

City Council Work Session
April 8, 2019

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Theberge, Otis, Remillard, Morgan Allain, Berthiaume, Higbee, Gentili, and Rozek (6:40).

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Fire Chief John Lacasse, Chris Dubey, Peter Donovan, Eric Cripe, Tyler St Peter, Adam Cloutier, Brandon Bisson, Shane Warren, Greg Auger, Robert Finn, *Matrix*, and Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun*.

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:02 p.m.

Fire and EMS Integration and Consolidation Study - Matrix

Robert Finn presented the feasibility study results for consolidating EMS into the Fire Department. The focus of the study was on response capability, response time analysis, financial resources, staffing and manpower requirement, and training and education requirements.

Finn advised that the call demand for the fire department has been an average of 2 calls per day, and EMS has been an average of 5 per day. EMS is projected to increase to 6 per day over the next few years. Call locations are centrally located, and the existing station could cover calls with a response time within 5 minutes 98% of the time. Finn advised that it was difficult to track response times due to the decentralization of dispatch services. Finn stated that the existing dispatch center could assume the average of 8 calls per day for Fire and EMS with no staffing changes. Staffing changes at the fire department would include a Captain position to oversee EMS functions and a staffing increase to 6 per day with a minimum of 5. The City would need a local physician to serve as the Medical Director for EMS services, and there is a physician who currently volunteers for that role. Existing personnel should be trained to EMT level and work toward 12 paramedics for the EMS system. The City could lease space from Berlin EMS until additional space is constructed. The City should contract with a 3rd party for billing. The transition could start in July of 2019 and be fully operational by July of 2021.

Costs involved would be a Fire Captain position at \$92,578, a physician to serve as Medical Director, acquiring vehicles for \$145,000-\$185,000, training EMS personnel to a firefighter level II at \$1,500 per employee, training fire department staff to EMT and Paramedic, leasing space to house the ambulance and personnel at \$2,400 per month, services of a 3rd party billing service at 2.85-3.85%, and cost of bays at the existing fire station at \$250,000. The City would operate at a loss the first two years, then start to see savings after that.

Mayor Grenier asked about how they would integrate EMS and the Fire Department as far as the union, as the IAFF would want to see them in the same bargaining unit. Finn advised that this would have to be negotiated, but the City could create positions at the Fire Department for EMT's, and then add certifications to established positions. Mayor Grenier also asked about payments for services at BEMS over the last 10 years and how Medicaid expansion would affect the revenues. Finn advised at this point it is hard to guess as there are too many pieces in play with Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act. Councilor Otis asked about the total startup cost and was advised it would be about \$1 million; personnel would be \$550,000, the new bays would be \$250,000, and equipment an additional

\$200,000-\$225,000. Councilor Remillard mentioned that we would be buying used equipment and will need to replace it at some point. Councilor Higbee shared the concern that the EMS personnel may not want to, or be capable of, becoming firefighters. Finn advised that the city would need to build in time for personnel to prepare for fitness testing at different levels. Councilor Higbee also asked about the cash flow and how much money would be needed and when. Finn advised that the expenses are factored into the transition as they occur. Mayor Grenier shared a concern that the revenue sample studied was small and additional time should allow the city to see if any changes occur. Councilor Berthiaume addressed the issue of Milan paying for EMS services.

Mayor Grenier suggested that EMS could be run as an enterprise fund, however Finn advised that the savings is based on a fire-based EMS service and if run separately, the cost would go up significantly. Mayor Grenier suggested that a CRF be set up. Mayor Grenier suggested that they form a sub-committee to continue researching, and Councilor Berthiaume stated that she would like to see periodic reports from the sub-committee, and that she did not want to see it take years. Mayor Grenier stated that it should only take 2-3 months to verify the information. Councilor Higbee volunteered to serve on the sub-committee. Councilor Berthiaume moved with a second from Councilor Theberge to remand further study on the integration of EMS into the Fire Department to the sub-committee. So moved, the motion carried.

Sancoucy Proposed Agreement

Mr. Wheeler informed the Council that the Board of Assessors has reviewed the proposed agreement with Sansoucy and recommended that the Mayor and Council execute the 2019 contract. However the Board is going to provide further investigation and make a recommendation going forward on future contracts, on or before September 1, 2019. Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Otis to allow the City Manager to execute the proposed agreement with Sansoucy for FY2020. So moved, the motion carried.

Budget Discussion

Mayor Grenier advised that the House Budget, which included \$1,054,000 in new money for Berlin schools, and \$517,000 in revenue sharing, will most likely be vetoed by the Governor. The Senate has not passed their budget yet. There will probably be a negotiated settlement, which should at least include the lost stabilization money.

Mayor Grenier advised that at the public budget hearing, he would like the Council to do the reverse of what is usually done, and present a budget with no tax increase and no additional state money, so that the citizens can see what that will mean for services. City Manager Wheeler will calculate what will need to be cut to achieve this, and come up with some scenarios as to how this would be done. The current budget would mean a tax increase of \$4.93. Two million will need to be cut from the budget to not increase taxes. Mayor Grenier will invite NHPR and WMUR to the budget hearing to report on what will happen to the City if the money from the state is not received.

Councilor Rozek asked about the construction equipment used for snow removal by the public works department. City Manager Wheeler advised that the equipment has been looked at, but there are no results yet. Councilor Rozek advised that Caterpillar does have a program to rebuild equipment.

Non-meeting

Councilor Rozek moved to go into non-meeting per RSA 91-A:2 I(a) Collective Bargaining; Councilor Morgan Allain seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Union negotiations were discussed.

Respectfully Submitted,
Shelli Fortin
City Clerk

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