

City Council Work Session

March 7, 2022

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Robert Theberge, Higbee, Eastman, Roland Theberge, Remillard, Morency, Morgan and Berthiaume.

Others present: Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Fire Chief Jay Watkins, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Chief of Police Dan Buteau, Lt. Nathan Roy, Brandon Bisson, Laura Boucher of Granite United Way, James Patry of AVH, Ben Belanger President of the White Mountain Rotary Club, Steve Korzen, Lori Korzen, Stuart Light, Carl Ouellet and William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:33 p.m.

Community Member / Volunteer Recognition Request

Mayor Grenier commented that last October, Mr. Guy Lopez passed away from Covid. We have a group of citizens here this evening, other volunteers in the community, who wish to honor Guy's decades long involvement in the community primarily through the Granite United Way. Ms. Laura Boucher of Granite United Way stated Mr. Lopez worked with Granite United Way for many years. He also volunteered with the White Mountain Rotary Club, the Berlin Main Street Program, Androscoggin Valley Hospital, the Coos County Retired Seniors Program and the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce. Some of the members from these groups are looking for ways to recognize Guy Lopez. She commented some ideas discussed were to rename one of the parks in the City in his name. They would also like to install a memorial bench in the park with his picture and a saying "In memory of Guy Lopez, dedicated Volunteer and Beloved Friend of the Community". She commented they were unsure of the park renaming process so if it's not possible, they would like to at least put a bench in a park like the Laura Viger Park. She presented pictures to Council showing some of the benches in the PSNH Park and Laura Viger Park.

Councilor Remillard questioned how much funds were raised. Ms. Boucher commented she has \$1,000 from the Granite United Way CEO and will be asking the other organizations Mr. Lopez volunteered for. She commented the bench will be purchased and installed by Nicoletti Memorials. Councilor Eastman commented he likes the idea of using the Laura Viger Park and adding memorial benches through it. Mayor Grenier suggested maybe having a pavilion in the Laura Viger Park named "the Guy Lopez Pavilion" instead of a bench. Ms. Boucher commented she would need to look at funding for that, but thinks it would be very nice. Mayor Grenier advised Ms. Boucher to design a pavilion, come back to Council and he'll help her raise the money. Councilor Remillard commented she likes the idea of the Laura Viger Park location and how much money is raised will determine what can be placed there either a pavilion or a bench. Mr. Patry thanked Mayor Grenier and Ms. Boucher for putting the work into this. He commented this has personal meaning for him as he was good friends with Mr. Lopez. Mr. Ben Belanger, President of the White Mountain Rotary Club, stated Mr. Lopez was also a good friend of his and he feels he is worthy of recognition in some way. He is happy to work with the Mayor, Council and everyone else involved to find a good way to dedicate his memory.

FY23 City Manager's Budget Submission

Ms. Laflamme thanked everyone for their patience with her through this process. She personally thanked Ms. Larsen for all her work and help. She commented this isn't the typical CM budget presentation as she was still working on it this afternoon. She presented the first pass of the [FY23 City Manager's Budget](#). She commented Department Heads each submitted their budget which she did very little editing of. The big editing comes from the Capital Improvements budget which she was very conservative with. One of the biggest increases was for elections as this past year we only had municipal election and this coming fiscal year we'll have the State primary in September and regular election in November. There are a lot of unknowns, three union negotiations just started last week, we are still working on health insurance and there are still funding questions in regards to the Mason Street Bridge project. This first pass at the budget identifies a tax rate of

\$42.59 which is an increase of \$6.05 over the current rate of \$36.54. She commented she kept a lot of the information the prior City Manager's had included when he developed his budget worksheet. \$800,000 was taken from the undesignated fund balance to use to reduce the rate. She used the same overlay amount that was in the tax filing forms Ms. Larsen put in last November to set our rate. We used \$80,000 in Veterans service credits, all of these items from our MS-1, DRA's education tax warrant. All of those are prescribed numbers. She distributed a [worksheet](#) to Council that compares FY22 and FY23 showing increases and decreases in percent's. She commented there are still things that will be added in as we go along in the budget process. Councilor Eastman asked the tax rate is based on which year's valuation. Ms. Laflamme commented it was based on the current valuation from last Fall's amount. Councilor Eastman questioned if the budget stays the same and the valuation increases this coming fall, would the tax rate go down. Ms. Laflamme commented yes, if the valuation increases, the tax rate will go down. Mayor Grenier commented to keep in mind the equalization factor was not used to get to this tax rate. Councilor Berthiaume questioned the increase in the cemetery total. Ms. Laflamme commented the increase is due to us budgeting an actual person do the mowing as there has been issues and complaints with the current quality of work.

Abatement Recommendations

Ms. Laflamme presented the abatement recommendations received from Corcoran Consulting. The first one is for Bristol Central Square, LLC. The property is located at 1327 Main Street (Map 127 Lot 266). Based on information obtained by Corcoran Consulting and the taxpayer not demonstrating the true market value of the property, they are recommending denying the abatement. Councilor Remillard moved to deny the abatement request from Bristol Central Square, LLC, Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

The second is for William and Dorothy Bolia of 290 Howard Street (Map 138 Lot 32). Corcoran Consulting asked for a full interior inspection, but were only allowed into the garage, therefore weren't able to confirm some of the things. During the inspection, they also discovered a pool house that was never recorded on the property card. It was added in 2019. Despite the removal of the finished area over the garage, the added value of the pool house brings the total revised valuation up from \$270,400 to \$283,600. Therefore, Corcoran Consulting is recommending denying this abatement application. Councilor Berthiaume moved to deny the abatement request from William and Dorothy Bolia, Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

The third is for Richard and Paula Huot for a parcel of land they own on Third Avenue (Map 111 Lot 49). They are requesting an abatement as the property is unbuildable as it has no road frontage on either Third Avenue or Harding Street. Corcoran Consulting is recommending returning the condition factor back to 90% off of market value to reflect the land locked status of the property and approving the abatement changing the assessment from \$20,900 to \$2,300. Councilor Remillard moved to approve the abatement recommendation to \$2,300, Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

The fourth is for Thomas Rozek of 1 Lovett Street (Map 139 Lot 1). Corcoran Consulting requested a full inspection which they did. There was 40 square feet shed listed on the property record card which fell down four years ago, the garage was listed as 2,240 square feet which is incorrect, it's only 1,100 square feet. They are recommending approving the abatement application for the 2021 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$167,800 to \$153,500. Councilor Remillard moved to approve the abatement request for Mr. Thomas Rozek to \$153,500, Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

The fifth is for Christopher Crooker. The property is located at 626 Cheshire Street (Map 130 Lot 29). This property is listed as a single-family home on our tax card. It is no longer used as a single-family home but rather a personal use garage and storage building. Corcoran Consulting did an interior inspection and changed

the building to a workshop in fair condition. They are recommending approval of the abatement reducing the assessment from \$21,300 to \$13,700. Councilor Higbee moved to approve the abatement for Christopher Crooker to \$13,700, Councilor Roland Theberge seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

The last one is for Richard and Suzanne Garneau of 199 Coos Street (Map 129 Lot 60). The second floor of the home is unfinished and is an attic only. Corcoran Consulting did an interior inspection and determined the second floor is in fact unfinished and there is only an oddly situated (an unsafe) pull down stair access. They are recommending approving the abatement application for the 2021 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$104,400 to \$76,300. Councilor Berthiaume moved to approve the abatement request for Richard and Suzanne Garneau to \$76,300, Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

BEMS Contract

Chief Watkins reminded Council that back in November, he took over negotiating the EMS contract. Early December he met with Scott Lees, Operations Manager and William Rosenberg, Chief Executive Officer of Butler. Since then, he's been going back and forth on a weekly basis negotiating this proposed service agreement he is presenting tonight. There has been changes from both sides, but he feels this contract protects the City better than past contracts. He mentioned there are not many changes, mostly verbiage changes. He pointed to Article I and mentioned Butler wanted a 5-year contract, he countered with a 2 year contract with an option for a third. They settled with a 3-year contract. On page 6, under the monthly stipend there are five years listed, but he read a communication via email which states "with a 3-year contract, year 4 and 5 price guarantee is taken off the table. If the City signs a 4-year contract with the above prices in place, we will guarantee your 5th year as set forth". He stated he feels more comfortable with a 3-year contract. He pointed out to page 3, #5 he's added language stating should the fire department use supplies on a medical call, then BEMS will replace all those supplies used. On page 4, #8, it addresses should BEMS use our services above and beyond what we've agreed to, we will be able to bill BEMS for these additional services.

Mayor Grenier asked Chief Watkins to go over to the Council and general public some of the concerns that he and Police Department had with use of municipal employees over and above the fire department to serve their contract to the City. Chief Watkins explained that when Covid started, one thing that 911 started doing was screening for Covid positive patients. In the past, 911 would handle calls in the City by sending them to the appropriate department. When 911 decided screening for Covid, he spoke with the PD and suggested they screen all 911 calls this way they're being screened then they would notify the other departments if they had Covid positive patients. They agreed and it worked very good and we're still doing it today. However, there has been quite an uptick of use of the dispatch center from the 911 standpoint where the old BEMS would get a lot of these calls directly in house. They weren't routed through the police department, they were routed directly to them. Mayor Grenier commented he feels we are paying a lot in subsidy to a private business. Chief Watkins advised in the very beginning there were discussions about charging dispatch fees, but it was quickly added into the contract on page 6 letter D. Basically, if the PD was going to charge Butler, they were just going to add it on to the stipend. It's just cross charging from one department to the other. Mayor Grenier stated he wants the taxpayers to know that not only will they be paying \$400,000 per year in a subsidy, they are also paying City employees, use and abuse of City vehicles, plus use of dispatch time to support their business. He commented he asked Police Chief Buteau today to quantify the cost of dispatch services to BEMS so instead of doing this on what it cost, he would like to have a true cost of what the City is supplying to BEMS. He would like for the Fire Chief to do the same.

Chief Watkins stated that after hearing concerns from Council, the fire department changed their response to medical calls. Councilor Berthiaume commented she spoke with the police department dispatch and she is mind blown that the PD dispatches 100% of their calls. She commented that prior to Butler, we were not dispatching 100% of their calls and now we are at a 63% increase in dispatching EMS calls out of the PD. That

puts a burden on the PD and it's not fair. She stated she doesn't think it's fair that someone in a private business, for profit business gets to tack on dispatching services back to the taxpayers. Mayor Grenier commented he would not support anything longer than 3 years. He commented that we can terminate the agreement by providing BEMS with a 60-day notice. He is asking if this is reciprocal. Chief Watkins advised BEMS can terminate at any time. Mayor Grenier commented he would like to see it reciprocal with a 60-day notice from both sides. Councilor Remillard questioned how much we've paid BEMS in the last three years. Ms. Laflamme commented the last 3 years have been the same at \$359,000 per year. 4 years ago, it was \$341,000 and 5 years ago it was \$323,000. Ms. Laflamme commented the PD did an estimate of dispatching fees based on this fiscal year and they came up with an amount of \$33,827. She commented the amount of \$376,000 for the first year in the contract factors those dispatch fees. Councilor Robert Theberge commented the effective year on the contract will need to be updated as it reflects 2021. Chief Watkins commented it will be updated. Councilor Roland Theberge questioned if when the fire department has to go out do they still use the ladder truck. Chief Watkins responded no, they do not. Primary they've been using the second newest engine. Councilor Roland Theberge mentioned there was talk about getting a rescue vehicle and asked if it was in the budget this year. Chief Watkins responded no as they are too far behind on replacing their regular trucks and need to get those bigger trucks in the replacement rotation. Councilor Roland Theberge asked if there is a way to maybe get a grant for a rescue vehicle. Chief Watkins said he would look into it. Mayor Grenier asked Chief Watkins to go back, add the couple things discussed and come back to Council for approval. He commented he would like to approve a contract that is not redlined. Council agreed.

At 7:46pm, Mayor Grenier requested to enter in Non-Meeting per RSA 91-A:2, I; (b) Collective Bargaining. Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Roland Theberge to enter into Non-Meeting per RSA 91- A:2, I; (b) Collective Bargaining. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

At 8:04pm, Mayor, Council and Staff came out of Non-Meeting.

At 8:05pm, 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.