

City Council Work Session September 10, 2018

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, Library Director Denise Jensen, Claire Stiles, Barbara Tetreault *Berlin Daily Sun*.

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:32 p.m.

Library Grant Proposal

Ms. Laflamme explained that the library needs works and it was decided to do a conditions assessment to determine the extent of what is needed. The NH Preservation Alliance offers grants of up to \$4,500, which have to be matched, to study conditions and historic preservation of the building. Alba Architects was consulted and they recommended a masonry assessment and a mechanical, engineering and plumbing assessment. Once completed, the report will unlock construction dollars; all grants require the assessment. Photos of the interior and exterior of the building will need to be submitted. It will take eight weeks to make a decision. Mayor Grenier noted that the City appropriated money for local match and this will leverage those dollars for a bigger project. The estimate for the study is \$13,000 so we will end up matching more than the required 50%. Ms. Laflamme added that the Library is in the historic district which is necessary for the grant.

Councilor Higbee asked how ALBA came to be involved. Ms. Laflamme stated that they came highly recommended by the Preservation Alliance. Stuart Anderson has worked on two other Carnegie Libraries. Mayor Grenier confirmed that there should be a final report in March or April. Ms. Laflamme asked for a vote adding that a formal resolution will come before the Council next week.

Councilor Rozek moved to authorize the Community Development Director and Library Director to apply for a \$4,500 NH Preservation Alliance grant to repair the Library building; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried.

Sewer Extension Follow Up

Mr. Wheeler stated that he is following up on a request from Bob Goddard for the City to participate at a greater level on the installation of a sewer extension for his property on Balsam Street. The Council asked for information on how the sewer extensions of recently built houses had been handled. For a house on Bemis Street that required approximately 100 feet, the city provided the pipe and a manhole. Ryan Landry did not need an extension as his house was built 475 feet off the road; he decided to put in a septic system. With the Nelson property, the city provided 100 feet of pipe and a manhole which was enough to complete the connection.

Councilor Rozek asked if Mr. Goddard has already run the sewer line to the edge of the property and Mr. Wheeler stated that Mr. Goddard's letter indicated that he had. Councilor Theberge questioned the gated area at the Goddard property. Mr. Wheeler determined that the connection would be on Balsam Street and would terminate on a public street. He said that this will be a public sewer, that will need to be engineered, and constructed, to the end of Balsam Street.

Councilor Rozek suggested that the City supply the manhole and an additional 100 feet of pipe. Mayor Grenier agreed stating that this is a single family house and it is not the intent to have the city provide additional pipe for commercial development. Councilor Higbee confirmed that the design and installation is at the expense of the owner including backfill, stone, and pavement. Mayor Grenier made the point that the City's subdivision regulations have the provision for additional people who tie in to the sewer extension to pay the city for installation, then the city would reimburse Mr. Goddard.

Councilor Otis asked what the Manager's recommendation is. Mr. Wheeler indicated that the ordinance set a standard and it is the Council's choice to adjust as they see fit. He warned that the Council should be prepared for someone else to come and want additional pipe provided by the City. Councilor Remillard commented that we want to encourage growth. Mayor Grenier noted that we are setting a precedent on the ability in the ordinance to make changes. This change was made for a single family home; not a subdivision, or commercial development.

Councilor Remillard moved for the City to provide 200+- feet of pipe and a manhole for the sewer extension requested by Robert Goddard of Balsam Street; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried.

Property Value Discussion

Mr. Wheeler referred to a Chart showing property sales from October 2017 to July 2018. In many cases the sale price was higher than the assessed value. Single family homes show a sales ratio of .83; three family homes showed a ratio of 1.08 and the overall median ratio was .89. Normally we would not see the benefit of this increase until the revaluation to be done in 2020. We thought it would be prudent to recalibrate the model by conducting a statistical update of the values so that the most recent information is used.

KRT could do the work; however it would mean filing for an extension for the MS1 which would delay the tax bills until November. Councilor Remillard mentioned a system by which each sale is calculated and the model is consistently adjusted. Mr. Wheeler indicated Claremont is doing their revaluation every 2 years.

Mayor Grenier noted that the assessors will not be going into homes; this would be a statistical update based on sales. Houses that are under valued may see higher values. Homes valued at \$200,000 or greater will get a break. Apartment buildings will see an increase. Mr. Wheeler said that it makes sense to build some of the increase in now and the remainder when we do the update. Councilor Rozek commented that a tax rate of over \$4.00 will not attract new homeowners. Councilor Otis stressed that we need to continue to tackle blight and keep tearing down buildings. Mayor Grenier agreed saying that demolition in the tight neighborhoods raises the value of the houses next door.

Non Public Session

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Theberge to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II(d) land matters. So moved, the motion carried with all voting in favor by roll call.

Mr. Wheeler explained that the City took a property at 565 Burgess Street by tax deed. Marcel and Lisa Couture have lived there for some time and want to continue to live there. They made payments to a bank where the taxes were escrowed into the payment. Once the house was paid, the co-signer of the

loan received the deed and the tax bills which were not paid, nor were they forwarded. The Couture's have offered to pay the back taxes to get the house back. It will be around \$5,000. They would get a quitclaim deed from the city. Councilor Higbee confirmed that they would pay in a lump sum.

Councilor Rozek moved to come out of nonpublic session; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried.

Councilor Rozek moved to sell the tax deeded property at 565 Burgess St., map 130 lot 307, by quitclaim deed to Marcel and Lisa Couture for the sum of back taxes and legal fees, approximately \$5,000; Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Adjournment

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to adjourn the meeting; so moved, the motion carried. The meeting ended at 7:22 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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