

## **City Council Work Session**

### **April 1, 2024**

Present were: Mayor Cone, Councilors Higbee, Grenier, Qualls, Korzen, Berthiaume, Theberge, Valerino and Morency.

Others present: Dir. Of Strat. Initiatives and Asst. City Mgr. Pamela Laflamme, Finance Director Holly Larsen, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Chief of Police Dan Buteau, Library Director Ann Brungot, Health and Welfare Director Angela Martin-Giroux, Paula Kinney of Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce, Tom McCue of the Berlin Main Street Program, Laura Boucher of Granite United Way, Margo Sullivan of A.V. Home Care Services, Brenda Gagne of Tri-County CAP, Ren Anderson of North Country Home Health & Hospice Agency, Greg and Sarah Swift of Feeding Hope Food Pantry, Jeanne Charest of CASA, Carol Miller of NCDE, Jeffrey Quackenbush, Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun and Members of the Public.

Mayor Cone opened the meeting at 6:31 p.m. He advised the Coos County Broadband Committee presentation would be held in the conference room, but the work session will be moved to the council chambers due to the large number of attendees.

#### **Coos County Broadband Committee Presentation**

Carol Miller, Director of Broadband Initiative for NCDE presented a [power point presentation](#) to Council. Ms. Miller, through her presentation discussed broadband funding to NH, the E911 data collection for Coos County, the next steps and provided contact information. She commented she is here to ask for E911 permission to collect the data for Berlin. Ms. Laflamme commented if Council doesn't have issues with this, she will send a letter to Director Doyle of the NH Department of Safety.

Council, Staff and Members of the Public moved to the council chambers.

#### **Electricity Aggregation Program**

Berlin's Representative for CPCNH Jeffrey Quackenbush discussed the energy aggregation plan that the City Council needs to approve. He commented that plan would also be sent to the State PUC and if the City decides to move forward, it will need to form an energy committee. Ms. Laflamme advised City Manager Warren left notes for the Council. The agenda packets emailed to Council included the contract with the edits made by legal counsel as well as answers from Henry Herndon. The goal tonight is, if all are comfortable with the changes suggested and answers given, to put this on a future agenda for final passage and approval. If moving forward, an energy committee will need to be formed. Ms. Laflamme commented Mr. Warren suggested forming a committee of no more than five members. Mr. Quackenbush advised he would send the clean text to CPCNH and instruct them to send it to the PUC sometimes in the next two weeks. He also commented that after adoption, a committee should be formed by Memorial Day. Ms. Laflamme advised she would be responsible for this new committee. She is happy to work out the details once Council decides how many members it wants to appoint and what the structure should be. This can be discussed at a future meeting. Mayor Cone advised the final energy aggregation plan will be voted on at the next regular meeting of April 15<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Budget:**

##### **Outside Agencies**

Ms. Laflamme said that NHMA and North Country Council are membership driven. Their dues are based on population and equalized valuation. Representatives from different Outside Agencies were present this evening. They presented their requests to Council and discussed their services. The presentations were as follows:

*Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce – Paula Kinney*

Ms. Kinney advised the requested amounts are the same as last year. She presented two requests, one for \$1,500 which is used for marketing to promote the area and events, and \$3,000 for the Journey to Jericho ATV Jamboree. Mayor Cone noted that the membership dues were entered in the FY25 budget at \$400, but should be at \$800. Ms. Kinney confirmed the dues should be at \$800.

*Northern Human Services*

No representative present.

*A.V. Home Care Services – Margo Sullivan*

Ms. Sullivan advised the agency provides non-medical nursing, homemaking and personal care services. They are a licensed home care agency. They apply for grants intended to help vulnerable older citizens and individuals that don't have resources and connections. They are the day to day care. Councilor Morency asked about staffing. Ms. Sullivan commented that it is actually getting better. There are a lot of people responding to their ads. What she is not seeing is the passion from workers as it was years ago. They do work on instilling this in new employees as the quality of care is what is most important.

*Tri-County CAP – Brenda Gagne*

Ms. Gagne advised Tri-County Cap provides a vast array of services for the City of Berlin including but not limited to; energy services, fuel & electric, winterization programs, transportation and senior meals. All those programs last year were provided to over 4200 residents of Berlin. Providing over \$5,300,000 in services. She distributed to Council a more detailed list of the services they provide. Councilor Morency asked about child care regulations and if they've eased up since last year's discussion. Ms. Gagne advised they are currently working with the State to see about extending hours to their Head Start program. They would like to do a pilot in the Berlin area which would provide daycare services after Head Start. It is still very early in the stages.

*Granite United Way – Laura Boucher*

Ms. Boucher commented Granite United Way works locally with many community partners and has the unique position to see all the organizations doing good work in our community. Helping lift these organizations doing the good work is core to United Way and the reason why it was created. They're requesting funds to support these local agencies and programs they partner with in the community with unrestricted grants. These grants will be offered 3 times a year allowing partners to seek support for their current needs. These grants are funded by campaign dollars from donors. The amount of donations has significantly gone down due to not having as many businesses as there used to be and many other factors. These grants are a much-needed resource for the community.

*Feeding Hope Food Pantry – Sarah and Greg Swift*

Ms. Swift advised the need is still increasing in the area. They've had a lot of new folks come to the area recently from many different avenues reaching out for help. Last year they had 237 new families. This year, in the first quarter, they've received 90 families. They receive people from all walks of life. They also do a soup kitchen on the side a couple times a month. Mr. Swift advised the numbers were greatly impacted this last year as they were able to benefit from the First Rescue Program which is an agreement between the NH Food Bank and retailers like Walmart, Shaw's, etc. This program allows them take the shelf expired food and unusable merchandise from these retailers. This supplements what they get from the NH Food Bank and USDA. Last year, at the Food Pantry there were 2,513 total family encounters that featured 5,180 individuals and 60 tons of food (120,000 pounds) went out the door to meet the needs of the community. This provided over 100,000 meals. This year, in the first quarter, they are averaging per month, 310 family encounters featuring 615 individuals. They've already provided over 7 tons of food (14,000 pounds) which is over 12,000 meals. They are the largest food resource in Coos County and 80% of that services the City of Berlin. The remaining 20% services other

communities including Stark, Dummer, Milan, Shelburne, Randolph, Gorham and occasionally Colebrook and Groveton. Councilor Grenier asked if they receive funding from the other communities included in the 20%. Mr. Swift responded they are working on getting funding from other communities that utilize the services the most which are Gorham and Milan.

*Second Chance Animal Rescue*

No representative present.

*Berlin Main Street Program – Tom McCue*

Mr. McCue serves as the secretary and member of the Board of Directors for the Berlin Main Street Program. They are a 501(c)(3) founded in 1996 and they're also registered with the NH Attorney General Charitable Trust Unit and every five years they file an annual report with the NH Secretary of State. They advocate for downtown businesses and work at improving Berlin's Main Street. They were faced with challenges over the years, but feels like it's moving in the right direction with new faces, new businesses and possibilities for more. The Berlin Main Street Program is run by a Board of Directors, all of who are volunteers and active participants along with other volunteers. The Berlin Main Street Program is requesting level funding again this year. The program continues with their efforts to work on beautifying Main Street. They are working on a set of design guidelines they're hoping businesses would consider when designing their business. They also sponsor the banners on the poles. The program hires clients of Northern Human Services for clean up at Bickford Park which was donated to the citizens of the City by BIDPA.

*The Family Resource Center*

No representative present.

*North Country Home Health & Hospice Agency – Ren Anderson*

Ms. Anderson advised that in 2023, their providers visited your friends and neighbors in Berlin 4,480 times to provide care. They have five major service lines they provide making sure that all friends and neighbors have hospice care, home health care, palliative care and long term care as well as durable medical equipment. With the new services they have an interdisciplinary team that provides nursing, rehabilitation services, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social services and homemaking. Hospice care is to improve the quality of life for patients and supporting their caregivers. Their dedicated team includes physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, a variety of nurses, home health aides, spiritual counselors and volunteers collaborating with patients to manage pain, address emotional and spiritual needs and providing necessary medication and equipment. Their durable medical equipment store provides all of the durable medical equipment for hospice patients across Coos and Grafton Counties. The wait for medical equipment is now 48hrs or less. They also pick up all medical equipment within 48hrs. They also offer oxygen to hospice patients at this time and are looking to growing that into their home health care. Home health care plays a pivotal role in addressing the growing needs of health care in our communities. There's been studies that show that people heal faster in their homes. She discussed in detail the services offered. She thanked Council for supporting their services.

*CASA – Jeanne Charest*

Ms. Charest advised CASA stands for Court Appointed Special Advocate. CASA consists of volunteers who serve as powerful voices for abused and neglected children. They are there to gather information for the court. She commented that currently there are 34 children in Berlin who are being serviced by a CASA. Last year there were 25. There has been a steady increase in children needing services. They do activities with children to get to know them to see what their specific needs are. The requested funds go towards improvements. Last year there were 70 children in Coos County that couldn't get a CASA assigned to them due to not having enough volunteers. Councilor Theberge questioned if there is an

increasing need for the program why only request \$500. Ms. Charest responded there are a few fundraisers held and generous donations are received. The funding from the City is sufficient.

#### *Hundred Nights Inc*

No representative present.

Councilor Morency commented we are very fortunate to have all these outside agencies that provide the number of services they do in the community. The funds they request is seed money as they bring a lot more than they're asking for. He is impressed by the number of volunteers who serve this community and wants them to know they are recognized and appreciated.

#### **Housing/Health/Welfare**

Ms. Laflamme advised the housing budget doesn't have much in it. It contains half the salary for Ms. Martin-Giroux which she will speak of in the Health and Welfare budget in a moment. The biggest line item in housing is for City Owned Property Costs which is utilized for the upkeep of the City's tax deeded properties. We will be using a portion of that this year to hopefully take down 745 Main Street along with 5 Birch Street.

Ms. Martin-Giroux distributed a [presentation](#) to Council and staff which included budget figures and what the department is actively doing to represent the City. She commented the Health/Welfare budget hasn't changed a lot through the years. The increases this year are mostly contracted items including salaries and health insurance. She commented the account clerk recently resigned so the funds under that line item will not be utilized unless the position gets filled. Councilor Qualls questioned how many individuals come in for assistance per year. Ms. Martin-Giroux responded anywhere between 150-200. She commented she maintains a good relationship with different agencies to keep everything moving forward and help Berlin residents receive services they need.

#### **Library**

Mrs. Brungot discussed the FY25 Library budget presentation that was linked to the agenda. She talked about the different services provided and the resources available at the library. She also provided statistics and pointed out that in FY23 the library lent out over 12,000 items to Berlin patrons.

The FY25 budget increase is just under \$6,000 which is a 2.31% increase from the FY24 budget. This is based on increases due to contracts. She discussed programs and events held at the library and upcoming activities. Mrs. Brungot advised the capital improvements are still the same. Councilor Theberge asked if last year's targeted areas for capital improvements have been addressed. Mrs. Brungot responded there was an attempt at a grant in April and unfortunately it was unsuccessful. She commented they continue to be vigilant at grant opportunities.

#### **NHMA Legislative Policy Committee Representative**

Mr. McCue, who's been the City's Representative for NHMA for many years advised he is will no longer be fulfilling this role and suggested appointing a new representative as it is important for Berlin and the North Country to be represented in this process. He advised NHMA is an organization that represents Cities and Towns in NH. They provide legal advice for city officials, they do a lot of educational work, they help with the State Office of Planning and Development, they also help with training Zoning Board members. One of the most important functions they do is they advocate at the Legislature for Cities and Towns. He reminded Council that Cities and Towns in NH only have those powers that the Legislature grants to them. With that in mind, it's very important that someone be present in Concord during the sessions advocating for Cities and Towns.

Mr. McCue explained that on Friday April 5, 2024 there will an organizational meeting in Concord which will include the individuals like himself who volunteer on behalf of Cities and Towns. Then the volunteers are divided into three different subgroups. One looks at finance/revenue issues, the second looks at general administration and governance issues and the third one is for infrastructure development and land use. Through the months of April and May, each subgroup meets to review for both legislation that they know are coming and to look at policies that different Cities and Towns suggest. The Staff at NHMA will then compile the information and the representative comes back to Council to review the different proposals.

He commented he's enjoyed his time representing the City, but the time is coming to pass this along to someone else. He advised he contacted Margaret Byrnes, Executive Director at NHMA and she confirmed NHMA could really use a representative on either the infrastructure development and land use committee or the finance revenue committee. There are two openings. He commented it is appropriate for a City Councilor to be Berlin's representative. He gave his contact information should Council have any additional questions. Ms. Laflamme commented the process starts this coming Friday so if someone could be identified this evening that would be great. Councilor Theberge advised he is willing to serve on the finance and revenue committee. Councilor Korzen moved to appoint Councilor Robert Theberge as the City of Berlin Representative to the NHMA Legislative Policy Conference, Councilor Valerino seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

#### **Council Committee Assignments Discussion**

Mayor Cone reminded Council it was agreed at the last meeting that committees would be assigned to Councilor Grenier. The committee vacancies are on the Berlin Airport Authority, Committee on Elections and Planning Board. Councilor Morency recommended passing the duties that were previously assigned to Councilor Morgan to Councilor Grenier. Mayor and Council agreed and will vote during the regular meeting this evening.

Councilor Grenier recommended that the resolutions coming up in the regular meeting be read by short title so the City Clerk can save her voice. Mayor Cone advised the recommendation will definitely be made once it gets down to the new business during regular meeting.

At 8:10 p.m., there being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Cone 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.