

City Council Work Session

March 5, 2018

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Otis, Rozek, Theberge, Gentili, Remillard, Higbee, Morgan Allain; Councilor Nelson was excused.

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, City Clerk Elaine Riendeau, Fire Chief John Lacasse, Finance Director Patty Chase, Public Works Director Mike Perreault, Barbara Tetreault *Berlin Daily Sun*.

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Rozek to add NHMA training to the Work Session agenda. So moved, the motion carried.

Solid Waste Permit Communication

Council discussed an e-mail communication that came to Council from Ellen Tovino who rents an apartment in the City. She feels the current rules to obtain a dump pass are discriminatory because they don't allow someone without a vehicle to purchase a dump pass. Mr. Wheeler noted that there are two reasonable options: one to revisit the rules and create a permit for people without cars. The other would be to incorporate the situation in the "special circumstance" permit which seems more reasonable.

Councilor Theberge asked about transfer station permits for people who have a second home here. Mr. Wheeler stated they would need to buy a non-resident permit at \$50. Councilor Otis confirmed that one permit that allows four days of dumping is allowed in a twelve month period. Councilor Higbee asked if a permit is purchased by someone with no car for \$20, does a vehicle registration have to be shown. In response, Ms. Chase stated that the registration number is on the permit. Mayor Grenier added that they system is ripe for abuse if it is not properly regulated. Council conceded to handle the situation with a "Special Circumstance" permit.

Fire Department Repair/Replace Equipment

Mr. Wheeler reported that Fire Department equipment is used until it cannot be used any more. Chief Lacasse said that the FD's 1999 Freightliner truck will not pass inspection in September due to a faulty frame. He indicated that he contacted 9 different companies and received estimates from two. Coastal Truck from Portsmouth estimated about \$35,000 to \$40,000; they could send a mechanic for a more accurate estimate. Granite State Truck would charge approximately \$45,000 and they have never done such a repair but they are equipped.

Chief Lacasse added that a lease payment for a new truck would cost between \$ 57,000 to \$65,000 per year. Mr. Wheeler added that the cost of the repair is close to a lease payment and he wanted the Council to be aware. Councilor Remillard asked what the life expectancy of the truck would be if the rails are repaired. Chief Lacasse replied that he hoped it would be another ten years. Councilor Rozek questioned Public Works' decision not to repair the truck. Mr. Wheeler noted that there are not enough mechanics to do the job and the primary entrance of the garage would have to be blocked off during the repair. Chief Lacasse affirmed that the truck is otherwise in good condition. The repair could likely be done in the summer. Mayor Grenier noted that a resolution to fund the truck repair would come at a subsequent meeting and a motion to move forward is in order.

Councilor Rozek moved to explore vendor options to get a final price and to proceed to schedule the frame rail replacement of the 1999 Freightliner fire truck; Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried.

Wastewater Truck Request

Henry Noel presented his request to purchase a truck with a service body that would give staff the ability to respond to pump stations with tools and equipment and move manpower without having to shuttle back and forth. The new truck is intended for service at outlying pump stations.

Councilor Rozek confirmed that the truck would be a four wheel drive F350 with body to hold tools and fittings. He asked if new tools will be needed to fill the truck and if there is specialized equipment on the truck. Mr. Noel indicated that they will need to buy some tools and a small crane may be added as specialized equipment. The truck will be purchased through the State bid and it is expected to cost \$36,411.

Mr. Wheeler explained that in the Wastewater budget there is a short and mid-term asset reserve that is required by the granting agency for equipment. Mayor Grenier received consensus from the Council that there is no opposition to acquiring the truck. He asked for a resolution for the next meeting for funding the truck.

NHMA Training

Mr. Wheeler stated that Bob Goddard, Chair of the Board of Assessors asked about getting training on the order of a meeting and the right to know law. NHMA does that kind of training and Staff Attorney Steven Buckley provided an outline and plan to move forward. For scheduling purposes, and since March is busy with budget, training could occur in April. All Board members would be invited to the two hour training which could be done in the evening. The preference was for a Tuesday or Thursday

Budget

Mr. Wheeler referred to the budget memo saying that he is proposing an increase of 5.56% over 2018's budget. There were no cuts made to schools or police. The SAFER grant is finished and we will be responsible for salary and benefits of 19 firefighters for the full 12 months. Capital improvements were reduced from \$4.2 million to approximately \$600,000 and the PD accounts for half of that. The schools are requesting an increase of \$449,908 in operational and \$496,000 of capital.

The City is planning to replace the Hillside Avenue Bridge which is estimated at \$132,000 and the replacement of streetlights estimated at \$130,000. A savings in electricity is expected once the streetlights have been replaced.

Councilor Theberge asked about capital projects that are budgeted but not yet completed such as the City Hall stairs and Hutchins Street. Mr. Wheeler noted that the repair of the stairs is still planned and with good weather, the contractor should be able to begin the work. The Hutchins Street project was never in the capital budget. Mayor Grenier asked if there is a final amount of reimbursement

anticipated from FEMA. Mr. Wheeler stated that we have the documentation; however there has yet to be meeting with FEMA.

Councilor Rozek commented that the red pickup truck at the Fire Department has no decal on the door. Chief Lacasse stated that it will get done this spring. Mr. Wheeler indicated that there is an RFP out for a study to determine the feasibility of adding EMS duties to the Fire Department which is expected to be complete by mid-summer.

Councilor Rozek established that the FD would be eligible for more grants if the department participated in a mutual aid agreement. Chief Lacasse said he would look into it.

Legislative News

Mr. Wheeler reported that HB 1381 was written for values on utilities to be done using net book value and that would be devastating to the City. The Assessing Standards Board (ASB) came up with a formula that was 75% of original cost plus 25% of net book; however the Legislature is now proposing a bill that would use a 50/50 formula. Legislation as its written includes land in the value and that means that land purchased for \$10 an acre fifty years ago would have the same value today. Utilities are behind this legislation and there are some who believe the savings will show up in electric rates.

Solid Waste

Mr. Wheeler wanted to clarify any miscommunication about the solid waste discussion from the last meeting. The City does not pick up AVH; however we do pick up AVH Surgical which is the medical practice at the base of Page Hill Road. The nursing home is not picked up twice every week but they are picked up twice on holiday weeks. Councilor Theberge added that the VFW puts garbage curbside; the crew does not go inside the building. Mr. Wheeler stated that they are a nonprofit who don't pay taxes and the City pays the tipping fees. He added that they will come back with a plan to notify non-profits.

There being no further business in Work Session, at 7:45 p.m. Mayor Grenier called for a five minute recess prior to the start of the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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