

City Council Work Session June 19, 2023

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

Others present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Dir. Of Strat. Initiatives and Asst. City Mgr. Pamela Laflamme, Finance Director Holly Larsen, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Chief of Police Dan Buteau, Micah Bachner, Amber Bachner, Pierre Lessard, Kyle Lacasse and Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun.

Mayor Grenier opened up the meeting at 6:32p.m.

Abatement Recommendations

Mr. Warren discussed the following abatement recommendations received from Ms. Monica Hurley of Corcoran Consulting Associates;

1. **665 Fourth Avenue (Map 110 Lot 48)**, Ms. Hurley recommends denying the abatement.
2. **290 Howard Street (Map 138 Lot 32)**, Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2022 tax year and reduce the assessment from \$406,200 to \$376,300.
3. **128.5 Wight Street (Map 109 Lot 90)**, Ms. Hurley recommends denying the abatement.
4. **87 Willard Street (Map 119 Lot 146)**, Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2022 tax year and reduce the assessment from \$518,000 to \$340,700.
5. **151 Main Street (Map 119 Lot 53)**, Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2022 tax year and reduce the assessment from \$363,100 to \$304,700.

Councilor Berthiaume moved to approve the property abatements as recommended by Corcoran Consulting Associates. Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

Utility Abatement Recommendations

Mr. Warren discussed the following utility abatement recommendations received from Sansoucy Associates;

1. **2022 HSE Hydro NH Smith/CRP**, Sansoucy Associates recommends denying this abatement due to lack of supporting information provided in the application.
2. **2022 Great Lakes Hydro America**, Sansoucy Associates recommends denying this abatement due to pending litigation and upcoming mediation.
3. **2022 Eversource**, Sansoucy Associates recommends denying this abatement due to lack of information or appraisal supporting their request.

Councilor Higbee moved to endorse the abatement denials as recommended by Sansoucy Associates for the utility properties. Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

Gravel Tax Warrant

Mr. Warren presented the gravel tax levy for Four Wheeler Holdings, LLC in the amount of \$511.28. Councilor Berthiaume moved to issue the gravel tax levy as presented. Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Eastman.

Exempt Properties

Mr. Warren advised he added this item to the agenda to discuss with Council on how they want to proceed with exempt properties. Something that wasn't done in the past but required by the DRA is the City has to approve exempt properties annually. There are no new ones, but approximately twenty present ones. They are reviewed by Corcoran Consulting Associates for accuracy. They then come to the City for approval. He is asking Council if

they want the exempt properties to come before them or do they want him to review them. He would present any new ones to Council. Mayor Grenier suggested any existing exempt properties be reviewed by the City Manager and any new ones should come to Council. Councilor Morency questioned if a property has a new owner or is transfers what happens. Mr. Warren responded it becomes a new one and would be presented to Council. All agreed with the existing exempt properties being reviewed by the City Manager and new ones being presented to Council.

Kyle Lacasse / CDBG Discussion

Mayor Grenier advised Mr. Lacasse, who recently purchased 18 Peavey Lane, is present this evening to answer any questions Council might have in regards to the CDBG Grant application for this property. Ms. Laflamme commented that herself and Donna Lane were approached by Mr. Lacasse. Ms. Lane has done a lot of work as a consultant for community development block grant projects for the City of Berlin. Ms. Laflamme commented herself and Ms. Lane have asked many questions to Mr. Lacasse in regards to interest of the City and process budgeting which will be required from CDFA in the application process. Ms. Lane also did reference checking. CDFA has expressed interest which is atypical of them, but they recognize the issues statewide around housing and availability especially rentals.

Mr. Lacasse distributed documents which include a broad overview of what the State is seeing right now for housing needs. It included; the current state of housing, problems to solve, project objective and future investment to the community. He commented the low-moderate income requirements are based off of 80% of the area's market income. This property will be all 3-bedroom units where that puts a family of five with an area of needed income to qualify for this property is at \$80,000. He commented they have specific requirements when renting to tenants. They do reference, background, eviction and income checks.

Mayor Grenier questioned the parking situation at 18 Peavey Lane. Mr. Lacasse advised he's been in conversations with the owners of the old market which abuts his property. He is working on a written agreement that would allow his tenants to park on that property. He commented there is also a garage that can be taken down to create more parking spaces. He has also considered renting parking space from the neighbor. Councilor Eastman questioned the selection process. How are the applications prioritized as to who gets in. Mr. Lacasse advised they screen all the renters and are on a first come first serve basis. 51% of the apartments have to be low to moderate income which is that 80% of the area market income. The tenants have to show 2 years of employment as well. Councilor Eastman questioned if the rentals will be for working families. Mr. Lacasse responded yes, all his properties are workforce housing. Councilor Berthiaume questioned if it's income guideline based, where does the employment criteria come in. Mr. Lacasse advised that for three of the four apartments, it will follow the CDFA requirements of low-moderate income and one of the apartments will be under his requirements which includes 2 years of employment providing a steady income. Ms. Laflamme commented there will be a lien placed on Mr. Lacasse's property by CDFA for 5 years that will require him to rent in that order. After 5 years, he can decide to rent at market rate. Councilor Robert Theberge asked about a timeline. Mr. Lacasse commented late Fall. He's already obtained bids from contractors which he knows he will have to rebid, he wanted to get the cost ahead of time.

Certificate of Vote – DES Cybersecurity Improvements Grant

Ms. Laflamme advised there is a Resolution on the agenda for this. She has two certificates of vote as there is also a second grant from DES which the Resolution was done last June, but they just finalized the funds they are awarding us which is a little over \$1,000,000. In putting in the paperwork for both that grant and the cybersecurity grant, DES now requires a certificate of vote for each grant not just the Resolution from the City.

The first one is for the cybersecurity grant;

Councilor Higbee moved to certify that at a meeting held on June 19, 2023 the City Council voted to enter into an ARPA grant agreement with the New Hampshire Department Environmental Services to fund a Wastewater Cybersecurity Improvement Project. The City of Berlin further authorized City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr. to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate this grant agreement. Councilor Morency seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

The second one is for the wastewater improvement grant; Councilor Higbee moved to certify that at a meeting held on June 19,2023 the City Council voted to enter into an ARPA grant agreement with the New Hampshire Department Environmental Services to fund a Wastewater Improvement Project. The City of Berlin further authorized City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr. to execute any documents which may be necessary to effectuate this grant agreement. Councilor Berthiaume seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Notice to Municipalities for Exile LLC

Mr. Warren advised Adam from Exile LLC made an application to the State of NH Liquor Commission for a for a Restaurant Bev/Wine liquor license. He commented he previously had the license, but let it lapse so now has to reapply. Councilor Berthiaume moved to send a letter to the NH Liquor Commission endorsing Exile LLC's application for a Restaurant Bev/Wine liquor license. Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Cates Hill Tower Lease

Mr. Warren advised Council the lease agreement is included in their packets. He commented he's been working on this lease for over a year. He informed that the City's emergency communications, public safety communications, water works communications (SCADA) are on an antenna on Cates Hill that is currently owned by Androscoggin Valley Hospital. We were able to co-locate on there, but AVH doesn't need it anymore, but the City needs the location for the communications equipment. The property where the antenna is located is owned by Daniel and Lynn Cotnoir. The lease document was originally proposed by the land owners, it was reviewed by Counsel, recommendations were made and negotiations have gone on during this period to execute this.

To summarize the agreement, the City leases this property for \$9,200 per year and pay a \$3,000 one-time non-reoccurring payment at time of execution. AVH will no fee convey the tower and building to the City. He advised because this is a lease that has been funded, and it is open ended, it's a simple vote from Council to get out of and just pay the pro-rated share of the rent. Because it's open ended and funding is in place, it doesn't require a resolution, just requires a vote of the Council. Councilor Morency questioned if Berlin Water Works will help with repairs and maintenance. Mr. Warren advised once the City owns the tower, they can negotiate agreements. Councilor Roland Theberge moved to accept the lease agreement as presented. Councilor Robert Theberge seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Dog Warrant

City Clerk Shelli Fortin distributed the list of dogs that have not yet been registered. There are 168 dogs on the list. She advised she sent out 1st and 2nd notice reminders and have also called everyone on the list she has a valid phone number for. She would like to send one more reminder stating they have till July 15 to license their dogs or they will be subject to a civil forfeiture of \$25 in addition to have to license their dog.

Councilor Morency moved to authorize the City Clerk to issue dog owners another communication stating they have till July 15 to license their dogs or they will be subject to a civil forfeiture of \$25 in addition to have to license their dog; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

At 7:22 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.