

CITY OF BERLIN
New Hampshire

Minutes of Council Work Session of 3/25/2024
City Council Chambers
6:30 pm

Members:

Mayor Cone
Councilor Valerino
Councilor Grenier
Councilor Morency
Councilor Korzen
Councilor Berthiaume

City Staff:

Phillip Warren, Jr., City Manager
Holly Larsen, Finance Director/Tax Collector
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk
Duane Johnson, Recreation Director

Public: Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun
Roland Sanschagrín
Jamie Welch

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

Public Works

City Manager Warren advised that they are providing the same services as last year, however the budget has increased by \$152,349.00 due to increases in paving, salt, and personnel costs. The increase in Solid Waste is also due to personnel. The Parks budget has a small decrease. Cemetery shows an increase of \$178. Mr. Warren noted that they are not adding any new services or programs.

In reviewing the Sewer User and Pollution Control budgets, costs have increased due to personnel and utilities. They have added one employee to the sewer crew, which is paid by the sewer user fees. This staff was added as there is a lot of work needed on the system due to inflow and infiltration, and they are using staff to analyze the infrastructure instead of hiring out. Wright-Pierce is helping with the work, but the City is providing labor.

Councilor Grenier asked if there were any projects still planned for inflow and infiltration, and Mr. Warren stated that there are some problem areas, such as the Mt. Forist area, Bass Shoe pump station, Armory pump station, and the Industrial Park, that they are working on.

Councilor Grenier asked about the age of the workforce, as there have been some retirements from Public Works. Mr. Warren noted that the younger workers, age 18-35, do not see the value of the benefit package with municipal work and are hard to retain as other businesses pay more per hour. Councilor Korzen suggested that when onboarding new employees, these benefits should be highlighted. Councilor Berthiaume noted that this age group had a hard time bouncing back after the pandemic, and are more concerned with dollars and bonuses. Councilor Korzen also noted that since the health insurance rules were changed, and children were allowed to stay on parents insurance through age 26, these workers do not need their own health insurance. Mr. Warren noted that it is nice to be able to promote from within, and the younger workers are needed to do this.

Councilor Grenier asked about the cost of training, and if that is included in the budget. Mr. Warren advised that the union contract provides for reimbursement for the CDL class if an employee gets their license and stays for one year. Mr. Warren noted that he is hoping to change this in the future and be able to send some employees to get their CDL. The problem is that they do not have the excess employees to cover positions in order to send some to schooling. There is a training program in place in the contract, for on-the-job training with equipment.

Councilor Morency stated he is amazed to see the public works employees out there in the bad weather. It was discussed that even though there are the same amount of streets out there to maintain, the number of employees in public works has dropped from 67 in the late 60's, to 44 in the 90's, and now to 27. The same services are being provided with fewer people. Some of this reduction in personnel is due to better equipment.

Councilor Morency asked about the suction truck and Mr. Warren advised that they are hoping to replace it next year. Mr. Warren noted that the current vac body was not designed for what they do with it, but the truck is in good shape. They are hoping to put a new vac body on the truck. This will also be used for Pollution Control for work that they now contract out.

Councilor Korzen asked about the new piece of paving equipment. Mr. Warren advised that they will be getting it on April 8 for a two-week test period. Mr. Warren advised they will then spec out a machine, and are hoping to use the rest of the ARPA funds to purchase one.

Councilor Korzen asked about the buyout on health insurance, and Mr. Warren advised the amount depends on the contract, as each one is different. Mr. Warren noted that even though the amount is similar to a single plan, not having someone on our insurance reduces our liability.

Councilor Grenier asked about the Capital Projects and the loaders. Mr. Warren advised they are buying out the lease and this amount is the last payment. The value of the machine is higher than the buyout. In 2025, they are buying three of the loaders, and in 2027 they will buyout two more. The life expectancy of the loaders is about 13 years properly maintained. Mr. Warren advised that they do clean them well after the winter and do spray them. Mr. Warren noted that Roland Langlois rotates them in the summer so they get equal use. Mr. Warren noted that in the future it may make more sense to purchase a 10-wheeler with a plow and sander, as the trucks today can handle the work.

Councilor Grenier asked about the BPW garage, and Mr. Warren advised that the capital improvement is for door and windows. The cost is for materials, as the staff provides the labor.

Mr. Warren noted that the \$100,000 budgeted for equipment is to start saving for replacement equipment in the next few years.

Councilor Grenier asked about the new salt shed. Mr. Warren advised that it is awesome, and they never ran out of salt, and never had problems loading the trucks. Mr. Warren stated that this has been their biggest asset to their new snow and ice management plan. Mr. Warren advised that they are using a management plan developed by the Minnesota DOT, and he will get a copy of this to the new Council. Mr. Warren noted that they do not use much sand anymore, however they will fill this in the summer so that it does not get wet and freeze up. Councilor Korzen asked if salt was available to the public, and it was noted that they can buy a bucket for \$6 by paying at City Hall.

Councilor Morency asked what could be cut if needed. Mr. Warren advised that the \$100,000 in the CIP for equipment would be the only area, as any other cuts would curtail services. Mr. Warren noted that he would not want to cut money from the road paving, as roads that are not maintained degrade quickly over time.

Councilor Korzen noted that there are lots of areas with failing infrastructure for drainage. Mr. Warren stated that they received an asset management grant which is helping to analyze the drainage systems on the East side and then identify what needs to be addressed. Councilor Korzen asked who was responsible for the brooks on private property and Mr. Warren advised it would be the homeowner, unless there was a drainage easement on file. However, improving the drainage infrastructure will help with issues. Councilor Grenier noted that the box culvert on Glen Avenue is in the NHDOT 10-year plan for the project from the Cleveland Bridge to Exchange Street. Councilor Korzen noted that the asset management plan will help to pinpoint trouble areas. Mr. Warren noted that staff has been trained in industry specific analysis to grade structures which is added to the GIS system.

Recreation Department

Duane Johnson noted that not much has changed in his budget, except for salary. The same programs are provided each year, and all of them are doing well. Mr. Johnson advised that Rec Hockey was down a little this year, as some players have moved on to Berlin Youth Hockey. They held a 1st and 2nd grade basketball tournament this year. The summer program is getting better every year, and they will be adding Jericho Lake to it this summer. They are starting a girls softball program, and karate. There will be a Jr. Gladiators program this year as well.

Mr. Johnson advised that they upgraded both bathrooms this year.

Councilor Grenier asked about the weightlifting area they put together, and Mr. Johnson advised that it is not being used as much as he hoped. However, the batting cage has been used a lot.

Mr. Johnson advised that they gave a lot of scholarships out last year, as they do not want any child to be left out.

Councilor Morency asked about basketball camps, and Mr. Johnson advised that they have them for 3rd-6th grade. Mr. Johnson noted that he is trying to get the high school kids involved in helping.

Capital Improvement amounts were added by City Manager Warren to keep the infrastructure current. A new ceiling is needed, and will need to be a drop ceiling, which will help with heating costs.

It was noted that the building is always being used by all age groups. Councilor Grenier noted that the more kids are involved, the less likely they are to get into trouble.

Councilor Korzen suggested that there is a subset of the youth population that is missing, who are more creative and not involved in organized sports. Although they do have opportunities through the school, such as theater, other programs to give them vision and direction should be offered. Mr. Warren stated that this would be a good discussion to have with the Library Director.

Other

Councilor Berthiaume asked about the plans of the Boys and Girls Club and the recent daycare closure. Mayor Cone advised that he did meet with them a couple of months ago, and their plan is to eventually build something in partnership with the NH Food Bank. It was suggested that a representative from the Boys and Girls Club meet with the Council.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Grenier and seconded by Councilor Berthiaume. So moved, the motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Shelli Fortin