

City Council Work Session
October 10, 2016

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

Others present included: City Manager James Wheeler, Chief Pete Morency, Assistant Chief Dan Buteau, Finance Director Patty Chase, City Clerk Elaine Riendeau, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun*

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Review of Pending Police Department Grants

Mayor Grenier stated that there were three grant resolutions on the City Council's October 3rd regular meeting agenda that Chief Morency is prepared to address. Chief Morency reported that the department has been looking for funding to attack the opioid epidemic. This grant for \$17,981.32 deals with Berlin, Gorham, Milan, Colebrook and provides overtime money for investigations in the next six months. Mayor Grenier asked if other communities are getting funds as well and if resources are being pooled to work in unison. Chief Morency indicated that other departments did not apply; however Berlin will be working together with the other communities.

With regard to a \$3,000 grant for Distracted Driving Patrols, Chief Morency stated that accidents happen because of distracted driving including dogs on laps, phones, or other forms of distraction. Funding is provided at 0 match. Councilor Higbee confirmed that the funding is for patrols that go beyond the duties of regular patrol.

The third grant is for \$3,600 for E-ticket Equipment for four patrol cars. Chief Morency explained that when an officer writes a citation, it can be done in the cruiser and everything is sent immediately to the court and prosecutor. If the person pays the fine, the information will be shared. Assistant Chief Buteau noted that the e-ticket works with State law; however if a city ordinance is broken, the officer will use the current procedure. Match for this grant is the training needed to operate the new system.

Councilor Rozek stated that he dislikes the e-ticket because it presumes guilt before the process is complete. He asked if the ticket can be retracted if it's in process. Chief Morency established that everything is the same up to where the officer writes the ticket; but rather than physically writing the ticket, the information is entered into the e-ticket system. Once it is in, the end result is the same; it can be voided or not processed.

There being no further questions, Chief Morency and Assistant Chief Buteau left the meeting at this time (6:45 p.m.)

Health Department Assessment Review

Mayor Grenier noted that there was US Census information included in the packets. To note is that the City's median age has dropped to age 44 meaning that younger working age people are making up more of the population. Mr. Wheeler acknowledged that staffing at the prisons is giving us a younger profile.

Mr. Wheeler stated that other cities in NH are not doing a visiting nurse program. Manchester and Nashua have health clinics and some of the other communities have no health department or their department focuses on health related inspections.

Councilor Rozek asked about the investment needed to continue with the health department's visiting nurse program. Mr. Wheeler estimated \$108,000.00 for staffing, \$36,000.00 for EMR software; EMR hardware \$50,000 and there is the cost of interim services over four months, approximately \$100,000.00. There will be interim costs in whatever direction the department goes. Councilor Rozek stated that this would not be a discontinuation of services for the public, it would be a transfer of current patients to another service.

Councilor Higbee reasoned that other organizations in the City do the work and they will have to hire additional staff to accommodate patients transferred to them. Councilor Rozek said that a critical element to keep in mind is that no one is going without care.

Mayor Grenier stated that if the visiting nurse program is eliminated and we leave a nurse in the department for clinics, it will still cost \$80,000.00 to \$85,000.00 per year in salary and benefits. Councilor Rozek made the point that the services are already provided and available by other agencies. Mayor Grenier reasoned that if all aspects of the health department are eliminated, there will still be half of Ms. Giroux's salary that is now being paid by Health. The Welfare budget would go up by \$36,000. Councilor Remillard questioned whether the City wants to be in the health field. There are agencies in the City who do the job and have the tools and programs to do the job. Ms. Giroux would continue to do health inspections.

Councilor Theberge stated that people depend on health care and there is not enough service out there. Mayor Grenier agreed saying that the demand is still greater than the ability to provide service due to the critical nursing shortage. He added that our employees would likely get a raise working elsewhere; however they would lose the retirement unless they work for the County. If the City gets out of the visiting nurse business, we would not be able to get back in.

Mayor Grenier indicated that there are only two options; either we go all in and provide the service realizing that some years we will lose money and other years, we return a profit. The other option is to get out entirely including the clinic functions. The Council should have a public hearing to take input from the public. If there is overwhelming response supporting the service, it would be considered. If this were strictly a business decision, it would be easy. Councilor Rozek said that it is important to know the public's view.

Mayor Grenier resolved that a decision needs to be made by the 1st of December so that the next budget is developed with the right information. The Council set the date for the public hearing as October 26 at 6:30 p.m. in the City Hall Auditorium. Councilor Higbee asked if the information could be distributed to the public before the meeting. With the facts in place, the Council could hear from both sides. Ultimately if a decision is made to get out, we will need to develop a strategy so that the hand off is seamless.

Councilor Higbee suggested that the City could hold sponsored clinics using per diem or part time help. He also asked what the implications are for union contracts. Mr. Wheeler said that most nurses would find work elsewhere. We would follow the contract for any issues with seniority or bumping.

Other

Councilor Rozek reported that he was approached by a citizen asking why Jericho Park does not have a racing track. He said the closest track is 2 hours away. Mr. Wheeler offered to call Chris Gamache to see what the State would consider.

Mayor Grenier said that Saturday is Riverfire and he encouraged anyone with a few hours to spare to volunteer.

Councilor Rozek moved to adjourn; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried. The meeting ended at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant