

City Council Work Session October 14, 2019

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Representative Henry Noel, Superintendent of Schools Julie King, BIDPA Chair Mike Caron, BIDPA Members David Poirier, Jay Poulin and Andre Duchesne, Public Works Director Ben Hall, Rick Laflamme, Rachel Selsky, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun* and public

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m. He asked to change the order of the agenda to have the School Department Amicus Brief discussion as the second item and to delete #3. School Budget Request. Councilor Higbee so moved, Councilor Rozek seconded and the motion carried.

Public Works Hiring Request

Mr. Hall reported that the Supervisor position has been filled by an existing employee and he has received 2 retirement notices resulting in a need for one mechanic and two laborers. Councilor Berthiaume moved with a second from Councilor Otis to hire a mechanic and two laborers. So moved, the motion carried.

School Department Amicus Brief

Superintendent King reported that the School Board decided to file an amicus brief in support of the education funding suit. Local attorney Natalie Laflamme, and Attorney Tobin filed in support of the lawsuit and gave additional information regarding the inequity of taxes to fund education. This will give the Supreme Court additional information. Mayor Grenier thanked Ms. King and added that an amicus brief is filed as a "friend of the court"

Economic Development and Marketing Strategy - Joint Meeting with BIDPA

Mike Caron explained that BIDPA initiated the marketing strategy and he introduced Rachel Selsky of Camoine Associates to give an overview. She noted that the firm is located in Sarasota Springs NY. Berlin saw a great turnout for the public meetings and people were positive. In the work that was done, there were themes rising to the top to focus on such as the Outdoor recreation and tourism; Downtown area; Business Development and Quality of Life.

Berlin has opportunities for recreation and tourism such as the river, trails, mountains, State Parks, festivals and it is a destination with multiple outdoor recreation possibilities. The lack of a hotel sends some tourist money outside the community.

The strategy speaks to reconsidering the downtown. There are several unused buildings and encouraging businesses that would be the right fit would go a long way to revitalizing the downtown. Work force development and the need to train for critical positions was also identified as critical. Ms. Selsky noted that Berlin's building regulations were reviewed and they are not hindering development and they are not overly stringent.

There is a need to recognize the quality of life in Berlin. After decades of decline, there can be a negative perception of the City. Externally and internally, Berlin needs to communicate its assets.

The full strategy should be implemented in the community and regionally. It includes some of the things already being done and focuses in on things that are realistic. There is a full report and bullet point are also in matrix format. It will be up to BIDPA to check in and to pursue implementation status updates.

Ms. Selsky indicated that there are priority first steps to be taken such as creating an on line guide of "How to Start a Business in Berlin"; updating the City web site to include a more human connection, perhaps adding stories of people who have moved here and why. Reaching out to existing businesses to see if there are expansion possibilities; working on retaining existing businesses. Creating a business "SWAT" team that would be prepared to meet with a potential new business owner.

Mayor Grenier commented it is critically important that a potential new business doesn't get the run around to the different departments by using a point person. He noted that it is difficult to quantify success; however Coos County's rooms and meals tax revenue is generating double digit figures. Councilor Berthiaume added that a survey was sent out after the ATV festival asking how many days they stayed and how much they spent. Mayor Grenier said that though there is no hotel in the community, a lot of single and two family homes have been purchased as second homes or for use as Air B&B. This has strengthened the real estate market in the city.

Ms. Selsky stated that nothing here is above and beyond; the key is changing perception and letting people know Berlin is open for business. Mr. Poirier noted that people tend to criticize what they don't understand. Mayor Grenier added that Capone, Presby and Burgess Biomass would likely offer testimonial of Berlin's business climate.

Mr. Caron indicated that BIDPA will be looking for support. Ms. Selsky stated that it's been a pleasure working with community. Mayor Grenier thanked the BIDPA board of volunteers stating that they are business people, not politicians. He thanked them for pitching in and helping the community.

Associated Grocers

Mr. Wheeler stated that we received a letter from Associated Grocers who are buying Berlin Marketplace. The change of ownership makes it mandatory to get a new liquor license. The Liquor Commission asks for the Community's support prior to issuing the license. Councilor Berthiaume moved with a second from Councilor Morgan to support AG Supermarket's effort to obtain a liquor license. So moved, the motion carried.

Other

Mr. Wheeler stated that he will be at the ICMA Conference next week and Pam will sit in on next Monday's council meeting.

Non Public

Councilor Berthiaume moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A: 3II(d) land matters. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Mr. Wheeler noted that there is interest in the property at 532 Burgess Street. Taxes owed are \$9,458. The recommendation is to put the property out to bid and for the Council to establish a minimum bid. If the bid amount is more than what is owed, the money goes back to former owner. Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Morgan to offer for sale, indefinitely until rescinded, 532 Burgess Street for a minimum bid of \$10,000. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Berthiaume moved to come out of nonpublic session; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Morgan to offer for sale, indefinitely until rescinded, 532 Burgess Street for a minimum bid of \$10,000. So moved, the motion carried. Mr. Wheeler noted that there is still material in the building that the family wants.

Other

Councilor Theberge questioned permitting on work going on at the corner of Hillsboro and Hutchins Street. It was determined that the building inspector is aware of the project.

Councilors asked about the Princess Theatre and Mr. Wheeler indicated that additional time has been given for bidders to come forward. The time extension is until October 24. The portion of the building that is leaning out will be dealt with by contract.

With regard to Hillsboro Street, the City has received price quotes to do the clean out. The job will be awarded next week.

Councilor Rozek asked about Paul Croteau. Mr. Wheeler stated that we have a verbal agreement and we are waiting for a written agreement. Councilor Rozek asked how much this has cost in legal fees.

Councilor Rozek asked about the former Depot Restaurant and Mayor Grenier said that the owner is waiting to hear about sports betting and if it passes, he will try to get a betting parlor in there and he would build to suit.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Theberge to adjourn. The meeting ended at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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