

**City Council Work Session
May 6, 2019**

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, Assistant Chief Dan Buteau, School Superintendent Corinne Cascadden, School Business Administrator Bryan Lamirande, School Board Chair Nicole Plourde, Police Chief Pete Morency, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, several member of the public, Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. He addressed those present by saying that no decision has yet been made on the budget. It is not the Council's intension to cut sports, policemen or firemen. He said the City has dipped into surpluses to keep schools funded and other departments have lagged behind. The school system has been put first for many year, and because of that Public Works is using aged equipment. He added that the education funding situation in the legislature has brought us to this point. Other communities have brought suit; however Berlin doesn't have time to sue; the funding issue is real today. Mayor Grenier noted that the Council wanted to see what the budget would look like if we don't raise taxes. We've asked the public for more money, but they are tapped out too. He asked for the public's help, asking them to send letters, e-mail to the Governor so that education funding becomes a reality.

Mr. Wheeler showed a pie chart of the City budget showing how each department takes up the City budget. In order to achieve a flat tax with no increase, \$1.9 million had to be cut out of budget. Dividing the cuts equally made sense. The schools are 60% of the budget and they needed to cut \$1.175 million; the other 40% is all other departments. Cuts were apportioned equally among departments.

Outside agencies were cut from the budget for a total of \$78,166. The Police Department budget would see a cut of \$202,510 and the Police Commission sent a letter emphasizing the dramatic impact these cuts would have on the department. The Fire Department would be reduced by two firefighters to achieve their apportionment. The Housing budget, which is where the costs for Brown School are carried, was reduced by \$25,000. In PWD overtime for supervisors was cut; several repair line items were reduced and an open position would remain unfilled. Recreation reduced playground personnel and the Director suggested operating with four playgrounds rather than five. Cuts in the Library budget would be in book purchases and reducing the hours of clerks, likely resulting in reducing the hours the library is open.

School Capital improvements, locker rooms and fire alarm improvements were reduced to zero. City Capital Improvements had Downtown Initiative reduced from \$25,000 to \$5,000 and handheld radios were reduced to \$5,500 to pay the first payment of a lease purchase agreement. PWD retaining walls were reduced from \$25,000 to \$20,000 and Sidewalk Replacement proposed for \$200,000 was decreased to \$140,000. Most of that would be needed for match for the Riverwalk Project. Work proposed at the City Cemetery would be done using trust fund money.

Mayor Grenier asked department heads, Pete Morency, John Lacasse, Eric Grenier and Corinne Cascadden to explain what these cuts would mean for delivery of services. Chief Morency indicated that the PD sees 25,000 calls per year. He cannot make these cuts without impacting services. There

would be a reduction of officers by two making the Department unable to provide DARE, LEAD, ILO position, Restorative Justice, and special enforcement for events. There would be no resources for opioid or drug enforcement, and no crossing guards. Loss of officers would mean losing the revenues from Milan and AVRDD. We would lose our Special Response Team and we would have to rely on the Team from Concord, creating a three hour wait. The PD would lose \$159,000 in grant funds. Two detectives would be back to patrol. The original cut of 6.16% would result in a loss of 18% of total operating budget. He went through a substantial list of 79 services that would be lost including crossing guards, OHRV patrols, and 24 hour policing. Chief Morency estimated that such a cut would set the department back 40 years.

Fire Chief John Lacasse stated that two positions would be eliminated as well as \$30,000 for training and equipment. If manpower is lost, it will affect the services and safety in the community.

Eric Grenier stated that Public Works used to operate with 60 to 70 employees; there are now 26 and the amount of streets and infrastructure the department is responsible for stays the same. Any further cuts will hinder services. The Department operates with loaders that are 15 to 17 years old; there is a salt truck that is a 1979. It's time to invest to bring up the average age of the equipment so that it is on the street when we need it and not in the shop for repairs. The Department is asked to do the same service with less money and less staff. There are still 60 miles of streets and hundreds of miles of drainage. The Parks Department does all the mowing and upkeep of all the fields and 32 parks with 3 people. With less staff, it will take longer to respond and to provide the service the community needs.

Corinne Cascadden addressed the group by saying that the school submitted a bare bones budget at over \$19 million; the School board cut \$660,000 from that and with another cut of \$1.175 million it becomes impossible to make the cuts. The schools have been diligent with upkeep of buildings and we would be losing ground with building safety. Brown School is closing to save \$300,000 per year. Positions have been eliminated including a preschool teacher, special ed, science, and kindergarten teachers. The loss of state aid is accelerating and we can't keep up with serving the kids we have. The additional cuts would affect travel, software support, supplies, books, resources, equipment, and furniture. Every year grades 6 and 9 get new Chromebooks; that would have to be cut.

Ms. Cascadden said that even into the third tier of cuts, the School Board did not eliminate any sports. By closing a school, there are Capital items needed to buy rubber treads for stairs, retrofit railings, provide fencing, and having urinals lowered at the high school to accommodate younger students. There needs to be separation at the high school between the sixth graders and the high school students. Bryan Lamirande added that the schools invested in maintaining buildings which in some cases, resulted in saving on heating and electrical.

Mayor Grenier emphasized that the cuts are spread in the whole city. He said that though it seems we are making some progress in Concord, he encouraged all to send a communication to the Governor. We need help and it's important for everyone to work together to get cooperation from the Governor.

Non-Public Session

There being no further business in work session, Councilor Remillard moved to go into nonpublic session per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) Land Matters; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Council members discussed an offer made on 723 Third Ave. There may be more than one party interested in the property. Councilor Rozek moved to offer the property for sale, by sealed bid for a minimum of \$12,000. The bidder will have one year to bring the property to code; Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried. Councilor Remillard made it a point to say that there should be at least three opportunities to view the property including one Saturday.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to come out of non-public session. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Rozek to go into Non Meeting per RSA 91-A:2 (b) Collective Bargaining. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to come out of non-meeting. So moved, the motion carried

There being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Grenier moved on to the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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