even. Mr. Wheeler's also noted that the paver shim program cost is at 8-year intervals, the NHDOT snow policy differs from the City's, NHDOT Rte. 110 reconstruction estimate is \$12,000,000, a City match of a 10-year plan project is \$2,400,000, nothing included in this report for equipment cost and an incremental increase in tax revenue will be allocated to TIF, therefore, it likely will not be available for these expenses.

Mayor Grenier suggested a stand-alone Public Hearing to be scheduled for September 29, 2021 at 6:00pm with all abutters to receive notice. He wants the Public to be able to voice questions or concerns in regards to Rte. 110 development. Councilor Rozek asked if it was possible to put together a presentation summarizing the development to present at the Public Hearing. Mayor Grenier asked Mr. Wheeler and Ms. Laflamme to put together a power point presentation. Councilor Eastman questioned the investment impact after the TIF district adoption. Ms. Laflamme responded there are no set numbers at this time. Councilor Eastman advised he would obtain numbers from his connections. Councilor Remillard suggested Councilor Eastman's connections should attend the Public Hearing. Councilor Eastman responded they would be attending.

Assessing Items

Assessing Coordinator Lise Barrette presented to Council a letter from the NHDRA including the final results of the monitoring activity of the 2019 cyclical inspections for the City of Berlin. Mrs. Barrette commented this was for informational purposes only.

Mrs. Barrette advised Council that back in July 2021, Gary Lucas had put in a land use change tax abatement application. After review from Corcoran Consulting Associates, they recommended the market value be reduced from \$36,000 to \$25,000 for Tax Map/Lot 406-2.2 and grant abatement request from \$3,600 to \$2,500 equaling \$1,100 plus interest if accrued. Councilor Remillard moved to approve the abatement request from Gary Lucas reducing the market value for Tax Map Lot 406-2.2 from \$36,000 to \$25,000 per Corcoran Consulting Associates recommendations; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with recusals from Councilors Rozek and Eastman.

Mrs. Barrette discussed with Council the City of Berlin's elderly exemptions. She stated the elderly exemption guidelines haven't been changed since 2009. She provided Council with documentation showing the current City of Berlin elderly exemptions and other communities in the State of NH for comparison. She stated there were 13 individuals removed due to over income limits after the 2020 review. She advised Council it was recommended by Corcoran Consulting Associates and the DRA that the City should increase the limitations. Mayor Grenier requested written recommendations from Corcoran Consulting Associates which could include comparison with maybe five communities similar to Berlin.

Mrs. Barrette provided Council with documentation showing the current City of Berlin veterans credit and other communities in the State of NH for comparison. She commented the last increase was in 2004. She also addressed Council if they would be interested in adopting an all veterans credit, a category which a veteran (or widow) would fall under if they don't qualify under the specified combat years, yet they still served at least 90 days active service. Councilor Remillard asked how many were denied because the City doesn't offer the all veterans credit. Mrs. Barrette responded she didn't have a number at this time, but would look into obtaining the information.

At 7:40pm, Mayor Grenier requested a 5-minute recess for Council to take a photo for the Great Northwoods Community Foundation. This is pertaining to resolution 2021-19 being read tonight during the regular meeting.

At 7:45pm, Mayor Grenier resumed the work session and moved on to the next item.

Fire Dept. Bid for Structural Improvements

Mr. Wheeler reviewed with Council the report that was discussed some time ago when identifying the approach which was to do the structural work under phase one along with the roofs, windows and the boiler. The City has received pricing for the roofs and boiler, but none for the windows but proceeding

with roofs and boiler. Mr. Wheeler stated that somewhere down the road, there was a more ideal approach of getting a slab on grade structure to the left of the current building where equipment would be housed. The estimate for the floor was \$300,000 which was a number HEB felt comfortable with as they had reached out to contractors with plans. The single sole bid received for just that work, came in at \$658,240. Mr. Wheeler commented that not unlike what is happening with the Mason Street Bridge where the bid came in at twice the amount of the estimate with only one bidder. Mr. Wheeler advised this brings the question of rethinking all of this as the City doesn't have that money. Mayor Grenier commented that the contractor who bid on this project had helped formulate the price with the engineers when the project was first initiated. Councilor Eastman questioned what was the justification for the increase in cost. Mr. Wheeler advised that Chris Fournier from HEB will be submitting a letter to the City as he has spoken with the contractor. The main reason given for the increase from the contractor was the cost of the structural steel. Councilor Eastman questioned if this was just for the floor and if this needed to be done now or can it wait next year. Mr. Wheeler responded yes just for the structural improvements and that he reviewed the 2015 structural report from HEB which showed at the time the building was not in immediate need or in immediate danger of collapsing, but pointed out cracks in the concrete, degradation of the steel. They did the structural assessment the best they could with the information they had and determined the building is structurally underrated and won't carry the loads currently going in.

Mayor Grenier asked what the next step is. Mr. Wheeler responded he would like the summary letter from Chris at HEB before moving forward. He stated that an alternative, if the City is comfortable with not doing the work, another option could be to pursue the building, but advised the building is \$893,000 on the estimate, but the bid could come in much higher. Councilor Otis questioned where is the fire dept. at with improvement costs. Mayor Grenier responded with the building and two pieces of apparatus it is at \$3,000,000. Councilor Rozek questioned Chief Watkins if there would be more funding available if they were mutual aid. Chief Watkins responded possibly as it would help increase calls, but could also hurt the budget. Councilor Remillard questioned what is the draw back to mutual aid. Chief Watkins advised it would increase overtime cost as every time City firefighters leave Berlin, it creates overtime.

Chief Watkins also informed Council he just received notification that the fire dept. just missed the engine grant again this year, but because they changed the classification of departments, they can now classify as a combination department instead of a career department which does open up more funding. Councilor Remillard questioned what is the draw back to becoming a mutual aid fire dept. Chief Watkins stated that for example if Milan had a fire and Gorham had a fire and they wanted a crew from Berlin to go, it would be good as they would get well trained firefighters to go, however it would cost the City overtime in order to do that. Councilor Eastman questioned if an overtime cost is automatic every time the firefighters leave Berlin. Chief Watkins responded yes, the contract is written stating when they leave City limits, replacements need to be called in. Councilor Eastman questioned if there is a way to quantify the advantage of the mutual aid in regards to more funding available. Chief Watkins stated that for example if we belonged to a mutual aid, one of the big things FEMA requests is the critical infrastructure. Where the City of Berlin has a water critical infrastructure, if we belonged to a mutual aid, we could potentially add more critical infrastructure stating that the ladder truck is first due to Gorham for their multiple places of critical infrastructures. Councilor Remillard commented that in her opinion the advantages of becoming mutual aid outweigh the cost. She questioned the process of becoming mutual aid. Chief Watkins advised it was \$250 per year and Council has to sign a form. He stated a concern of the union would be they will lose staffing if we belong to a mutual aid. He commented it could also affect response time. Councilor Remillard commented she would like to hear more about becoming a mutual aid. Chief Watkins stated he would work on putting something together

for Council. Mayor Grenier advised Chief Watkins when he's prepared to make a detailed presentation to Council, it will be added to the agenda.

Chief Watkins advised Council on August 25, 2021 was the fire Dept.'s annual pump testing and engine 1 failed by a substantial amount. He stated the initial quote received was \$15,000 to rebuild the pump. He received more estimates and the lowest came in at \$11,500. Engine 1 is now out of service. While pump testing engine 2, an issue with the transmission cooler was noticed. They finished the pump testing which passed and brought engine 2 to the public works garage to fix the transmission issue. Public Works was able to fix the transmission cooler but advised it wouldn't pass state inspection for September. He mentioned engine 3 has been out of service for a couple years and engine 4 was out of service for 2 days in order to pass state inspection which passed and they were able to complete the pump testing which also passed. The plan is to have engine 1 repaired and thereafter bring engine 2 to the garage for repairs so it can pass state inspection. Councilor Morgan asked if the City has certain mechanics that can work on engines. Chief Watkins responded there are no public works mechanics trained to work on fire engine pumps. Mayor Grenier commented that during the next budget season, the new City Manager will have to allocate at least \$150,000 for a new fire engine. Councilor Rozek questioned the cost of a brand-new four-wheel drive engine. Chief Watkins responded about \$750,000.

PWD Laborer/Equipment Operator Position Fill Request

Mr. Wheeler advised Council the Carpenter position was filled with someone in house which is resulting in an open PWD laborer/equipment operator position that he would like permission from Council to fill. Councilor Remillard moved to approve the City Manager's request to fill the PWD laborer/equipment operator position; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor.

Riverfire Application

Mr. Wheeler presented the NHDOT form for temporary heliport application. This was done the last time at the riverfire and was successful, so they are looking to do this again this year. Mr. Wheeler advised he shared this form with the Fire and Police Chiefs. The Police Chief did mention a concern in regards to drones. There is an effort to notify the Public not to fly drones in that area at the time of the event. Councilor Remillard moved to approve the application from the Chamber of Commerce Riverfire Committee to allow CR Helicopters the right to fly in the City of Berlin; Councilor Rozek seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor.

Other

Ms. Laflamme advised Council there is no need to accelerate the resolution process for resolution 2021-20 for the sale of 121 Main street as the City's attorney reviewed the resolution and marked it up after it had already been sent out to Council. Ms. Laflamme also stated the letter of intent was just received from Mr. Scalley and it states that he doesn't intend to close for a while. He intends to come to the planning board for site plan approval for his project and wants the transaction to occur not more than 35 days after a final non-appealable decision of a planning board decision which puts him out quite a way. She informed Council the resolution process doesn't need to be accelerated and can go through the normal process with a revised copy including the City attorney, Chris Boldt's edits at the September 20th City Council meeting.

At 8:22pm, Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Theberge to enter into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II; (a) The dismissal, promotion or compensation of any public employee. The motion carried unanimously by roll call.

The compensation of any public employees was discussed.

At 8:30pm, Council and Staff came out of non-public session.

Councilor Rozek moved to seal the minutes as releasing them would render the action taken ineffective; Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor.

There being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Grenier recessed before moving on to the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Danielle Rioux
Executive Assistant

*Minutes are unofficial until they have been accepted by the City Council by motion.