

City Council Work Session
March 12, 2018

Present were: Mayor Grenier, Councilors Otis, Rozek, Theberge, Gentili, Remillard, Higbee, Morgan Allain, and Nelson

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, City Clerk Elaine Riendeau, Library Director Denise Jensen, Finance Director Patty Chase, Police Chief Pete Morency, and Barbara Tetreault *Berlin Daily Sun*.

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier noted that there would be a non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 (e) Pending Claims.

Memo from Police Chief re: Opioid Litigation

In a memo to the Mayor and Council, the Police Commission recommended that Napoli Shkolnik PLLC be contacted for an informational meeting regarding representing the City. Chief Morency stated that the firm will interview within the month. They appear to have more experience in the field and they are looking at a summary judgement. Mayor Grenier asked if Chief Morency would contact the other firm and he indicated that he could let them know they are not being ruled out; however we are looking at the firm with more experience first. Council conceded that the Commission has the latitude to proceed.

Budget - BIDPA

Mayor Grenier confirmed that BIDPA is paying the bills with surplus funds. Ms. Laflamme said they have about \$170,000. There is money budgeted for Park Improvements because it is anticipated that there will be development in the industrial park. There is an effort to develop 121 Main Street to a community health and wellness center.

Library

Ms. Jensen thanked the Council for their continued support for the library. The majority of the increase in the Library budget is negotiated pay increases.

The Library sees a lot of use and this year there were 237 new library cards issued; there are 3,985 library members. There are people who have no other means to get materials and services. It is a safe place to come after school, do genealogy searches and to use computers. Ms. Jensen reviewed the library statistics which showed an increase in library use.

She explained that the Library could begin to have microfiche digitized and to put the data on line. The cost would be \$125 per roll and there is a \$500 startup fee for web service. Mayor Grenier confirmed that there is a charge for fax and copier services. He stressed that the library should charge for genealogy services. Councilor Higbee suggested that there may be a grant for digitizing the microfiche.

Mr. Wheeler stated that there are building needs such as the interior back wall, brick pointing, and windows. He suggested spending \$10,000 to get an assessment of what should be done to the building. There are potential sources of funding with CDBG, Rural Development but to apply we need to articulate what the buildings needs. Councilor Theberge asked if chipping paint has been tested for lead.

Councilor Rozek questioned spending money on a study when the back of the building could just be repointed which would seal the building. Mayor Grenier suggested getting an estimate of the cost adding that we could concentrate on pointing for this year.

Councilor Gentili stated that there may be an empty school building where the library could be housed in the future. Councilor Higbee asked why downloadable books have gone down in cost when the use is up. Ms. Jensen stated that they are going by usage rather than population to calculate fees for downloadable books, thereby reducing the cost for Berlin.

Airport

Mayor Grenier mentioned that the Airport sells sand to the Water Works in the summer and the Town is now claiming we should pay an excavation tax. Sand sales are used as one means to keep the airport in operation.

Looking at Airport expenses, Mr. Wheeler stated that equipment maintenance is increased for beacon repair. Jet fuel expenses are up but there is a corresponding revenue for that. Salaries are up \$6,000, taking into consideration an increase for the assistant manager and an additional 416 hours for a per diem employee. There is still a \$53,000 infusion from the general fund as a subsidy to maintain the airport budget. Councilor Higbee questioned the beacon repair and Mr. Wheeler confirmed that those are the beacons on the mountains.

Noting that the apartment over the terminal building is not rented, Mayor Grenier asked if we want to get back in the rental business. He added that he cannot support a \$53,000 subsidy. Councilor Remillard asked if the airport should look for donations. Councilor Rozek proposed waiting to see what will happen with the Balsams. Councilor Higbee said that the State speaks highly of the airport and perhaps they could help. Mr. Wheeler indicated that there is funding for capital projects; however operations are not State funded. Councilor Nelson questioned whether the employees had ideas about promoting the airport.

Administration

Mr. Wheeler reported that Administration includes City Manager, Finance, City Clerk, Assessing and Planning. The budget increase is for the salary line items. There is an increase in the insurance buyout which results in a significant reduction in insurance cost to the City. We saved on the Utilities Update with a reduction from \$14,000 to \$9,000. The Assessing contract was also reduced given how much we are doing each year. Without Northern Pass and the hydro divestiture as legal issues, we should be able to stay in the budgeted \$75,000 for legal expenses.

Councilor Nelson asked if there should be an increase in dog license fees. Ms. Riendeau noted that a portion of the fees go to the State. She confirmed that an increase could be done for next year since the dog licensing process has started already. The City Clerk's office is notified when a dog goes to a local vet. If the dog goes to the vet in Maine, there is no notice sent. Councilor Morgan Allain asked if a dog is not registered this year, are they charged for both years when they do register. Ms. Riendeau confirmed that they are not charged.

Mayor Grenier asked Ms. Chase if there is a calculation of the impact of reduced interest on delinquent taxes which is a bill in this Legislative Session. He stated that such an action would put the City in a cash flow crunch. The bill has passed the House and will now go to the Senate.

IT

With regard to IT, Mayor Grenier asked if we are close to ending the contract with SNS. Ms. Laflamme stated that we are ending year four and at year five, we would go out for proposals. There are software licenses that have to be updated as well as ongoing expenses for license fees; Library, Finance, Fire, all have license fees. PD software license fees are separate.

Mr. Wheeler commented that we were at risk before and the contract with SNS has set things right with proper backup and security. Ms. Laflamme added that the Fire Department is getting a technology update with phones, and tablets which are very welcome by the staff. She added that the computer hardware line item includes two much needed copiers. They can be bought outright which is less expensive or lease to own is an option.

Non-Public Session

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 (e) consideration or negotiation of pending claim. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Council discussed ongoing development projects.

Councilor Higbee moved to come out of non-public session; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Adjourn

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried. The meeting ended at 8:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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