

City Council Work Session
March 25, 2019

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Chief John Lacasse, Public Works Director Eric Grenier, Health & Welfare Director Angela Martin Giroux, BEMS Chris Dubey, Claire Stiles, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun*, and public

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

He asked to add two items: a non public session regarding land matters, and Funeral Expense to the agenda. Councilor Remillard so moved, Councilor Morgan Allain seconded and the motion carried.

Chamber of Commerce Request for Building Modification

Mr. Wheeler referred to a sketch provided by Mark Belanger that showed doors that would cover the entrance to the bunkhouse/cookhouse at the Service Credit Union Heritage Park. The doors would be left open most of the time; however when both buildings are being used, they could be closed to keep the weather out. Councilor Berthiaume clarified that these are barn doors that would be closed off for rentals. Mayor Grenier commented that they are wood doors that would look period. Councilor Gentili moved to approve the changes to the cookhouse bunkhouse; Councilor Otis seconded and the motion carried. Councilor Berthiaume abstained.

Ambulance

Mr. Wheeler noted that there is a study that was commissioned regarding EMS done by Matrix. They will come to present to the Council on April 8. The full report is still in draft and has not yet been made public.

Mr. Chris Dubey of Berlin EMS stated that the contract with the ambulance service is up June 30 and that has had an effect on their ability to get and retain people. He had suggestions for changes to the contract. There is a requirement to do special transports and they would like the ability to take weather into consideration and not take the ambulance out for transports when it is unsafe to drive. There is also an obligation to send monthly reports to the city and there is no contact for those reports. There should be a requirement to have a mutual aid agreement with surrounding communities that use the service. Mr. Dubey proposed that they would pay Berlin a portion of the subsidy.

If this were a normal year, it would be the first year of a 3 year agreement and the company would be focused on replacing capital items, but now they are more focused on paying long term debt. Uncertainty of the future is making his employees nervous and there is a lack of EMS personnel in the state which has increased their ability to get better wages. Mr. Dubey stated that he would like to increase wages across the board by \$1. per hour which would cost about \$25,000 to \$33,000 per year. With regard to new equipment, he asked if the city would consider purchasing and leasing to BEMS. He noted that the contract does not have to be finalized until the results of the Matrix study are known.

Mayor Grenier asked if Milan and Dummer are having difficulty getting people for their ambulance service. Mr. Dubey indicated that the people are great but they have full time jobs and are not always available. Milan has also suffered from a loss of volunteers.

Councilor Berthiaume asked if there is a percentage of Milan calls that are responded to. She added that she would like to see the month reports as part of the Manager's Report. She is concerned that Berlin is subsidizing other ambulance services. Councilor Remillard stated that last year it was felt that the calls were reciprocated. She asked if anything has changed. Mr. Dubey said that Gorham gets 403 calls per year and last year they had to turn down 132 of their calls. He confirmed that Berlin picked up approximately 75% of those calls. Mayor Grenier commented that Gorham is under the same circumstance with their call fire department depleting. Councilor Theberge asked if there is still a paramedic on duty for every shift. Mr. Dubey confirmed that there is, unless someone is sick or on call.

Mayor Grenier stated that the ambulance is a great service to the community and offers top notch service. Mr. Dubey offered to cooperate with whatever comes along with the EMS in the community. Mr. Dubey left the meeting at this time.

Health & Welfare

Angela Martin Giroux presented a chart with several years' worth of experience data showing what the City has given out in welfare assistance. She added that she's been able to maintain welfare expenses due to the relationship she has with other agencies and strong workfare program. Last year \$26,195 was given in general assistance.

On the Health Department side, Ms. Giroux said that she does a restaurant inspection of every restaurant and deli in Berlin. She also works with the Fire Department and Code Enforcement on complaints. Cases on average take about 1.5 hours each. They have developed a system to make responding to complaints as efficient as possible. Ms. Giroux stated that she's been working on housing coordinator duties as well.

Councilor Remillard asked if people are being assisted on a short term basis. Ms. Giroux replied that there is a shorter term because there is a short waiting list at the Housing Authority. Councilor Remillard asked if by eliminating low income buildings, are people more able to afford their rent? Ms. Giroux noted that it is more competitive to get apartments. There are fewer on the market and more landlords are asking for credit checks. When they are not able to find an apartment, some people are moving on.

01-425 Code Enforcement

Mr. Wheeler explained that this budget item pays for maintenance of tax deeded properties. He added that the cost to maintain Brown School was also added at a level of \$50,000.

Proposed Sewer Rate

Eric Grenier reported that the City's sewer rate is 12% below the state average. Flows are up in all the categories. He is recommending a slight increase of 2.5% from \$8.21 per hundred sf to \$8.39 psf. Mayor Grenier stated that he would prefer to be cautious and frugal with an increase from \$8.21 to \$8.30. Councilor Otis moved to increase the sewer rate to \$8.30 per hundred sf, an increase of .09 per

hsf. The motion was seconded by Councilor Morgan Allain. Councilor Higbee noted that this is an increase of .38% over seven years.

Funeral Expense

Mayor Grenier noted that John Morris was Trustee of Trust Funds and he wanted to send a funeral arrangement for the services. Councilor Berthiaume moved to authorize the expense from Council Contingency; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried.

Non Public Session

Councilor Higbee moved to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) land matters; Councilor Gentili seconded and the motion carried.

Mr. Wheeler updated the Council on a land matter.

Councilor Higbee moved to come out of non-public session; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried.

There being no further business in work session, Councilor Otis moved to adjourn; Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried. The meeting ended at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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