

City Council Work Session December 6, 2021

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

Others present: Interim City Manager & Community Development Director Pam Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Assessing Coordinator Lise Barrette, Chief of Police Peter Morency, William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun, Members of the Public including; Micah Bachner, Amber Bachner, Stuart Light, Lori Korzen, Steven Korzen, Wanetta Collins, Ralph Collins, Richard King, Eamon Kelley, Steven Binette, Kathy Trumbull, John Trumbull, Rachel Eastman, Connor Arsenault and Natalie Guitard.

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Assessing – 2021 Equalization Municipal Assessment Data Certificate

Mrs. Barrette presented to Council the equalization study for the 2021 tax year prepared by Corcoran Consulting Associates, Inc. She commented the City's assessments are down to 73% of market value and at this time last year after the revaluation conducted in 2020, the assessments were at 98% of market value. The real estate market has increased by 25% in just one year. The letter provided by Corcoran Consulting stated it is expected that the City will need to undergo another valuation update for 2022 to achieve an assessment ratio close to 100%. Mrs. Barrette is asking Council to approve the Mayor signing the certificate. Councilor Remillard moved to authorize the Mayor to sign the 2021 Equalization Municipal Assessment Data Certificate, Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried by roll call vote with all in favor.

Agreement Amendment No. 2 – I&I Building Demolition Project

Ms. Laflamme advised this is an amendment to the contract with Wright-Pierce for the building demolition part of the I&I project. She commented the previous City Manager Mr. Wheeler had negotiated a scope of service with Wright-Pierce for them to oversee this phase of the project. This increases the initial contract amount with Wright-Pierce for engineering services. It went from \$59,850 to \$68,750 resulting in an increase of \$8,900. Councilor Remillard questioned if this increase is covered under the funding the City is receiving for this project. Ms. Laflamme responded yes, it is covered. Councilor Remillard moved to approve the amendment No. 2 – I&I Building Demolition Project with Wright-Pierce, Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Speed Limit Change on East Milan Road

Ms. Laflamme advised this comes from the Traffic Safety Committee. White Mountain Lumber had come to the City requesting a reduction in speed limit in front of their business from the cemetery right before WML that goes to the smaller cemetery up on the hill which is a 30mph zone. They are asking this gets pushed back to a 25mph zone for safety purposes. Deputy Chief Buteau attended the last Traffic Safety Committee meeting and agrees with the reduction. Ms. Laflamme advised this will be presented under new business during tonight's regular meeting as a resolution and will be the first read. Councilor Higbee commented the area of Brown school is still listed as a low speed school zone and is wondering if it needs to be changed. Council agreed to receive input from Police Chief Morency who is present. Chief Morency commented the low speed school zone is only in effect during school hours which is not in place anymore so would revert to the 25 mph.

Zoning Ordinance Amendments

Ms. Laflamme advised the Planning Board has been discussing over several months now, small changes to the zoning ordinance to make it easier to build on existing 50'x100' lots which is still the City's predominant lot size. She explained that right now, for residential single family, two family and residential general the requirement is for 100' of frontage as a minimum. The Planning Board is recommending to allow usage of existing lots which most are 50'x100' to build on. This would change the frontage requirements from 100' back to 50' which is what it was for many years until the new ordinance was proposed in 1999. She mentioned the presentation from Urban3 earlier this past winter showed density as being a good thing especially where existing infrastructure is already laid out, where water and sewer is already in place. The advice from the presenter was to take advantage of what you have which is what started this conversation with the Planning Board. Ms. Laflamme commented it will be up for first read at the December 20th Council meeting. Mayor Grenier commented he would like this item added to next week's Council work session as he has issues with potential subdivision of 100'x100' lots. He stated if they are existing 50'x100' lots within a neighborhood that has 50'x100' lots, he's not opposed to allowing the change. If it's an area of the community that has 100'x100' lots, he doesn't think it would serve the interest of the community by allowing people to subdivide 100'x100' lots.

At 6:49pm, Councilor Theberge moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to go into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II; (a) The dismissal, promotion or compensation of any public employee (b) Hiring. So, moved, the motion carried by roll call with all in favor.

The dismissal, promotion or compensation of any public employee and Hiring matters were discussed.

At 7:05pm, Council and Staff came out of Non-Public Session.

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

At 7:07pm, 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.