

**CITY OF BERLIN**

New Hampshire

**Minutes of Council School Budget Session of 3/13/2023**

**City Hall Council Chambers**

**6:30 pm**

**Members:**

Mayor Grenier  
Councilor Morency  
Councilor Remillard  
Councilor Higbee  
Councilor Eastman  
Councilor Robert Theberge  
Councilor Roland Theberge

**City Staff:**

Phillip Warren, Jr, City Manager  
Pamela Laflamme, Director of Strategic Initiatives  
Holly Larsen, Finance Director  
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk

**School Board, Administration and Staff:**

Superintendent Julie King  
Administrator Marion Moore  
School Board Member Matt Buteau  
School Board Member Ann Nolin  
School Board Member Nathan Morin  
School Board Member Eamon Kelley  
Tammy Fauteux, Principal, Berlin Elementary School

Representative Corinne Cascadden

Representative Henry Noel

Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun

Other members of the public

At 6:31 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting.

**NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs Grant**

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Roland Theberge, to add an item to the agenda for the demolition grant from NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs. So moved, the motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Pamela Laflamme advised the Council that the City has been awarded a grant that was applied for back in October. It is seven separate grants for seven properties; 827 Western Avenue, 98 Hillside Avenue, 609 Hillsboro Street, 422 Champlain Street, 373 Champlain Street, 37 Cambridge Street, and 426 Burgess Street. Some of these properties the City has owned since 2013, some were put out to bid and did not sell, and some the Council had voted not to sell as they are multi-family and are not in good shape.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Remillard, to enter into seven individual contracts with NH Department of Business and Economic Affairs and further authorize the City Manager to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate these seven individual contracts for demolition funds for the following buildings: 827 Western Avenue, 98 Hillside Avenue, 609 Hillsboro Street, 422 Champlain Street, 373 Champlain Street, 37 Cambridge Street, and 426 Burgess Street.

Councilor Eastman asked if any matching funds were required and Ms. Laflamme advised there are not.

Councilor Remillard asked that a list of the buildings be sent to the Council.

So moved, the motion passed.

### **FY2024 Budget – Board of Education**

Mayor Grenier invited School Board Chair Ann Nolin and Superintendent King to present the FY24 Berlin Board of Education proposed budget. Ann Nolin stated that she appreciated the opportunity to come in to meet with the Council and advised that the budget is a fluid document. Ms. Nolin stated that they have worked hard on the budget to give the best possible education to students. Ms. Nolin advised that they are still waiting on news from the state, which will hopefully make the cost less taxing on individual taxpayers.

Superintendent King advised that this budget is a level service budget, which will not add new services but maintain the ones they currently have. Ms. King advised the budget does include some new positions for cost saving purposes. These new positions include a social worker, which has been grant funded in the past but is now being added to the local budget as the grant had ended. Ms. King advised that the social worker connects students and families with services that are available so that they have what they need so they will be able to learn. Ms. King advised that they are also planning for succession, as they have an aging faculty and will need to fill positions as people retire. They currently have custodial staff that are able to do carpentry and plumbing, which saves the school money on contracted services for these items. They are looking into ways to either train new staff, or share positions with other departments or school districts. The current transportation director has been filling multiple roles as mechanic, director, and bus driver, and it will be difficult to fill this position without an increase to the budget. They have also been looking for a Business Administrator, and have decided to fill the position with the person in the Tech Integrator position and eliminate the Tech Integrator

position. They will keep a Finance Administrator part-time to train while the new Business Administrator completes their certification. They have also looked at services for Occupational Therapy and are hoping to hire for two positions, which could save them about \$150,000 on contracted services. They are also hoping to fill a position for a second Assistant Principal at the elementary school, as there is a need with the behavior of the students.

In reviewing the remainder of the budget, Ms. King advised that with the increase in the amount for the insurance waiver, they have had 11 staff members use the waiver rather than the insurance which has saved on costs. They have budgeted for a not to exceed rate of 9.8% for insurance, however it is likely to be 5.5%, which will be a substantial savings. Out-of-district placements have increased. Under energy, they budgeted for a \$1 per gallon increase in fuel, but if they are able to lock in a lower rate there will be a savings. They will be using ESSER and ARPA funds to install a new boiler at each facility, which will help with efficiency and costs.

Ms. King advised that the Building Committee has been active for 8-9 months and are working on building aid funds and a full assessment of the facilities. Ms. King advised that they have an increase of \$403,300 for Capital Improvements, which includes \$149,000 for asbestos abatement for the tile floors. Councilor Eastman asked if they could just cover the tile and Ms. King advised she will look into that option. Mayor Grenier also noted the request for a dump body and salt spreader, and that the school had previously received a truck from the Airport Authority.

In reviewing revenues, Ms. King noted that the State Adequacy Aid is down due to having fewer students. The state uses the number of students as of October 1, and enrollment has increased a little since then. Ms. King shared a handout as to why the city is receiving less funding. It was noted that some of the aid is based on the number of students with free and reduced lunch, and the number of applications is down. The state is looking at increasing the threshold and the amount of the aid, and DHHS is looking at having any family on Medicaid qualify for automatic free lunch. Councilor Remillard asked if the numbers included all students, and Ms. King advised it does not include Preschool, only K-12.

Ms. King advised they do expect to have unexpended funds to return to the City at the end of the fiscal year, and will continue to work on those numbers.

Mayor Grenier stated that the arena expenses will not increase for varsity and JV hockey this year, and noted that with the corporate sponsor they have not increased ice rates in 15 years.

Ms. King noted that they are doing what they can to keep costs low and still provide for the needs of students. Ms. King stated that there has been a learning gap since the pandemic, and they are working to close that gap with new curriculum. Ms. King stated that there are also services through the Coos Coalition to reach children between birth and 5, so that they receive services earlier.

Mayor Grenier noted that the school system is his number one priority and thanked the Board of Education, Ms. King, and the staff. Mayor Grenier stated that he is proud of the work that they do. Mayor Grenier noted that the budget is a responsible one and they do a great job for the kids.

Councilor Theberge asked if the school was working with the police department on a School Resource Officer. Ms. King advised that they do have an officer who will be taking the position, but they are currently out on medical leave. They will start as soon as they are back to work.

Councilor Theberge asked if the school has a committee that bans books, as he was asked this question by a resident. Ms. King advised they do not.

Councilor Morency asked about school safety grants for equipment and Ms. King advised that they received \$14,000 for the Elementary School and \$18,000 for the Middle High School for projects. Ms. King also advised they have a Homeland Security drill planned for May.

Councilor Eastman asked if there has been a reduction in the need for social services in the community, and Ms. King advised she did look into this and found that the requests for services have more than doubled.

Mayor Grenier thanked Ms. King and the Board of Education for balancing the needs of the district with the ability of the citizens to pay.

### **Non-Public Session**

At 7:18 p.m., Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Roland Theberge to enter into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II; (a) The dismissal, promotion or compensation of any public employee. The motion carried unanimously by roll call.

The compensation of a public employee was discussed. No votes were taken.

At 7:28 p.m., Councilor Roland Theberge moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to come out of Non-Public Session. The motion carried unanimously by roll call.

### **Non-Meeting**

At 7:28 p.m., the Council voted unanimously by roll call vote to enter non-meeting per RSA 91-A:2, I (c) Legal Consultation.

Respectfully Submitted by Shelli Fortin