

**December 6, 2016**  
**Planning Board**

**Present were:** Regular Members Tom McCue, Greg Estrella, Lucie Remillard; Alternate Members Helene Rayborn, Richard Cassidy, and Naomi Levesque

Ernie Allain, Lori Langlois, and Aline Boucher were excused for the evening.

Martha Creegan was absent.

**Others Present:** Pamela Laflamme, Community Development Director; Jim Wheeler, City Manager, Kaela Gray – North Country Council; and Bryan Chevarie, recorder of meeting minutes

**Public Comments** – no one spoke

**Approval of November 2016 Minutes**

Ms. Remillard motioned with a second from Mr. Estrella to approve the November 2016 minutes with the following corrections: Page 3, Paragraph 3: “Tower will anti-climb” should be “Tower has anti-climb.” Additionally, on Page 5, Riverwalk should be capitalized. So moved, the motion carried.

**Capital Improvement Plan Discussion:**

City Manager Jim Wheeler presented the Capital Improvement Plan to members of the board. By definition, a capital project is something that costs \$10,000 or more and has a life expectancy of at least three years. He explained that this plan is used to identify significant capital needs for the City that are anticipated to arise over the next six years. Mr. Wheeler pointed out that this is somewhat of an exhaustive list of needs facing each department and it is understood that only a fraction of the requested funds will be allocated during the annual budgeting process.

Mr. Wheeler went through several of the projects in more detail, pointing out potential grants and funding opportunities that may aid in financing some of the larger projects. The group discussed potential benefits to local businesses and organizations that would result from some of the items in the Plan, such as the downtown snow melt system, depending on the results of the feasibility study of the project. The Board also noted that some of the City’s municipal buildings are in need of significant upgrades, primarily the Fire Station and City Hall. Helene Rayborn pointed out that accessibility issues are an important part of any public building and could potentially be a source of legal concern if not adequately addressed.

Greg Estrella asked how these projects will be prioritized in the upcoming budget. Mr. Wheeler explained that Section 2 of Fiscal Year 2018 will automatically go into the annual budget's first draft and then will be whittled down throughout the planning process.

**Greg Estrella made a motion to accept the six-year Capital Improvement Plan as presented by Jim Wheeler; seconded by Helene Rayborn. All in favor, the motion passed.**

#### **North Country Council Presentation – Resilient Economies Toolkit:**

Kaela Gray of North Country Council was welcomed by the Board and subsequently presented a Resilient Economy Toolkit to each member of the group. Ms. Gray explained that the intent of the toolkit is to assist municipalities in determining if the practices that they have in place are designed to promote positive and sustainable business growth. North Country Council is seeking feedback from municipalities and since Berlin has a considerable amount of planning and infrastructure development it was felt that both parties could benefit from identifying successes and potential areas of improvement.

The first section of the Toolkit focuses on zoning, site plans, and master planning. The group was in agreement that the City of Berlin has a detailed and enforceable zoning ordinance along with processes in place for site-plan reviews and an up-to-date Master Plan. Richard Cassidy pointed out that the City invites the public to voice their opinions regarding issues facing the City and its departments at Citizen Academy events. Ms. Gray was happy to hear that the Board has addressed environmental concerns – such as the Superfund site – when making planning decisions or recommendations.

Next, the group examined how the City fares through the lens of infrastructure awareness. Recently, there has been a significant investment in road construction and maintenance. These measures, along with recently finished upgrades to accommodate the sewage requirements of the prisons on East Milan Road, demonstrate the forward-thinking approach that the leaders of the City utilize when prioritizing infrastructure needs.

In terms of public transportation, the Board noted that Tri-County CAP offers a bussing system that services the Berlin and Gorham areas. Admittedly, the group agreed that the existing public transportation options have limited time frames in which they operate.

Regarding community character and the rubric presented by Ms. Gray, it was noted that the City of Berlin prides itself in its reputation of having a strong communal spirit. The City is home to the White Mountain Community College, offers a farmer's market every summer, and has a great school system that taxpayers invest a great deal of funds in.

When it comes to supporting businesses, the Board discussed how closely the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce works with the City to advance local business opportunities and to strengthen the existing businesses in the area. Members of the Board reiterated that they

are open to hearing new ideas and working with organizations who are thinking of potential development in the area.

The health & safety section of the toolkit underscored the importance of having a clear vision in the City's Master Plan for these concerns. The community proactively protects its current and future water supplies and the Board is always open to reviewing and encouraging green infrastructure practices for new development.

Mr. McCue remarked that it is interesting to tie this toolkit in to the local business environment and identify stakeholders that are involved in the decisions that the Board makes on a regular basis. Ms. Gray said her hope is that if the City is interested in exploring new tactics perhaps North Country Council can help by showing the successes other communities have found and how they were able to overcome challenges in the process of achieving their goals.

#### **Signage Discussion – update from committee meeting**

The committee will be meeting in the near future – there is no substantive update at this time.

**Project Updates** – Ms. Laflamme mentioned that she is still waiting on the results for the riverwalk grant. NHDOT is supposed to announce the results in early December.

**Other** – None

**Public Comments** – There were no public comments

**Member Comments** – Tom McCue stated that he is on the Coos County Planning Board and there is an upcoming meeting regarding the Cog Hotel on Mt. Washington. Mr. McCue wanted to stress that the meeting will be very preliminary in its nature and specifics will likely not be discussed at length, nor will votes on the idea transpire.

Ms. Rayborn asked if there was any grant money to help get a movie theater open. There was a short discussion about grant funds typically being available for not for profit businesses.

**Planner Comments** – None

The next meeting will be Tuesday, January 10, 2016.

**Adjournment** – There being no further business to come before the Board Mr. Cassidy moved to adjourn; Ms. Remillard seconded and the motion carried. The meeting ended at 9:00 pm.