

City Council Work Session November 22, 2021

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Community Development Director Pam Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Deputy Chief of Police Dan Buteau, Assessing Coordinator Lise Barrette and William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun.

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:37pm.

Mayor Grenier requested to add an item under other for the acceptance of the minutes of the November 8, 2021 Non-Public Session as they were not sealed and need to be discussed. Councilor Higbee moved to add an item under other for the acceptance of the minutes of the November 8, 2021 Non-Public Session, Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried by all in favor.

Building and Land Sale Fall 2021

Ms. Laflamme presented an updated list of the multi-family properties owned highlighting the properties that are two units or less. This included 767 Second Avenue, 96-98 Hillside Avenue, 609 Hillsboro Street and 615-611 Rockingham Street. She also presented to Council a sample language for bid documents for two family properties which includes a deposit request and she commented that usually the City requests that the rehabilitation work be completed within a year. Councilor Remillard questioned if a buyer doesn't get all the work done and ask for an extension, will it get approved. Ms. Laflamme commented that the City would probably have Mr. Salek confirm that there is active work on going and they are making an honest effort. Mr. Wheeler commented extensions have been granted in the past. Ms. Laflamme advised that the abutters on Maple and Seventh Avenue have been contacted, notified and they're all set. She also stated the three single family properties which are 212 Glen Avenue, 293 Burgess Street and 827 Western Avenue will be going out to bid shortly as she is finishing the bid documents. Councilor Remillard moved to put up for sale the four multi-family properties which are 767 Second Avenue, 96-98 Hillside Avenue, 609 Hillsboro Street and 615-611 Rockingham Street for a \$5,000 minimum bid amount and a \$5,000 escrow for building improvements with a 12-month time frame to obtain an occupancy permit, Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried by all in favor.

Ms. Laflamme discussed the land parcels. She informed Council that BWW is interested in the property on Jericho Road so she removed it from the list. She presented to Council six parcels with photos and acreage. First parcel is 94 Granite Street which is currently used by the abutter which shows no interest in purchasing it. The second parcel is 758 Second Avenue, which we've received interest from abutters. The third is 155 Willow Street which is a buildable lot and has been put out to bid before. The fourth parcel is 421 Burgess Street which is 0.11 acres and has less than 50' of frontage on the street, could be offered to abutters, it is a residential lot. The fifth parcel is 466 Burgess Street which is similar to 421 Burgess Street. The sixth parcel is 290 Grafton Street is a 100' x 100' flat lot and is on the corner of King and Grafton Street. Councilor Remillard questioned if any of these properties have been put up for bid already. Ms. Laflamme responded only 155 Willow Street has. Mayor Grenier suggested offering 466 Burgess Street to abutters. Councilor Remillard commented 421 Burgess should be offered to abutters also. Mayor Grenier suggested offering all parcels to abutters first for a minimum bid of \$1,500 with the requirements of joining to their existing lots except for 290 Grafton Street as this is a buildable lot and can be put out separately later.

Special Warrants for Tax Billing

Mrs. Barrette explained the first four warrants are for properties that were sold by the City to Taxpayers and the taxes needed to be prorated. The rest are due to issues when transferring data from the Vision program to the City's finance program Munismart, there were discrepancies in the transferred data so these warrants represent the adjustments to collect the outstanding taxes that weren't identified in the original warrant presented. Councilor Remillard moved to allow the City comptroller to proceed with the Tax billing, Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with a recusal from Councilor Berthiaume.

BTLA Settlement Agreement – Abatement

Mrs. Barrette stated Richard Mattos of Lancaster Street filed an appeal with the BTLA after the City of Berlin denied his abatement requests. Mr. Mattos has been in communication with the assessing firm representing the City, Corcoran Consulting Associates, Inc and they have reached an agreement which is what is being presented to Council tonight. It is an adjustment for years 2020 and 2021. Mayor Grenier questioned if both parties had signed off on this agreement. Mrs. Barrette responded yes, they have. Councilor Higbee moved to approve the tax abatement for Mr. Mattos, Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with recusals from Councilors Eastman and Rozek.

Brown School

Ms. Laflamme advised back in 2019, Council had decided on Wildcat LLC (Fred Dambrie) as the developer. Mr. Dambrie had come to the Planning Board in early 2020, but things stalled after this due to Covid. She explained she kept communications with him trying to finish and finalize things, but he really was not ready. By the time he was ready, he had changed the funding sources changed. It went from being privately funded to being a combination of privately and publicly funded. This resulted in the City putting out a new RFP earlier this fall. The only two proposals received were from New England Family Housing and Wildcat LLC. Interviews were held last Thursday night. After each interview, it was determined that both are doing comparable projects, both putting in 20 units, both looking to use public funds, they each own and manage several units in the City. When it came down to separate the two, there were small nuances in that New England Family Housing has done some bigger projects like Bartlett School, 97 Main Street and are quite experienced with CDBG funds and HOME funds.

The Committee decided to see what New England Family Housing could do and how quickly. She advised Council she has spoken with both developers to let them know a recommendation was being brought to Council tonight to move forward with New England Family Housing. She advised that New England Family Housing are ready to go ahead and start putting their application in with the Community Finance Authority as early as January if Council agrees to move forward. She advised she would be bringing to Council, on December 6, a resolution authorizing an option agreement to start with New England Family Housing as well as the CDBG process. Councilor Eastman questioned if New England Family Housing is nonprofit. Ms. Laflamme responded no, they are for profit. Councilor Eastman commented this would be for low income housing. Ms. Laflamme stated it would be a mix of low to moderate income.

Mayor Grenier questioned if the City would be sponsoring a CDBG grant and if we had to hire a CDBG grant administrator. Ms. Laflamme responded yes, we'd be sponsoring a CDBG grant, but New England Family Housing already hired a grant administrator. Mayor Grenier questioned if in the agreement we could specify only five low income units. Ms. Laflamme responded she would find out the CDBG requirements. Councilor Berthiaume questioned what they are paying for this. Ms. Laflamme stated

both developers were asking to take the building for a dollar. Councilor Remillard moved to allow Ms. Laflamme to proceed with an option agreement with New England Family Housing for Brown School, Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one vote in opposition from Councilor Eastman.

Mask Ordinance

Mr. Wheeler presented to Council updates dated November 19th and 22nd from AVH and CCFHS which shows Covid is still present in our Community. Both Healthcare facilities are asking for the City to extend the mask ordinance for another two weeks as they are expecting a potential spike in cases. Councilor Berthiaume questioned if the City is still in status Red. Mr. Wheeler advised per the communication date November 19th from AVH, we are in status green. Mayor Grenier commented he is not in favor of extending another 2 weeks. He advised he looked at the DHHS website and there are 27 active cases in Berlin. He suggested extending it till the end of the month of November only. Councilor Remillard commented she would like it extended another two weeks as requested by the Healthcare facilities. Councilor Higbee commented he agrees with extending another two weeks as requested by the Healthcare professionals. Councilor Rozek moved to extend the mask requirements for Public participation to end at midnight on Tuesday November 30th, Councilor Eastman seconded and the motion carried by roll call vote. Higbee - no, Rozek – yes, Berthiaume – yes, Remillard – no, Morgan – yes, Eastman – yes, Theberge – no, Grenier - yes

Other

Mr. Wheeler distributed to Council the [minutes](#) from the Non-Public Session held on November 8th, 2021 relative to Ms. Laflamme filing the role of Interim City Manager. He advised the minutes weren't sealed so they are to be made public. Councilor Remillard moved to accept the Non-Public Session minutes of November 8th, 2021 and place on file. Councilor Higbee commented he was listed in the minutes as seconding a motion, but he was absent that night. Ms. Fortin advised she would amend the minutes to state Councilor Berthiaume in place of Councilor Higbee. Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor.

At 7:35pm, Mayor Grenier requested to enter in Non-Meeting per RSA 91-A:2, I. (b) Collective Bargaining. Councilor Theberge moved with a second from Councilor Morgan to enter into Non-Meeting per RSA 91-A:2, I. (b) Collective Bargaining. So, moved, the motion carried by roll call with all in favor.

At 8:07pm, Mayor, Council and Staff came out of Non-Meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Councilor Rozek moved to adjourn; Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried by all in favor. The meeting ended at 8:08 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Danielle Rioux
Executive Assistant

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