

CITY OF BERLIN

New Hampshire

Minutes of Council School Budget Session of 3/04/2021

Via Zoom

6:30 pm

Members:

Mayor Grenier
Councilor Otis
Councilor Remillard
Councilor Higbee
Councilor Eastman

City Staff:

James Wheeler, City Manager
Holly Larsen, Finance Director

School Board, Administration and Staff:

Superintendent Julie King
Administrator Marion Moore
School Board Member Matt Buteau
School Board Member Ann Nolin
School Board Member Jeanne Charest
School Board Member Nathan Morin
BMHS Principal, Michael Kelley
BMHS Assistant Principal, Jason Hook
Assistant Principal, Sandy Pouliot
Bryan Lamirande, Buildings and Ground Coordinator
Autie Hamilton, Technology Director
Martha Miller, Special Education Director
Sonya L'Heureux, Grade 6 English
Kayla Steady, Technology Integrator
Jamie Welch, Grade 7 Science

Eamon Kelley, NH House of Representatives
Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting. 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 822 3705 1237; Passcode 414386, 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.

Mayor Grenier invited Superintendent King to present the FY22 Berlin Public School proposed budget.

Superintendent King began the presentation with a Powerpoint with the highlights from the 2022 School Budget. Their request for general fund and capital improvements is \$20,570,598. This is up \$1.29 million from the current year's appropriation. The anticipated revenues are down due to the one-time allocation last year from the state, along with other reasons. King advised the process is fluid and she expects some changes, as some costs will come in different than anticipated.

On October 1, 2020, they were down one student from last year's enrollment. King advised as of today, they are down 6 students, which is typical. They have lost less students this year from the October 1 date than in previous years.

King advised they did a good job choosing a model last summer that would work for schooling. King advised that if a remote option was not provided, many more students would have left to homeschool.

Superintendent King reviewed the Covid funding. This could be spent on anything Covid related that is in addition to the budget, short-term or one-time expenses, to get us through the pandemic. This includes the HVAC system, air purifiers, and other things to make the building safer. Technology, and additional costs for meals for students were included, along with a social worker position.

Superintendent King reviewed the Goals of the Board, and advised that some have stalled because attention was focused other places, but other things have moved along, such as communication and family engagement which was necessary during the pandemic. Long-range planning is a goal to provide some stability, for both academic programing and facilities, but things change very rapidly now. The Board recently voted to create a Building and Grounds Committee to evaluate the facilities, and is mandatory for any state building aid. The Building Committee must be made up of half of the members appointed by the Board and half appointed by the Council. They are also hoping to continue collaboration with WMCC. They are currently planning with them for a business program, which is necessary to comply with DOE minimum standards. They have been working on this with AVEC, where they try to coordinate and share resources. Their goal is to meet and exceed the DOE standards, and are aware that there is not equity across the state for students. King advised that they received a letter from the DOE stating they were not in compliance, due to the fact that they did not have a full-time CTE Director. They also need to keep an eye on class size. They are also working on creating alternative pathways, so that all students have opportunities. King advised that their goal is to bring back students that have left to homeschool, to increase adequacy aid and to provide a quality education that is accountable to the state, which they believe is better for most students. Another goal is a comprehensive system of support, which includes food insecurity and mental health issues.

Superintendent King advised that on the funding side there are a lot of unknowns. The funding formula is currently in legislation. They will be keeping an eye on that. There are more Covid relief funds on the way, and the latest they have heard is that the funding contains a substantial amount. For the Free and Reduced lunch aid, the loss of anticipated revenue is \$316,000 because of the reduction in the percentage of students qualifying because families have not filled out the application. King advised it is crucial to continue to seek the applications from families, as even if the state fixes the funding, the federal government has not. King advised they have recouped some of the revenue at this point, by contacting families one by one, and offering incentives for filling out the form. They will use the end of the year data for calculations next fall. King advised that there is also a proposal to raise the minimum wage, and they have employees who are making less than the proposed amount. King also warned that the proposed voucher system would be detrimental to the public school system, especially for funding.

Superintendent King reviewed the loss of \$1.98 million from the one-time funding. The increased appropriation this current year was \$503,122 for the general fund, along with \$425,500 for Capital Improvements, which makes up almost \$1 million of the one-time funding. The rest went toward reducing the tax rate. However, the loss of the extra is causing a hole, which is increasing the tax rate. King advised the FY22 budget has an increase in the retirement cost for NHRS, which also adds to the increase in the tax rate.

Superintendent King advised that this round of Covid funding will be \$2.065 million. This will not be spent on staff, as they are having trouble filling positions, so they will be looking at facilities. The HVAC system at BMHS is original to the school, so they will use funds to update the system. The money can be used for anything related to Covid or air quality, such as windows, doors, and potentially a bus due to lunch distribution. King advised it has been difficult to find HVAC engineers and companies due to the virus. They were able to find an engineer in VT, who is doing a site review, and they are planning to go out to bid to get an estimated cost. King advised they are watching the time factors so they don't waste money or let it go unused.

Superintendent King reviewed the needs of the school, including HVAC and elevator repairs. Covid accommodations are questionable, as they do not know what the DHHS and CDC guidelines will be next year. They are asking for a classroom teacher at BES due to class size. The social worker position and SEL support need funding. They also need to address other cuts that have been made, including a guidance counselor at the middle school, and an office management position in the guidance office. King advised they crossed out the CTE director position, as they feel it can be taken out of the budget. They would like to find a funding replacement for JAG, as it is no longer funded through the state grant. They were able to continue this year with their matching part for the grant, along with other grants, but it will not be funded this year. This program is for students who are going into the workforce upon graduation. They are hoping to secure a Tillotson grant, but do not know yet if this will be available. They would also like to continue the STEM scholarship program, which was cut out of the state budget. The school relied on these scholarships for their collaboration with WMCC.

Superintendent King reviewed the special education budget, including the current placements and costs. King advised that for out-of-district placements, the school is capped at \$56,000. Anything over that the state pays. King also shared amounts for adequacy aid in the state, so that the numbers could be compared to other locations, along with the amount of valuation per pupil in districts in the state. The average cost per pupil in the state is \$17,000.

Councilor Eastman asked about the CTE director position, which Superintendent King advised was the Career and Technical Education program. Eastman asked why they felt they could remove it from their list. King advised that they were told they needed a full-time director, which is not a state regulation, but is written into their agreement with other schools. However, the agreement is in need of revision, and the Superintendent of SAU20 stated that he was happy to revisit and keep the structure they currently have in place. King advised they currently have 7 programs, and have instructors for all. Eastman stated there will be a high demand for those trades in the upcoming years. King advised that all programs hit in the workforce shortage areas. It has been a struggle this year for health students to get their 60 hours of internship experience

due to the pandemic. However, the vaccination clinics have allowed the health students to take part, and they have received lots of kudos for their helping, which has been a good experience for everyone.

Mayor Grenier thanked the school for the presentation, and stated that King, the administration, and the Board have done a phenomenal job making the school system work. However, they are looking at a big deficit. Mayor Grenier advised that he will do what he can, testifying in the legislature and asking for flexibility in this new round of funding. Mayor Grenier advised he is cautiously optimistic that things will fall into place. Mayor Grenier asked Jamie Welch to pass along thanks to the employees for their work during this trying time.

Mayor Grenier noted that Representative Kelley would help any way could and Rep. Kelley agreed.

Ann Nolin thanked the Mayor for his kind words and optimism to work together to give the kids the education they deserve.

Councilor Remillard thanked Superintendent King for the presentation. Councilor Remillard was pleased to hear of the Covid funding, and hopes it can be used for the HVAC and bus.

Motion to adjourn by Councilor Remillard and seconded by Councilor Higbee. The motion carried unanimously by roll call vote.

Meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Shelli Fortin