

**City Council Work Session
May 17, 2021**

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Community Development Director Pam Laflamme, Finance Director Holly Larsen, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Assessing Coordinator Lise Barrette, Deputy Chief of Police Dan Buteau, Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun and Members of the Public. Monica Hurley, Assessing Agent from Corcoran Consulting Associates was present via zoom.

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

Property Value Abatements

City Manager James Wheeler discussed the property abatement recommendations received from Monica Hurley, Assessing Agent from Corcoran Consulting Associates who was present via zoom to answer any questions. Thirty one property abatement recommendations were sent to the Mayor and Council Friday May 14 for their review. Mrs. Hurley discussed the standard process used to determine the abatements. She commented that the taxpayers must reference one out of the following three criteria's in order to merit an abatement application. The three criteria's are; data, comparable market sales and level of assessment. She also stated if the citizen's concerns are interior, they will schedule an interior inspection. Councilor Remillard questioned if the property owner states his property is assessed too high, how they would re-assess. Mrs. Hurley responded that they would look at the market analysis based on active sales, not conditional.

Mayor Grenier asked Mrs. Hurley if she was looking for approval tonight on the thirty one property abatement recommendations submitted. Mrs. Hurley responded that not necessarily, but would like to point out to Council that interest is ticking and her suggestion is to approve the abatements now, clear this up and send the taxpayers their refunds plus interest earlier rather than later. She did remind Council that the City technically has till July 1, 2021. Mayor Grenier did comment that most of the abatements recommendations presented reflects the City having to pay taxpayers back so he agrees with acting on this sooner rather than later. Mrs. Hurley also commented that the majority of the abatements were interior related and there had not been any interior inspections on these properties for many years. Councilor Remillard requested a little more time to review the abatement recommendations submitted. Mayor Grenier did state Council would be meeting next Monday May 24 to discuss further. Mrs. Hurley stated she had fifteen more abatements recommendations that are ready and that she just needs to type up the memos for Council. Mayor Grenier asked Mrs. Hurley if she could have the extra fifteen sent by Wednesday May 19. She stated she would make every effort to send them by Wednesday. Mrs. Hurley confirmed there was 109 abatement applications received which represents 1.5% of the properties in Berlin.

Mason Street Bridge

City Manager James Wheeler presented the Bid Review Letter from HEB in regards to the one bid received from R.M.Piper, Inc. that was much higher than anticipated. HEB had estimated the project to be about \$282,974.50, but the bid came in at \$564,385.00. Prior to receiving this higher bid, his suggestion was to use leftover funds from the construction loan which represented about \$206,000.000 and was appropriating \$150,000.00 in the FY22 budget which would have covered the original estimated project cost. HEB did look to see if any items could be taken out of the project to

reduce the cost. They did reflect removing painting from the project which would reduce the bid amount by \$60,000.00. Mr. Wheeler explained with this increase, the requested amount in the FY22 budget would increase from \$150,000.00 to \$350,000.00. One of the critical component is the bridge seal that they need to order soon in order to start the project in September as planned.

Councilor Remillard pointed out that HEB had projected a cost of \$4,400.00 for maintenance of traffic compared to R.M.Piper's bid which reflected \$45,000.00 for maintenance of traffic. She asked if this is something the City could do themselves. Mr. Wheeler stated that maybe and informed that R.M. Piper is likely charging a premium which is inserted into a variety of items included in the bid and feels like this item most probably reflects a premium. Councilor Remillard questioned what the mobilization item represents. Mr. Wheeler advised this was for the upfront items like getting their equipment here, setting up a field trailer, bonds, insurance, basically all items needed upfront. Mr. Wheeler also commented that this was the third time this project went out to bid. The first two times, no bids were received. A conversation was had with R.M.Piper to entice them to bid. There is maybe 4 or 5 bridge contractors that can do this type of work. Mr. Wheeler stated we could hold off on this project, but there is no guarantee we will receive any bids if we put it back out to bid at a later time. Councilor Otis questioned if the State Bridge Aid Grant would cover any of these costs. Mr. Wheeler responded the State Bridge Aid Grant will not fund this type of work. They will not fund work that is considered maintenance and most of this work is replacement of which does not qualify. Mr. Wheeler did state that this item was at the top of the list sent to Congresswoman Kuster's appeal to the communities for projects. Since then we have learned that most likely this phase wouldn't be approved because they don't want a project that has already been out to bid. We will plan on requesting \$300,000 for phase 2 which is next year. We did ask for \$600,000 in response to Kuster's appeal. We're assuming if approved, it would be \$600,000 this year and \$600,000 next year which would fund the whole project, but still doesn't cover the \$500,000.00 for this year.

Councilor Remillard asked if this project was on the red list. Mayor Grenier responded it's been on the red list for the last 3 years and it's a necessary expenditure. Councilor Rozek asked if we change the structure from steel to concrete or replace the bridge, would it qualify for the State Bridge Aid Grant. Mr. Wheeler advised he would ask. Councilor Remillard asked if doing this would open up to more bidders. Councilor Rozek responded yes and it would extend the life of the bridge. Mr. Wheeler also stated another option would be to go back to Congresswoman Kuster and request \$1,200,000.00 instead of the \$600,000 and see if it goes through. This would delay the project another year. Mayor Grenier asked Mr. Wheeler when he needed an answer by. He responded 2 weeks. Councilor Theberge commented that the bridge gets inspected every year and asked if there were major changes. Mr. Wheeler responded that it was mostly related to decay in the mortar and concrete piers. Mr. Wheeler concluded by stating he will investigate the idea of replacing the bridge per Councilor Rozek's request.

Lower Glen Ave. Drain Line Issue

City Manager James Wheeler advised the Mayor and Council about an issue with the lower Glen Avenue drain line. He described a sink hole resulting from a storm drain line failure. The sink hole is on Berhen's Paper Mill property. The drain line runs from Cascade Hill and drains to the Androscoggin River just south of the current Vintage Junky store. The sink hole is approximately 10' from the river's edge. The drain line also crosses mill process water, natural gas and landfill gas lines before exiting to the river. He is currently looking at assessing the situation and coming up with an interim solution to eventually find a long term solution. All sewer line drain funds have been allocated to High Street in

the FY22 proposed budget. Councilor Remillard asked if this is something we would contract out or can we do it ourselves. Mr. Wheeler advised it would have to be contracted out, but maybe we can do it ourselves if we do an interim fix. Mr. Wheeler advised this is an FYI and will gather more information.

Congressionally Directed Spending Request

Community Development Director Pam Laflamme presented a project list along with the estimates to the Mayor and Council. She advised that the Senate will be [restoring the authority to approve Congressionally-directed spending items](#). She is looking for direction on which projects they would like her to pursue which is due in by Friday May 21. She also advised that we've received more information on the process and it was confirmed we wouldn't receive a response before November. She stated all request will be going through Senator Shaheen's office. Ms. Laflamme advised she was informed by both Senator Shaheen and Congresswoman Kuster's offices that there is no guarantee the requests will be approved. She suggested pursuing the Route 110 Infrastructure upgrades. Councilor Eastman stated he agrees with Ms. Laflamme's suggestion to pursue the Route 110 Infrastructure upgrades. Mayor Grenier advised that Coos County will be receiving \$3,065,000.00 per year for two years that will get split between the three districts. The County has allocated those funds to Covid related issues but also to Water and Sewer. There is still a lot to look into, but hoping Berlin gets an amount that could be allocated to one of the projects from the list. Councilor Higbee suggested the Fire Department Equipment Floor Repairs to be prioritized as a project as he would hate to see a fire truck go through the floor. City Manager James Wheeler advised that we do have funds leftover from the construction loan that is allocated to the Fire Department Floor Repairs. Mayor Grenier commented as far as needs for the community, the Mason Street Bridge project is on top of the list. Ms. Laflamme will look into different options. She will discuss with Senator Shaheen's office if it's an option to put in requests for the Mason Street Bridge project on both the Congress and Senate side. If not an option, she will pursue the Route 110 Infrastructure upgrades project.

Letter from Aaron and Pamela Throneberry re NH Liquor License

Mayor Grenier read the letter received from Aaron and Pamela Throneberry which communicates they are requesting support from Council to approve opening a coffee Bistro located at 151 Main Street, Berlin. They will also serve as an upscale cocktail lounge from the hours of 7pm to 1:30am. They would like a letter from Council addressed to the NH Liquor Commissioner supporting their endeavor. Councilor Rozek moved to send a letter to the NH Liquor Commissioner on behalf of the City Council supporting Aaron and Pamela Throneberry's endeavor at Main Street Affairs; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Non-Meeting

At 7:31pm, 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 Theberge to go into Non-Meeting per RSA 91-A:2, I. (b) Collective Bargaining. So moved, the motion carried with all in favor.

At 7:49pm. Mayor, Council and Staff came out of Non-Meeting. There being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Grenier moved 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.