

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, March 4, 2024

Public Hearing

Mayor Cone opened the Public Hearing at 7:33 pm for Resolution 2024-04 ARPA Funds Expenditure. There were no public comments. Mayor Cone closed the Public Hearing at 7:33 pm.

Regular Meeting

Mayor Cone called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:34 pm.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Cone, Councilors Mia Qualls, Higbee, Morency, Valerino, Morgan, Korzen, and Theberge.

Absent: Councilor Berthiaume

Also present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Director of Strategic Initiatives Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Jamie Welch, Gina Welch, Bunny Caldwell, Ernest Martin, and Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun.

c. Councilor Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to accept the minutes of the February 20, 2024 Regular Meeting and Work Session. So moved, the motion passed.

Disbursements:

Disbursement Summary Draft #1956 with a start date of 02/21/2024 and an end date of 03/04/2024 for a total cash disbursement of \$750,320.00. Councilor Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Higbee, to accept the disbursement summary and pay all bills as recommended by the Committee on Accounts/Claims. So moved, the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Bunny Caldwell of 442 Norway Street noted that it is expensive to contract billing for an ambulance service, and suggested that the City do the billing in-house. City Manager Warren advised that this would require the City to hire an additional employee and purchase the software, and noted that the City would then assume the liability for any Medicaid/Medicare audit, which would be assumed by the billing company if it was contracted. Ms. Caldwell stated that she hopes the City will be open to new ideas, and not do things the way they have always been done.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Council Committee Reports

There were no Council Committee Reports.

2. Resolution 2024-04 ARPA Funds Expenditure (tabled 2/20/2024)

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-Four

A RESOLUTION authorizing the expenditure of ARPA funds.

Resolved by the City Council of the City of Berlin as Follows:

WHEREAS, the City has been granted ARPA funds and said funds are on deposit with the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Council would like to use said funds for the betterment of the community and consistent with all ARPA regulations.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Berlin, NH, that the following expenditure of ARPA funds, located in revenue account 01-000-340425-0000 be authorized for the following amounts and purposes:

Community Park Baseball Field Improvements	\$25,000
Chairlift Replacement	\$1143
Council Chamber cameras and microphones	\$9300
Horne Field Tennis Court Project	\$4761

And to furthermore authorize the City Manager to take any and all actions necessary to complete said projects.

This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after passage.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to remove this item from the table. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to read Resolution 2024-04 by short title for a second time. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to read Resolution 2024-04 by short title for a third time. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, that Resolution 2024-04 be passed. So moved, the motion passed.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Resolution 2024-05 Ambulance Purchase (1st read)

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morgan, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for March 18, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

2. City Manager’s Report

1. We have been notified by FEMA that disaster relief will be coming for the December 2023 weather event. A request will be filed by this office for available disaster funds.
2. Senator Shaheen’s office advised us that “Directed Spending Requests” are now being accepted. The Police Department will be filing one for upgrades to the emergency communications system, including improvements to the communication facility on Cates Hill. We were advised in the past that the Route 110 project is too large for these types of requests.
3. We are working with Berlin Water Works to coordinate roadway improvements – we were advised today that Water Works will be accessing many water services to inspect them for lead.
4. An informational meeting regarding the Mason Street bridge improvements was held last week, it is anticipated that design will begin this year and that construction will take place in September of 2025 – we are limited to when construction can occur by the drawdown schedule of the canal, which generally occurs each September.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to accept the City Manager’s Report and place it on file.

Councilor Higbee asked about the bridge work and if it is a continuation of the ongoing work that has already been done on the bridge. City Manager Warren advised that it is the final piece of the project.

Councilor Korzen asked about the FEMA funds, and City Manager Warren advised that there was damage to drainage, pavement, roads, and the Watson Street Pump Station. The City has submitted a preliminary request, so a lot of the work has already been done already to request the funds.

So moved, the motion passed.

3. Mayor’s Report

There was no Mayor’s Report.

4. Public Comments

Bunny Caldwell stated that she agreed with Councilor Theberge that transparency is extremely important, especially the breakdown of salaries for employees. Ms. Caldwell noted that this should be public knowledge and not lumped together in the budget.

5. Council Comments

Councilor Valerino noted that Senator Shaheen was very helpful when the Police Department applied for the COPS grant, and she may be able to help again with the grant for Fire Department personnel. Councilor Morency agreed.

Councilor Theberge noted that the Coos County Sheriff's Department, the Police Department, and NH State Police have been working together to avoid any problems during the solar eclipse on April 8, 2024. Councilor Theberge also stated that several private planes plan to land at the airport for this event, which may increase revenues.

Councilor Morgan read a letter of resignation to the Council:

Mayor Cone and City Councilors,

It is with much regret that I need to resign my seat on the Berlin City Council effective 03/04/2024 after tonight's meeting. Circumstances have changed for me and my family recently and I need to make some adjustments to my schedule to allow me more flexibility for the benefit of my family and work obligations.

As a City Councilor for well over a decade, I have worked alongside many wonderful individuals who have all sought to revitalize our community. From the project with North Country Growers, the RAISE project for downtown, the development and success associated with the continued growth of the outdoor recreation sector, and new small businesses opening on our Main Street, I have seen a lot of time and effort from our elected officials, City staff, and local volunteers to bring projects to fruition. We have a lot to be proud of and I am so grateful to have had a part in Berlin's redevelopment. I learned so much about public service and the role of local government and I thank all of you who were part of my education.

As someone who grew up here, makes a living here, has raised my family here, I am committed to seeing Berlin thrive. I wish nothing but the best for our community and our residents. I do hope that when my circumstances allow me, I will attend some public meetings and stay on top of what is going on here in this great community.

Thank you for the opportunity to have served alongside all of you! I will miss this work and all of the people I have had the pleasure to work with over the years.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise M. Morgan
117 Pine Street
Berlin, NH 03570

City Manager Warren suggested that the Council advertise the open position in the newspaper and on the website, with letters of interest due by noon on March 14, 2024, and interviews to be held on March 18, 2024 during the work session. A decision can be made that night or at the next meeting.

Councilor Korzen moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to accept Councilor Morgan's resignation with regret. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to accept the City Manager's recommendation and advertise the vacant position on the Council, with letters of interest received by noon on March 14, 2024, and interviews to be held at the work session on March 18, 2024. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee thanked Councilor Morgan for her service, and noted that he has enjoyed working with her and campaigning together.

6. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Higbee, seconded by Councilor Morgan, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:57 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.