

City Council Work Session

Pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8 and Emergency Order #12, Section 3

April 20, 2020

Present were: Mayor Grenier at City Hall; via Zoom, Councilors Remillard, Otis, Higbee, Eastman, Theberge, and Morgan were present; Councilors Rozek and Berthiaume were absent.

Others present: At City Hall City Manager Jim Wheeler; via Zoom Superintendent Julie King, Fire Chief James Watkins, Assistant Police Chief Dan Buteau, Finance Director Patty Chase, Skip Sansoucy, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Patty Chase, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun* and public.

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened by stating: as Mayor of the City Council, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04 this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to the meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, this is to confirm that we are:

- a) *Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means;*

We are utilizing the Zoom platform for this electronic meeting. All members of the Council have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through the Zoom platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone # 1-646-558-8656, meeting ID 492 041 282, or by clicking on the City Council agenda on the City's website, www.berlinnh.gov.

- b) *Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting:*

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom or telephonically. Instructions have been provided on the City of Berlin's website of the Council at City Council-agendas

- c) *Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access:*

If anybody has a problem, please call Pam Laflamme at 603-752-8587 or e-mail at:

plaflamme@berlinnh.gov

- d) *Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting*

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, we will adjourn the meeting and have it rescheduled at that time.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote. By roll call, each member is to state their presence, and whether there is anyone in the room during this meeting, which is required under the Right to Know law.

Councilors Remillard, Otis, Higbee, Eastman, Theberge, and Morgan were present and stated that there was no one else in the room; Mayor Grenier was present and in the room with City Manager Jim Wheeler.

Tax Lien Dates

Patty Chase explained that the last date for tax lien is September 30. She suggested getting the liens out. Mayor Grenier asked if the process could be delayed until June 30 given the Covid 19 situation. Ms. Chase clarified that this is for tax liens, not tax deeding. Councilor Higbee moved to have tax lien letters go out effective May 31, 2020; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Utility Update Contract

Mr. Wheeler explained that we advertised an RFP for utility appraisals on our web site, with NHMA and by sending the RFP directly to assessing firms. The on line proposal was viewed by several firms; however only Mr. Sansoucy put in a proposal. This is a three year agreement and it includes implementation of standards from HB700 that will need to be factored in. Councilor Remillard asked how the rate compares to that of last year. Mr. Wheeler noted that it is up from the last contract. Mr. Sansoucy added that the hourly rate stays the same. He also noted that the City has 3 big hydros coming off of settlement and the cost is spread out over the three year agreement. Councilor Theberge asked what the MS1 is and Mr. Sansoucy stated that it is the form that is filled out by the municipality and sent to the DRA to establish the tax rate.

Councilor Remillard moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to sign an agreement with George E. Sansoucy, PE, LLC for the City's utility appraisals for the next three years subject to final approval by the DRA. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

PD Grant from Jericho Power

Assistant Chief Dan Buteau explained that this is a grant similar to the one the Fire Department received last year. There are no strings. The Police Department will likely put the money toward public safety; however no program has been chosen yet. Possibilities include the Canine Program, or Neighborhood Watch. Mr. Wheeler confirmed that this is a donation and by resolution, the Council is appropriating to the PD budget.

Net Metering

Mayor Grenier said that we received a request from Clean Energy NH to sign on to a letter of support for increasing the limit on renewable energy projects from 1 MW to 5 MW. Legislation has made it to the Governor's desk and he has vetoed every time. Councilor Remillard asked what the advantages and disadvantages are. Mr. Wheeler stated that the City looked in to doing a solar project to provide

power for ourselves at the Brown Farm water wells. It was not found to be economically advantageous. Mayor Grenier explained that in net metering, the local utility is forced to buy unused power at more than market rate.

Councilor Eastman reasoned that this is not good for the ratepayers. He asked how much the city would use and Mr. Wheeler stated that the proposed Brown Farm project was 1 MW. Councilor Eastman theorized that if we had 5 MW and the power went to the grid, we could be jeopardize existing power by raising the rates. He added that he could not support and Councilor Remillard agreed. Council conceded that they would like to hear more with a presentation.

COVID-19 Update

Mr. Wheeler noted that we were asked to complete several surveys related to COVID 19's effect on the City. NHMA and Homeland Security wanted estimated expenses and DES was reaching out to see if there were shovel ready projects, should there be stimulus money available. In the past shovel ready was a project that could be started within 90 days. Shovel ready projects include: I & I Removal for \$1.7 million; I & I Demo for \$500,000; WWT Ejector Station for \$604,000. Mason Street Bridge and the Fire Station Floor are close to being shovel ready as well.

The Airport will be receiving \$30,000 to offset expenses. In addition the FAA is forgoing local match on a project which is likely to be paving in Hangar Alley.

All City workers are working at this time with the exception of one employee laid off from the Rec Department. Public Works is staggering start times so that social distancing can be observed. The Library is closed; however there are several projects to be done.

Mr. Wheeler noted that he sat in on the call to Mayors from Governor Sununu on the 16th. The Governor is being cautious about opening businesses. The next call is Thursday, at 10:00 a.m.

The Task Force is meeting twice per week. We need for the public to know that the Valley is ready; we are as prepared as we can be. They will be sending out another message to the public encouraging them to continue with social distancing and not to become complacent. Councilor Remillard mentioned the lack of testing in the area and she credits the precautions being taken for the lack of cases.

Budget

Mayor Grenier stated that he and the City Manager will work on a blueprint of the budget for discussion. He is looking for a zero tax increase.

Non-Public Session

Councilor Remillard moved to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II (d) Consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property which, if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general community; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Councilors discussed a written offer of \$2,000 from Maurice Croteau for 532 Burgess Street. The property was put out to bid with a list of items that need to be completed prior to receiving an

occupancy permit. Councilor Morgan stated that Mr. Croteau would do a good job and he could bring it back to being a tax paying property. Council conceded to accepting \$2,000 for the property. Mayor Grenier said that he would add item 5a to the agenda and this would be voted on in public.

Councilor Theberge moved to come out of non-public session; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

There being no further business in work session, Mayor Grenier moved on to the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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