

City Council Work Session
June 14, 2021

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Berthiaume, Rozek, Otis, Higbee, Morgan, Eastman, Remillard and Theberge.

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Community Development Director Pam Laflamme, Finance Director Holly Larsen, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Assessing Coordinator Lise Barrette, Fire Chief James Watkins, Waste Water Treatment and Collection System Superintendent Jon Goodreau, Alex Ritchie, Ritchie Associates Consultant, Barbara Tetreault & William Carroll, Berlin Daily Sun, Henry Noel and Members of the Public.

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Joint Application for Funding Engineering Study – Alex Ritchie

Mayor Grenier explained he's attended multiple meetings along with Mill Ownership, the Town of Gorham, Jon Goodreau, Alex Ritchie and George Bald. He asked Alex Ritchie to make a presentation to Council explaining exactly what their plans are. Ms. Ritchie is representing White Mountain Paper Company and gave a brief overview of White Mountain Paper which acquired the mill in 2020. She stated the mill has been working diligently making sizeable investments to the infrastructure in order to stabilize the mill's operation and preserve the existing jobs. Additionally, these investments open up a path to future growth, expansion plans and assuring they are going to be viable. She explained that upon the acquisition of the mill, the Town of Gorham expressed they would like to see the lagoon decommissioned if possible. The mill has explored solutions which would make it possible to decommission the lagoon. One of the options is what's called a closed loop waste water treatment system which would be between Berlin, Gorham and the Mill. Ms. Ritchie explained receiving input and guidance from former NH DRED Commissioner George Bald which fully supports this collaborative effort. In order to pursue this conception, much more information is needed to properly vet its viability and make sure it accomplishes what it's believed it could accomplish. This will include engineering work, design and costing considerations. She stated that Mr. Bald does believe this effort could be a strong candidate for securing DES stimulus funds that NHDES is overseeing related to water and sewer infrastructure. She explained to Council that the working group would like to submit a request for funding as soon as possible.

The thought process is that the City of Berlin, Town of Gorham and the Mill fill out a joint application. With this being a collaborative effort between both municipalities and acquired business that is of significant importance to the region, we believe it would be viewed very fairly by DES. Ms. Ritchie also stated the Mill is more than prepared to assist with filling out the application, however it does need to be led by municipalities. She also explained that supporting this request for funding does not commit to doing this project. It will only allow the exploratory work to move forward. This is only step one of the process to try and move this initiative forward to support study efforts. Councilor Rozek addressed Ms. Ritchie asking if this would be at no cost to Taxpayers and if she had met with the Town of Gorham. She replied it is too early in the process, but the goal is to not incur any additional charges. She also stated that she did meet with the Town of Gorham and they showed interest. Mayor Grenier reminded Council that this is just to apply for a Federal grant and the engineers would be the ones figuring out all the details. City Manager Jim Wheeler asked Mrs. Ritchie if there were any discussions of who would hire which consultants. Mrs. Ritchie replied that they would look at municipalities for

guidance and at this point just don't want to miss out on the opportunity for funding. Mayor Grenier commented that a stamped plan is needed to apply for funding.

Councilor Rozek asked Ms. Ritchie if the mill is in compliance at this time. She answered that the mill is currently in full compliance and don't need to do this. Councilor Remillard commented that if the City can be assured there will be no interruption to our system during this study, no cost to the City and a full copy of the study will be provided, she doesn't see any reasons why Council shouldn't move forward with this. Mayor Grenier invited Jon Goodreau to comment. Mr. Goodreau made Council aware that if we move forward with this, it will trigger an upgrade to our plant and the City will need to reapply for a discharge permit. He commented that the last upgrade was done in 2015. There would be an increase in CSO's. He also stated that the CEO of the mill wants to add a line which would double the flow to us. He also wanted to make Council aware that if the mill was to shut down, this would leave us with a plant that is too large. Councilor Rozek moved to allow City Manager Jim Wheeler to enter the grant funding request from DES for a feasibility study of waste water effluent projects with the Town of Gorham and White Mountain Paper; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Tax Bill No. 1 Warrant

City Manager Jim Wheeler presented the Tax Bill No. 1 Warrant for FY2021 in the amount of \$8,413,946.50 and is looking for authorization from Council to execute the warrant. Councilor Remillard moved to allow City Manager Jim Wheeler to sign the Tax Bill No. 1 Warrant; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried with all in favor.

Timber Tax Warrants

Mr. Wheeler asked Council for authorization to execute the Yield Tax Levy Warrants for Timber Cut to Paul and Lisa Bourbeau in the amount of \$746.42 and to Carl Mercier in the amount of \$229.94. Councilor Berthiaume moved to authorize City Manager, Jim Wheeler to execute both Yield Tax Levies; Councilor Remillard seconded, the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Rozek.

Abatement Recommendations

City Manager Jim Wheeler presented the abatement recommendations from GES denying the 2020 abatements requested for the following utilities: Eversource, Consolidated Communications and Central Rivers Power. Councilor Berthiaume moved to deny the abatement requests from Eversource, Consolidated Communications and Central Rivers Power; Councilor Higbee seconded, the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Rozek.

Letter from the House Committee on Redistricting

Mayor Grenier advised Council this communication was sent to let the City know there will be redistricting this coming fall. The only item of question to the City is we no longer have four wards. We have one ward with four precincts and that's the difference. There is no change so far.

190 Glen Avenue – Inspection Report

City Manager Jim Wheeler advised the inspection report was provided as requested and Councilor Remillard had the opportunity to walk through the property. Councilor Remillard commented that she, Councilor Morgan and Community Development Director Pam Laflamme did an extensive walk through of the property. She stated she has seen worse properties put out to bid and sold. She recommends putting it out to bid with our requirements. Mayor Grenier stated if the property goes out to bid, the

bidder should be responsible for the I&I. Ms. Laflamme commented that in the past, properties were put out to bid for a minimum of back taxes amount. Councilor Remillard suggested putting all the properties out to bid without a minimum as it's costing the City \$5,000 per month just in mowing fees. Mr. Wheeler reminded Council that the primary driver to tear the property down was to solve the I&I issue. Tearing the building down solves the I&I issue. Councilor Berthiaume commented that back taxes should be charged as this wouldn't deviate from the process. She honestly feels that if the bidder can't handle \$6,000 of back taxes then they won't be able to do much more. Ms. Laflamme commented that the back taxes on this property are at \$33,000. Councilor Theberge commented he looked at the outside of the property and it looks good from far away, but not up close. He expressed concerns with the electricity as there were two meters still operating and there seemed to be asbestos on the walls. He stated the property needs a lot of work. Councilor Morgan commented she feels an investor could revive the property. Councilor Eastman commented that the deficiencies are not a big deal as the new owner would need to fix them. Councilor Otis questioned if this property had been approved for demo and if so, was the demo funded. Mr. Wheeler replied yes it was on the I&I list for demo and yes it was funded with 20% forgiveness. Mayor Grenier stated either the property be torn down or put it out to bid with bidder responsible for I&I. Councilor Remillard moved to put 190 Glen Avenue out to bid for a \$1.00 minimum with a requirement to fix the I&I issue within a year; Councilor Morgan seconded. Councilor Higbee commented that if we give the bidder a year to fix the I&I and it doesn't get done, then it won't be covered under the I&I funding. Councilor Rozek questioned if we can request money to be placed in an account to make sure it's a bona fide sale. Councilor Remillard replied all we can ask for is a verification of funds. Mayor Grenier commented that all this is a process and by the time all is set and done, there is only 90 days left. Councilor Rozek suggested the requirements should state to fix the I&I first then the other issues.

Roll call resulted in affirmative votes of Councilors Eastman and Bertiaume. Councilors Remillard, Otis Rozek, Theberge, Higbee, Morgan and Mayor Grenier voted in the negative. The motion failed.

Fire Department Upgrades

Mr. Wheeler presented the report from Alba Architects in regards to the fire station upgrades. He directed Council to page 8 of the report which shows a sketch of the kind of building we are looking at. He then directed Council to page 10 which the architect laid out the most logical sequence. He explained that phase I is to fix the existing floor and replace roof, windows and boiler for a total of \$594,000. Mr. Wheeler commented that is about the funds we have available for this. He commented that phase IIA is for renovation of the existing adjacent building in the amount of \$187,500. Mr. Wheeler commented that between minimizing the scope of work and getting lower bids by saving some money in phase I, he is hoping we'll have funding to make some upgrades to that adjacent building which will give the space needed. He explained that Phase IIB would be for at some point in the future to take down the adjacent storage building and putting a four bay building to house the equipment in the amount of \$893,310. This is what Alba Architects came up with and this is with a 10% contingency. Councilor Theberge asked what is in the adjacent storage building now. Chief Watkins replied that engine 2 is housed in that building. Mr. Wheeler commented that if we were fortunate enough to upgrade the equipment as the oldest piece of equipment is engine 3 dating from 1979, we might only need four bays. Councilor Eastman commented that phase I should be prioritized then re-evaluate after. Mr. Wheeler explained this document is for informational purposes only and it's good to have should funding become available for safety buildings.

Other

Dog Licensing

Mayor Grenier asked to add an item for discussion in regards to several forfeitures for unlicensed dogs. City Clerk Shelli Fortin advised in the past there were no actions taken in regards to unlicensed dogs and this was mostly due to the Police Department not having time to serve violations for this. She explained that every year the list of forfeitures grows and for 2021, there is 218 forfeitures. She feels this is something Council needs to consider and according to RSA 466:11, she needs to furnish the list of owners who have failed to renew their license to Council between June 1 and June 20. She explained Council then has 20 days to decide if they will issue a warrant to authorize to issue a civil forfeiture for each unlicensed dog. This forfeiture is a \$25 fine that the dog owner would pay to the City and if that \$25 fine is not paid within 15 days, then the police department can write the dog owner a violation to go to court which would then be a \$50 fine and they would still need to license the dog. She confirmed that she has sent all dog owners a reminder and a second notice when they didn't license by April. Councilor Eastman questioned why dogs need to be licensed. Mrs. Fortin advised it's a State law. Councilor Berthiaume stated she thinks it's a good idea to hold the dog owners accountable as it's not fair to responsible dog owners who do license their dogs. Mayor Grenier asked what the process is. Mrs. Fortin answered that within 20 days of receiving this list presented today, Council would issue a dog warrant which is a list of everybody that hasn't licensed their dog and they would all be sent a letter stating they're being issued a \$25 civil forfeiture fine that they would need to pay the City along with licensing their dog. Mayor Grenier asked if legally we can waive the licensing fee if they pay the \$25 fine as our intention is not to fine people but to get them to comply with State law. Mrs. Fortin commented that maybe a better way to do is to waive the fine if they register by a certain date as the intent is to have them license their dogs. Councilor Berthiaume moved to authorize the City Clerk to issue dog owners another communication along with a copy of the law 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 Remillard seconded, the motion carried by majority in favor with one recusal from Councilor Theberge.

Coos County

Mayor Grenier advised he had one more item he'd like to bring to the Council's attention. He explained that at last Wednesday's Coos County Commissioners meeting, the Coos County Commissioners support applying for a \$250,000 ARP grant for the City to do the engineering for water and sewer for Route 110 all the way to the Jericho campground. It has to be OK'd by the Coos County Delegation which are meeting on July 26 at 10:00am. He stated that the City Manager Jim Wheeler, himself and Alex Ritchie will be attending the meeting. He also mentioned that Coos County will be receiving \$3,065,000. Commissioners have decided to put half of this amount for Coos County needs and the other half will be on an as needed basis for districts.

Adjourn

There being no further business Councilor Rozek moved to adjourn; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried. The meeting ended at 8:04pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Danielle Rioux
Executive Assistant

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