

## **CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, December 6, 2021**

### **Regular Meeting**

Mayor Grenier called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:14 p.m.

#### **a. Pledge of Allegiance**

#### **b. Roll Call**

Present: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Remillard, Otis, Eastman, Higbee, Rozek, Theberge, and Berthiaume

Absent: Councilor Morgan

Also present: Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme Finance Director Holly Larsen, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Chief Peter Morency, Micah Bachner, Amber Bachner, Stuart Light, Lori Korzen, Steven Korzen, Wanetta Collins, Ralph Collins, Richard King, Eamon Kelley, Steven Binette, Kathy Trumbull, John Trumbull, Rachel Eastman, and William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun.

**c.** Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to accept the minutes of the November 15, 2021 Regular Meeting and Work Session, and the Work Sessions of November 22, 2021 and November 29, 2021. So moved, the motion passed.

#### **Disbursements:**

Disbursement Summary Draft #1901 start date 11/16/2021 end date 12/06/2021 for a total cash disbursement of \$3,754,956.37. Councilor Theberge moved with a second by Councilor Berthiaume to accept the disbursement summary and pay all bills as recommended by the Committee on Accounts/Claims. So moved, the motion passed.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Richard King of 107 Jericho Road spoke in opposition to the sale of Brown School for one dollar. Mr. King noted that the City has spent millions in renovations on that building. Mr. King noted that he tried to bid on City property several years ago and the bid was not accepted as it was not high enough.

Micah Bachner of 59 High Street asked if there were any other bids received.

Wanetta Collins of 104 Seventh Street stated that she also had a problem with selling Brown School for one dollar. Mrs. Collins also stated that she has a problem with Section 8 housing being located in her neighborhood. Mrs. Collins noted that this is a slap in the face to taxpayers. Mrs. Collins stated that there are 88 properties in the City that are non-profit or government buildings and asked how many pay taxes on their homes.

Lori Korzen of 788 Kent Street spoke against selling Brown School for one dollar. Mrs. Korzen noted that she does not hate disabled or low-income residents, she just does not want more Section 8 housing in the City. Mrs. Korzen stated that she would like to see people come to Berlin to work. Mrs. Korzen stated that she looked up the CDBG grant that the developer is hoping to use, which requires a majority, or 51% of the units, to be Section 8 apartments. Mrs. Korzen suggested that a program such as Moving to Work, which assists with rent as long as the residents hold a full-time job, would be a benefit. Mrs. Korzen noted that Section 8 housing does affect resources and property values, and asked that the property be put out to bid again, as they could make more.

Ralph Collins of 104 Seventh Street noted the amount of low-income housing listed on a handout that Steven Binette provided. Mr. Collins stated that he has been living here since 1989 and they have been trying to get income into the City, however restaurants are closing and the downtown area is still not as developed as they had hoped. Mr. Collins stated that housing should be income-generated.

Steven Binette of 181 Overlook Road in Milan advised that he did some research on low-income housing and there are 406 units in Berlin, of which some are vacant. Mr. Binette suggested that housing was needed for middle-class and working families, as real estate prices are skyrocketing and it is hard to find apartments for the working-class. Mr. Binette suggested a more modern approach for housing for working people who will generate something for the community.

Kathy Trumbull of 348 First Avenue stated that she would like to know how much energy has been put into finding the highest and best use of the building. Mrs. Trumbull stated that they need to use creative thinking and put some time in. Mrs. Trumbull suggested colleges, creative retail, and thinking outside the box.

Jesstina Murphy of 43 Sweden Street shared concerns that the developer may not have all the information they need concerning lead and asbestos management and is concerned the building will continue to sit and not be developed. Ms. Murphy suggested some sort of contingency to be sure things move forward.

Holly Larsen of 24 Ottawa Street advised she was opposed to selling Brown School for one dollar.

Richard King spoke again, stating he was against Section 8 housing and suggested the building would be well-suited for an urgent care facility. Mr. King noted as a healthcare facility, the playground could then be left for children in the neighborhood. Mr. King stated that the building should sell for more than \$1, and although the City will not recoup all the money they have spent on it, it should be more.

Wanetta Collins asked why the building could not be used for a Charter School. Mrs. Collins also noted that is ironic that houses are selling for so much, yet Brown School is selling for \$1.

Steven Binette suggested that the property be advertised on the commercial market.

Lori Korzen stated that there have been a million different ideas on the internet as to what could be done with the building, such as ground floor shops and restaurants, a motel, college dorms, and a Charter School. Mrs. Korzen stated that children and parents need choice in education and the Berlin schools are not listening.

Amber Bachner of 59 High Street suggested working with a state college or university, which would bring younger people to town who may stay. Mrs. Bachner also asked why there was opposition to a Charter School.

Interim City Manager Pamela Laflamme addressed the questions and concerns brought up by the public in attendance. Ms. Laflamme stated that in 2019 the Council authorized a committee to be formed to determine the best and highest use of the building. The committee had members from the Council, BIDPA, and residents of the neighborhood. They did discuss the use of a commercial broker and the services of Camoin Associates, which would have been about \$12,000. The committee chose to go with a Request for Proposals in 2019 and at that time CCFHS came for a walk-through, along with TKB and Wildcat LLC. There was no minimum bid required on the proposals. At that time, Wildcat LLC was awarded the bid, and they had proposed market-rate units in Brown School. However, Mr. Dambrie needed to ask for more time due to financing and Covid, and last June indicated he would not be able to move forward with the market-rate project. The school was put back out to bid and re-advertised on the website, in the local papers, and in the Union Leader. The only bidders were TKB and Wildcat LLC, both were interviewed and they had nearly identical projects, using CDBG and HUD funding. The committee decided to go with TKB, as they had experience with using that type of funding before. Ms. Laflamme advised that they are not proposing Section 8 housing, it will be low to moderate income housing for a period of 5 years to satisfy the CDBG requirements and then will be market-rate. TKB currently manages 84 units, of which only 24 use some form of housing assistance. The other 60 units they oversee are paying market-rate. The \$1 bid was what both TKB and Wildcat LLC proposed to be able to make the project work. Ms. Laflamme noted that the property does sit within a floodway/floodplain, which will be tricky to develop around. The study is available on the City Manager's page on the website. Mayor Grenier noted that the project would be 20 apartments, of which half would be low to moderate income. Ms. Laflamme noted that the proposal suggests 70-75% of units for low to moderate income, and based on current guidelines, the income limit would be \$69,000 for a family of four.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **1. Council Committee Reports**

There were no Council committee reports.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **2. Resolution 2021-25 Carryover Appropriations (1<sup>st</sup> reading)**

Councilor Remillard moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for December 20, 2021. So moved, the motion carried.

**3. Resolution 2021-26 Speed Limit Change (1<sup>st</sup> reading)**

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Berthiaume, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for December 20, 2021. So moved, the motion carried.

**4. City Manager's Report**

1. Mayor Grenier & I attended an online meeting this morning with Senator Shaheen and her staff to discuss the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Mayor Grenier was on top of checking on the funds that may be available for extending water and sewer infrastructure related to economic development. It sounds like there will be more funds available through traditional funding sources, nothing unexpected here but there may be one avenue which we will explore with her staff to learn more about that may benefit Berlin.
2. St. Vincent's has completed its work to connect their drain line to the City's drainage system as of last week. We received a call from the neighbor who brought this to our attention Mr. Langlois this morning to express his gratitude for our help in getting this issue resolved.
3. There will be a Booster Blitz statewide this weekend, the local site will be here in Berlin at Brown School on Saturday, December 11, 2021. You can register in advance at this site - <https://www.vaccines.nh.gov/> by selecting Booster Blitz.
4. [NHDES - Annual Sampling and Analysis Report letter.](#)
5. [AV Home Care mid-year report.](#)
6. Attached is the [Fire Chief's November report](#) and the [Monthly Incident Report](#).

Councilor Rozek moved, with a second from Councilor Higbee, to accept the Interim City Manager's Report and place it on file.

Councilor Berthiaume asked about the Police Department monthly report and Chief Morency advised he will look into that for the next meeting. Councilor Berthiaume also requested the EMS report. Councilor Berthiaume stated the Fire Department has done a good job listing medical assists, and requested a 3-year comparison with year-to-date totals before budget season.

Councilor Eastman asked about the status of the engineering for Route 110. Interim Manager Laflamme stated that they are waiting on information from Jennifer Fish at the County, and hope to put it out before the holidays.

So moved, the motion carried.

**5. Mayor's Report**

- a. Letter from Steven Binette re: Brown School

Paul,

Just wanted to briefly review our phone conversation yesterday in regards to Brown School, as a Berlin tax payer/business owner/developer within the City. As I mentioned that the Brown School Building would be best used as Moderate Housing and not low income which the City has an abundance of. We've seen and experienced what this has done to the City as property taxes increase due to the additional service that will be needed in regards to the low-income approach. I believe that the best interest for the City is to market the Real Estate to a Commercial Agency besides the Local Paper which we can provide one. If we were to go back and calculate all the monies that the City spent in the past 10 years within that property it probably exceeds a million dollars. I believe that there's a Developer that would invest into 20 moderate housing units which would not depend on grants to rehabilitate. Also it would be a Great Tax Revenue for the City. If the Property can be marketed for example \$200,000. I believe that the City would receive other offers from Commercial Real Estate Agency. The Residential Real Estate Market this

past year has been through the roof and Berlin does not have enough Moderate Housing available. Also seeing a Public Building selling for 1 dollar does not help the City's commercial market which we have properties for sale within the City.

I would also like to mention that when the River Walk is completed this too will attract people to the Brown School Property.

Please reconsider and move Berlin in a Positive Approach.

Thanks

Steven Binette  
Ray's Electric and General Contracting Inc.  
President/CEO  
603-752-1370

b. Planning Board Appointments

Mayor Grenier & City Council:

My name is Amy Howder-George I am interested in serving on the Berlin Planning Board. After observing the Planning Board as a guest, I concluded that your team is a board of individuals that work well together and have a genuine concern for the city and the shape the city takes under the board's guidance and direction.

My background in local government started at Santa Rosa Junior College as a cabinet member within student government, where I learned about parliamentary procedure. I then moved into community issues and onto the Women's League of Voters, demonstrating a commitment to empowering voters and defending democracy. I advanced my knowledge of community capacity building (CCB) by learning what it looks like to invest my time in a service that focuses on enabling all community members, including the poorest and the most disadvantaged. I assisted with helping people develop skills and competencies to take greater control of their own lives and contribute to inclusive local development. I began to also work within detention centers, recovery centers, homeless shelters as a matriculation technician out of the Santa Rosa Junior College Matriculation Department. My most significant achievement was when I worked on the LWV within the nominating committee and on a study that performed community-wide mapping to understand the delinquent youth and the juvenile justice system. Our goal was to bring resources, answers, solutions and to gain LWV favor to support local policies that ensure that youth receive fair, equitable, and rehabilitative treatment within the Juvenile Justice System in Sonoma County. After an extensive study, my passions moved to policies targeting solutions for recidivism (re-incarceration), restorative justice practices, and rehabilitative strategies. (AB109)

By appointment, I soon served on the Child Care Planning Council of Sonoma County Office of Education, where we ensure citizens in the community get choices about where and how they will live and work. We surveyed and developed interactive heat maps to provide team members with data visualizations designed to foster learning, discussion, and decision making.

I have had many experiences and now find myself here in Berlin, married and making friends, some that I have found to speak about the planning board as a place to visit and think about investing myself in. After visiting and observing your team, I would like to ask if I may join your group. I felt welcomed and aligned with your members' comments. I am looking for such a team and seat to serve in. I am interested in filling an open alternate member seat for an unexpired term that would go until April 30, 2023.

Thank you for your time in reading this.

Sincerely,

Amy Howder George

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

I was informed recently of an open seat on the Berlin planning board, and I would like to offer myself for consideration. I bought a house in Berlin in 2014, while I was working in the Boston area, and moved here full-time in 2017, after taking a remote job. I feel that this community has great potential for economic development and for reinvestment in its buildings, roads, businesses and energy systems.

I have a B. A. in Linguistics from the University of Michigan. For the last 14 years, I've worked in the renewable energy industry, installing, designing and project managing solar and battery projects. I recently started a new job with Simpliphi Power, a lithium-ion battery manufacturer, as an applications engineer.

I would like to be helpful in the city government's efforts to develop and improve Berlin as we move deeper into the 21st century.

Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Jeffrey Quackenbush  
167 Washington St.  
Berlin, NH 03570

Councilor Rozek moved, with a second from Councilor Higbee, to accept the letter from Steven Binette and the Mayor's nominations of Amy Howder George and Jeffrey Quackenbush as alternate members of the Planning Board with terms to expire on April 30, 2023 and April 30, 2024 respectively. So moved, the motion carried.

## **6. Public Comments**

Micah Bachner asked about a municipal corporation and Interim Manager Laflamme stated that the City used to have BEDCO, which was a quasi-municipal agency that could do lending with revolving loan funds. However, BEDCO disbanded and the recipients of the loan funds were the Coos Economic Development Corporation and North Country Council.

Jesstina Murphy asked why the companies bidding on Brown School were not asked to break the tie at \$1 with another bid, and suggested others may come to the table.

Richard King stated that the new assessed values will lead to taxes going up. Mr. King asked about road repairs, sewer and water line upgrades, and plans for bettering the City. Mr. King noted that he hopes the Police Department will get money to patrol Route 110 with the new projects proposed there, as the 4-wheelers do wheelies and drive by his house at 50-60 mph.

Steven Korzen of 788 Kent Street asked about the carryover appropriations of 2.1 million and if these projects will be completed. Mayor Grenier advised that these accounts are money saved for capital improvements. Many of the projects had to be put on hold due to rising costs due to Covid. When the supply lines and prices stabilize, then they can be completed. Mayor Grenier noted that the Mason Street bridge project went from \$500,000 for the whole job to \$509,000 for half of the work due to rising costs.

Jesstina Murphy asked about money budgeted for roads and Mayor Grenier advised that there is not a line item for road work, just maintenance. Mayor Grenier advised that taxes went up, as the estimate in June was based on the best information at that time. The equalization rate affected the amount of County tax, and there will need to be an update for assessments to bring property back in line with the value. Mayor Grenier noted that the higher our property valuation is, the more it hurts our state funding for education. Mayor Grenier advised the equalization rate is a real problem.

Lori Korzen noted that she has lived here for 20 years and the roads have deteriorated. Mrs. Korzen noted that as a household, they need to budget for paving driveways or oil deliveries and asked why the City has not done this for road repairs. Mayor Grenier advised that since 2008, the City has lost \$14 million from the State in revenue sharing, along with increased costs for the NH Retirement System which the state used to contribute to.

Ralph Collins stated that it is time for the City to tighten its belt with the budget just like people do at home.

## 7. Council Comments

Councilor Higbee asked about the Carryover Appropriations and confirmed that this is money already in savings that was not used and is being carried over to the next fiscal year, not money that needs to be raised. Councilor Higbee also asked about the Mayor's comment about Charter schools, and Mayor Grenier advised there are currently no proposals for Charter schools for Berlin.

Councilor Eastman advised that he received a number of phone calls from citizens with concerns over the sale of Brown School for \$1. Councilor Eastman stated that citizens feel it is not in the best interest of the community, that moderate housing is needed, and they are concerned about the school system, as the culture they are seeing at the bus stops and playgrounds is concerning.

Councilor Rozek stated that he agreed with Councilor Eastman's statements and suggested the sale be reviewed by the Council. Councilor Rozek noted that the two biggest complaints in the City have always been the condition of the roads and taxes, which were heard here again tonight. Councilor Rozek noted that in defense of the City, work that was done by Berlin Water Works in the Norway and Sweden Street area was allowed trench patching, which they assumed would be covered, but is now very rough. Councilor Rozek stated that all the roads need to be repaved, and the City needs to find a way to correct this. Councilor Rozek thanked those attending for taking the time to share their thoughts and comments.

Councilor Remillard noted that Brown School had been put out to bid a couple times and each time only 2 bids were received. Councilor Remillard stated they are both proposing moderate housing and that Bartlett School is already done the 5-year requirement and pay taxes. Councilor Remillard advised that it is a major cost to hold on to a building, as well as the problem of deterioration the longer it sits. This plan would give the City more moderate housing, and is a major investment. Councilor Remillard stated that we are not going to get any development without some sort of grant. Councilor Remillard noted that there is a lot happening and that we have to work with what is coming in, and this project will bring in tax money and housing.

Councilor Berthiaume noted that Brown School was put out multiple times and they only had two bids. Councilor Berthiaume stated that the City wants a tax paying entity, not a non-profit, and as much as creative thinking would be nice, there is not money for that. This plan will get the property back on the tax rolls.

Councilor Eastman asked if the asbestos and lead have been abated. Interim Manager Pamela Laflamme advised that most of the asbestos has been, but there is a small amount left on pipes in the basement. Ms. Laflamme will check with Bryan Lamirande on the lead, as she is not certain on that.

## 8. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Rozek, seconded by Councilor Higbee, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:27 pm. So moved, the motion carried.

A True Record, Attest:

Shelli Fortin  
City Clerk

Note: Minutes are unofficial until they have been accepted by the Council by motion.