

City Council Work Session July 18, 2022

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Remillard, Morency, Berthiaume, Robert Theberge, Eastman and Roland Theberge. Councilors Morgan and Higbee were absent.

Others present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Police Chief Dan Buteau, Lt. Zachary Howry, Steven Korzen, Lori Korzen, Ralph Collins, Dan Landry, Micah Bachner, Amber Bachner, Paul Robitaille, Berlin Daily Sun.

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:35 p.m. He requested to add a Non-Public Session to the work session agenda. Councilor Remillard moved, seconded by Councilor Roland Theberge to add a Non-Public Session to the work session agenda per RSA 91-A:3 II; (I) Consideration of legal advice provided by legal counsel. So, moved, the motion carried by roll call with all in favor.

Road Closure Requests – Journey to Jericho ATV Jamboree

Councilor Berthiaume read the communication received from the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce requesting multiple road closures for the “Journey to Jericho ATV Jamboree” being held on Friday and Saturday August 5th and 6th, 2022. Councilor Remillard moved to authorize the street closures as presented by the Chamber of Commerce. Councilor Morency seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Abatement

Mr. Warren presented the abatement for Tri-County Community Action Program Inc. This is for the first half of the 2022 Tax bill. The property has exempt status and was billed due to an error in the assessment data. Councilor Berthiaume moved to approve the abatement for Tri- County CAP. Councilor Robert Theberge seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

Geese Discussion

Mayor Grenier asked Councilors to authorize Mr. Dan Landry to participate in this discussion. Councilors agreed. Ms. Laflamme gave an update on the geese situation. She commented discussions had started in 2016 and continued into 2017 where signs were posted not to feed the geese. Because the geese continued to be fed and stay longer than usual, Fish and Game considers the geese to be resident geese versus migrant. This past winter they spent most the winter at Community Field and didn’t really leave. In 2018, the Public Works Department and the City Manager at the time worked with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the City paid to have the geese rounded up at Landry farm and exterminated. The biggest issue at the time is not all the geese were exterminated which cause them to repopulate and come back. Mr. Landry has still experienced many issues over time. She commented when designing the Riverwalk, there was work done with HEB and Ironwood Architects to try to come up with landscape plantings that might deter the geese from coming up the bank. The consensus is at this point no matter what is done, they’ll figure out a way to get around whatever is planted and put up. There are many other options that can be done, but according to Fish and Game there is really not much we can do except harass them which would involve hiring trainers with dogs to constantly harass the geese off the river bank and the minute the harassing stops, they’ll be back. She commented the geese cause a lot of problems including health problems. The list of issues related to geese is extensive. Many communities struggle with this issue not just in New Hampshire, but across the Country.

Mr. Landry advised he's been in communication with Fish and Game and they really don't want to get rid of the geese as they like to tag them so they can monitor them and see where they fly. He advised that it's the NH DES that gets rid of the geese. They round them up and exterminate them. This may take up to three years to exterminate them all. He advised the last time this was done; two geese came back and citizens started feeding them which is why they stayed and repopulated. He commented the geese leave anywhere from the 1st to the 5th of January and return the third week of February to the 1st week of March depending on the weather. They are here 10 months out of the year. This year, the geese were hanging out at Community Field, there were at least 50 of them defecating all over the field. They would stay there all day long and around 3:00pm, kids would come to play soccer with feces all over the field. They are also at the High School track and Glen Avenue. He stated a couple years ago he lost an acre of corn in one day from the geese.

He commented in the fall he gets 200 to 250 geese on his property. There are so many diseases associated with geese feces that this poses a health risk. He was also advised by Fish and Game that the Southern part of the State is experiencing many issues and geese are dying from the bird flu and they don't know how transmissible it is to humans. They do know one type of bird flu is transmissible to humans and pets. He commented he used to be able to swim in the river off his land and for the past Two-Three years he hasn't been able to because of all the feces. When the geese come in and he's cleaned up the day before, within a few hours of them being there he will be picking up over a 5-gallon pail of feces. He's used many options to steer them off including loud noises, decoys, chimes, dogs, he let the grass grow 30" high per Fish and Game and the geese tunneled through it. He put up a string fence which they got through and a snow fence which they also got through. Fish and Game was at his property about two weeks ago advising him to try a ribbon. He put it up in the afternoon and in the evening he had up to 60 geese on his land. There is no way of getting rid of them unless you terminate them. He advised when they did it 4 years ago, it helped, but it should have been done for 3 years in a row to be fully successful. He advised that 2 years ago the City of Berlin had to have the Fire Department wash the sidewalks from the 12th Street Bridge to Brown School because of the amount of geese feces accumulated overnight.

Councilor Eastman questioned if it's Fish and Game that rounds them up and euthanizes them. Ms. Laflamme responded it is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that handles it with a cost associated with the service. She commented the last time this was done the cost was about \$5,000. Councilor Roland Theberge commented that the method used to euthanize them, still leaves them edible. Councilor Remillard commented she feels this issue needs to be dealt with and suggested planning starting next year for a three-year program. Councilor Robert Theberge commented there is a contraceptive option to reduce the geese population. There's a humane way of doing this.

Councilor Berthiaume mentioned the signage that was placed stating not to feed the geese and if the law can get involved. Mr. Warren advised the City doesn't have an Ordinance that prohibits it so there is no way to enforce. Councilor Eastman commented this is a definite health hazard and with what they're experiencing down South with the bird flu and because the geese are spreading out through the City defecating everywhere, this needs to be addressed. He questioned if it has to be a government entity that rounds them up. Mr. Warren responded it has to be an entity that is licensed by the State to remove nuisance wildlife. Mayor Grenier asked Mr. Warren to contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to put a proposal together for Council to review before any decisions are made. Mr. Warren asked Mr. Landry if the molting is almost done. Mr. Landry advised it's coming to an end. If nothing is done within the next week and a half, it will have to wait next year. Mr. Warren advised Council if they want to do

something this year, now would be the time to do it. There are funds in contingency to cover the cost for this year and the next three years would be budgeted for.

Councilor Remillard moved to authorize the City Manager to spend up to \$5,000 for the hiring of a vendor to work with reducing the geese population for this year and obtain a proposal for the next three years. Councilor Berthiaume stated she doesn't agree with starting the process this year. Councilor Robert Theberge commented he is in favor of the proposal, but would like the City Manager to research if any communities are using contraceptives and how effective they are. Mr. Warren commented he would ask U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Councilor Roland Theberge seconded the motion. So, moved, the motion carried by majority in favor with one vote in opposition from Councilor Berthiaume.

Non-Public Session

At 7:23 p.m., Councilor Remillard moved to enter into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II; (I) Consideration of legal advice provided by legal counsel; Councilor Morency seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call. Mayor Grenier abstained and advised he will not be part of the discussion. He left the room.

Legal matters were discussed.

At 7:51 p.m., Mayor, Council and Staff came out of Non-Public Session. Councilor Remillard moved to seal the minutes of the non-public session, as releasing them would render the action taken ineffective; Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

At 7:52 p.m., there being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Grenier recessed before moving on to the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Danielle Rioux
Executive Assistant

*Minutes are unofficial until they have been accepted by the City Council by motion.