

City Council Work Session April 22, 2019

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Theberge, Otis, Rozek, Berthiaume, Higbee, Morgan Allain, and Gentili; Councilor Remillard was absent.

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Public Works Director Eric Grenier, School Board Chair Nicole Plourde, School Board Member Scott Losier; Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun

Councilor Theberge moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to add School Board Update to the agenda; so moved, the motion carried.

Public Works Budget Update

Mr. Grenier reported that the Public Works budget will be \$160,000 over on overtime, sand and salt. Mr. Wheeler explained that in October of 2017 there was a significant weather event in Berlin and we were able to apply for FEMA funds. Those funds have come in this fiscal year and we will use some of that money to offset this expense.

Councilor Theberge asked if we need to budget more for PWD and Mr. Wheeler said that the high cost of salt and the unforgiving winter contributed to the budget overage. Councilor Rozek stated that the State gets high quality salt from the vendor and municipalities are allowed to purchase salt through the State bid, at the same price; however it is not the same quality. Mr. Grenier noted that the city used a combination of sea salt and a higher grade salt from another vendor to achieve a reasonable priced product.

Mayor Grenier suggested writing to the DOT, copying the Executive Council with regard to municipalities getting the same price and quality in the future. Councilor Higbee confirmed that we use 2,500 to 3,000 tons per year.

Mayor Grenier asked if there is a way to trim by not spending until the new fiscal year. Mr. Grenier indicated that he could cut \$19,000 from seasonal labor. Councilors agreed that roads are in a serious state and cutting seasonal labor is not the answer.

High Street Sewer

Mr. Grenier stated there is a sewer line on High Street that runs through five properties and the line is in rough shape. To look at the line, the best access was through the basements of residents. A good project to do this summer would be installing a main on High Street so that everyone has a lateral into the main system. BWW will be digging there as well this summer, putting in a water line. There is a temporary solution for the one resident having the problem, but it won't last a winter. Mayor Grenier confirmed that the expense will come out of the sewer fund; homeowners will be responsible to connect to the lateral.

Councilor Rozek suspected that there is ledge in the area. He asked what will assure that the residents will connect. Mr. Grenier indicated that we have a commitment from the owner on temporary equipment. Long term, all will have to connect. Mr. Grenier roughly estimated the project at \$50,000 to \$60,000. The project would conclude with curb to curb paving on High Street up to Emery Street.

Princess Theater

Mr. Wheeler reported that barricades have been put in place at the former Princess Theater because a substantial portion of the roof has collapsed into the building. He suggested going through a building assessment to reconfirm the safety of the building. For the most part, the interior of the building has been removed. Councilor Rozek noted that exposure to the elements will further deteriorate the interior. He suggested a temporary roof. Councilor Theberge asked if this is a historical building that would be eligible for grant funds. Council conceded that an assessment would be done first and the results would be used to make any further decisions.

Other – School Budget

Nicole Plourde addressed the Council saying that we are at a crossroad with budgets. Flatlining the School budget takes away many services. Under the flatline budget, the schools cannot open. There is some relief in the Legislature; however we won't know until the State budget passes and the Governor is not a friend to education. If there is no budget until August, the cuts will have to be made, then if the funding comes through, cuts would be reinstated. There are staff members actively looking for positions elsewhere. She stated that people looking at Berlin could potentially go somewhere else due to school funding. Ms. Plourde suggested that the message should go out that no matter what, we will be there for kids. Taxes should be raised, then if the funding comes through, property tax relief could be offered. She said, we can't let kids pay the price for adult dysfunction. If we do not put the kids front and center, people will leave. We, as a community, have to take care of schools first.

Mayor Grenier took exception to Ms. Plourde's comments and said that no one has done more for education than he has. Funding may not be to the ideal level but it will be to the level that we can make work. He said we won't use the kids as a pawns and the Council is doing everything possible.

Ms. Plourde stated that there is no more cutting to be done. There has been no discussion of cutting sports and there are minimum educational standards that have to be kept. Mayor Grenier stated that PWD has equipment that is 20 years; the newest fire truck is a 1984. He said he did not appreciate the lecture, the Council is doing what it can. Ms. Plourde said that there is no place to cut another \$500,000. Mayor Grenier said that we will continue the efforts with the Senate and give the kids what they need; we are all in this together.

There being no further business in work session, Councilor Rozek moved to go into nonpublic session per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) Land Matters; Councilor Morgan Allain seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Land matters were discussed.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to come out of non-public session. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Rozek moved to seal the minutes of the non-public session as releasing them would make the action taken ineffective; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Berthiaume to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting ended at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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