

City Council Work Session

Pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8 and Emergency Order #12, Section 3

April 13, 2020

Present were: Mayor Grenier at City Hall; via Zoom, Councilors Remillard, Otis, Higbee, Eastman, Theberge, and Morgan were present; Councilors Rozek and Berthiaume were absent.

Others present: At City Hall City Manager Jim Wheeler; via Zoom Superintendent Julie King, Fire Chief James Watkins, Police Chief Pete Morency, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Patty Chase, Health & Welfare Director Angela Martin Giroux, BEMS Chris Dubey, Library Director Ann Brungot, Denise Bergeron, Jamie Welch, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun* and public.

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened by stating: as Mayor of the City Council, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04 this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to the meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, this is to confirm that we are:

- a) *Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means;*

We are utilizing the Zoom platform for this electronic meeting. All members of the Council have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through the Zoom platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone # 1-646-558-8656, meeting ID 927 439 003, or by clicking on the City Council agenda on the City's website, www.berlinnh.gov.

- b) *Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting:*

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom or telephonically. Instructions have been provided on the City of Berlin's website of the Council at City Council-agendas

- c) *Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access:*

If anybody has a problem, please call Pam Laflamme at 603-752-8587 or e-mail at: plaflamme@berlinnh.gov

- d) *Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting*

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, we will adjourn the meeting and have it rescheduled at that time.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote. By roll call, each member is to state their presence, and whether there is anyone in the room during this meeting, which is required under the Right to Know law.

Councilors Remillard, Otis, Higbee, Eastman, Theberge, and Morgan were present and stated that there was no one else in the room; Mayor Grenier was present and in the room with City Manager Jim Wheeler.

Downtown Tax Incentive

Ms. Laflamme explained that Mr. Hammill underestimated the cost of renovations when he applied for a downtown tax incentive. At her urging, he would like to amend the application for an additional \$31,800 of work not yet completed for a total of \$60,780. Mayor Grenier questioned why the incentive is not for the entire cost of the project and Ms. Laflamme stated that the law is very specific that the incentive can only be granted for work not yet completed. Mr. Hammill indicated that he understands and he is grateful for the opportunity. He is also willing to help any other business considering downtown Berlin as their location. Councilor Eastman encouraged a press release so that this incentive can be an asset to anyone considering opening a business in the downtown.

Councilor Remillard moved to amend the motion of February 10, 2020 that granted a tax incentive of \$31,800 to granting a total tax incentive of \$60,780; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Budget

Ambulance. Mayor Grenier asked if there were questions regarding the ambulance budget. Councilor Eastman asked how much of the cost of providing ambulance service can be recouped from Medicaid. Chris Dubey estimated 23%; however he did not have the exact numbers. He also estimated that 35% of 911 patients pay through Medicaid; 35% through Medicare and the remaining are private pay or insurance. Long distance transfers pay well.

Library. Ann Brungot described the services available to the public at the library. There were 19,088 patrons who came in to the library last year and 21,016 items were borrowed by adults and children. She proposed increasing the per diem budget to include an additional person when there are children's programs going on. Other increases came in books, audio books, video and microfilm which were broken out into separate line items. Building improvements were the only capital request. Mr. Wheeler explained that a study was done last year in an effort to prepare for writing a grant for improvements to the Library. Mayor Grenier asked if any grants have been found and Ms. Laflamme replied that this may qualify for LCHIP or Community Facilities money. Mr. Wheeler added that if the project were shovel ready, it may have a better chance at funding. Councilor Eastman asked if there was an estimate and Ms. Laflamme reported that it was approximately \$350,000.

Mayor Grenier asked if there were questions on the Library budget and Councilor Remillard asked what the line item for "Materials" is for. Ms. Brungot said that would be used for art supplies, refreshments

for events, and prizes for children's activities. Mayor Grenier stated that Ms. Brungot used savings from a health care line item to add books and value for the community.

Housing. Mr. Wheeler noted that not a lot has changed from last year in this budget. We've been cleaning out tax deeded properties to demolish or sell. This year, with the I & I project, ten properties will be demolished. AHEAD has expressed some interest in obtaining tax deeded properties to renovate them and sell. Mr. Wheeler asked if Ms. Giroux had anything to add and she mentioned that her time has been spent with the eviction process.

Cemeteries. Shelli Fortin indicated that the Cemetery budget is the same as last year. Mayor Grenier confirmed that we are maintaining the Jewish Cemetery. Ms. Fortin stated that there are plans to add sites there.

Councilor Remillard asked about the cemetery on the east side that has had some ground movement. Ms. Fortin said that a test pit will be dug to see how deep the bark is at the site. That will give more information on how to move forward.

COVID-19 Response and Planning

Mr. Wheeler reported that policies have been created to deal with COVID; the Task Force has seen all of the policies. Most have come from other communities and they have been reviewed by an attorney. The Families First law is Federal and we are obliged to follow it. The law allows for expanded family leave when home schooling a child. The act allows for exclusion of some employees; however Mr. Wheeler advocated for not excluding any employee.

Councilor Higbee moved to accept the policies as presented and to not exclude any employee from the Families First Act; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Request for Full Time Public Works Administrative Clerk

Mr. Wheeler stated that Lise Barrett has accepted the Assessor Supervisor position and her position in Public Works will now be open.

Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Morgan to fill the Public Works Administrative Clerk position. The motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Non-Public Session

At 7:50 p.m. Councilor Higbee moved to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) Consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property which, if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general community; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

At 8:40 Councilor Higbee moved to come out of non-public session; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Councilor Higbee moved to seal the minutes of the non-public session as releasing them would make the action taken ineffective; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Councilor Morgan moved with a second from Councilor Theberge to adjourn. So moved the motion carried. The meeting ended at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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