

City Council Work Session

January 23, 2017

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

Others present included City Manager James Wheeler, Veteran's Representative Bob Pelletier, School Superintendent Corinne Cascadden, Eagle Scout Candidate Calvin Ruediger, Elizabeth Ruediger, Dr. Arthur Ruediger, Fire Chief Randall Trull, Assistant Fire Chief Thad Soltys, Barbara Tetreault *Berlin Daily Sun* and public.

Mayor Grenier opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Councilor Rozek moved to change the order of the agenda to have the Veteran's exemptions proposal go first; Councilor Theberge seconded and the motion carried. Council conceded to having Mr. Pelletier address the Council.

Consideration of Veterans Tax Exemption

Bob Pelletier addressed the Council stating that Veteran's exemptions as adopted in RSA 72:28 are specific to qualifying veterans who have served in certain conflicts. He advocated that the Council adopt the provisions of 72:28b which would give every veteran, no matter what their service, an exemption. He also asked that the tax credit be raised from the current \$125 to the maximum of \$500. He reported that 60% of communities offer the maximum award.

Mayor Grenier noted that if the Council grants additional exemptions, whatever amount of money will be borne by every other taxpayer in the community. He stated that the City wants to honor the service of veterans; however the Council has to consider the impact to everyone else and the need to do what is fair for everyone.

Councilor Rozek commented that if it was not for veterans, we would not be able to pledge allegiance to the flag. Mr. Pelletier thanked the Council and left the meeting at this time (6:45 p.m.)

Eagle Scout Project

Calvin Ruediger reported that in order to get the rank of Eagle Scout he needs to complete a service project that will benefit either a school, community, or religious group. He wants to build a backboard for the Horne Field tennis court so that players can practice skills and hit the ball against the board. The estimated cost of the project is just under \$500 but he intends to ask for donations that will bring down the cost.

Mr. Ruediger explained that he will look to the High School Tennis Team and Boy Scouts for the four to six people he will need to work on the project. He expects to get the project done in less than one month from start to finish. Mayor Grenier asked what is needed from the city. Mr. Ruediger was hoping to get a building site close to Horne Field as well as permission to do the project on City property. Mayor Grenier asked about the time frame to get approval. Mr. Ruediger indicated that he will need

Eagle Scout Committee approval, then he can start doing the project. It also has to be done by May 18 which is Mr. Ruediger's 18th birthday. Councilor Rozek asked what kind of material would be used and what color. Mr. Ruediger replied that the frame will be made from pressure treated wood beams and the board will be 4x 8 RTD plywood sheeting with a thickness of 11/32. It will be painted green with a white line at the height of the net.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Nelson to approve the project as proposed subject to coordination with the foreman at the Recreation Department; Councilor Nelson seconded and the motion carried. The Ruediger's left the meeting at this time (7:00 p.m.)

Ms. Cascadden noted that Mr. Ruediger is the student representative on the School Board and that they are very proud of him.

Fire Alarm System Information

Assistant Chief Soltys explained that in response to the Council's request at the January 3 meeting, he is reporting on the businesses that have responded to the Fire Department's inquiry about changing out the City's fire alarm system to a wireless radio system. There are twelve that agreed to a wireless system and two that do not want to participate. Mayor Grenier clarified the Service Credit Union and the State Prison have their own outside system and they are not required to have an additional box.

Councilor Nelson asked if the two systems, the current wired system and the new radio system, can operate at the same time and she was assured that they could. Mr. Wheeler indicated that the wired system will be eliminated in other zones over time. The Route 16 Project has the cost of replacing the wire built in; however there is a better, more updated wireless system that can be done for less money. The options were to continue with the wired system, convert to a radio alarm or convert to a system that is operated by a third party. The third party system adds 3 minutes to the fire department's response time. Councilor Higbee also noted that the radio system has the ability to give more information to first responders than a wired or monitored alarm.

Councilor Nelson asked about the initial cost to a business and Assistant Chief Soltys reported that it is \$3,000 to \$6,000 and there will be a \$450 per year fee to the FD.

HEB Contract Proposal for Hillside Ave Bridge

Mr. Wheeler informed the Council that HEB designed the Hillside Bridge replacement a few years ago and the project is due to be done this summer. The City's portion of the funding is budgeted. The contract with HEB will get the project ready to go out to bid; however it still needs to be approved by DOT.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to award the contract for engineering to HEB and go forward with the project. All voted in favor with the exception of Mayor Grenier who abstained. The road is expected to be closed for approximately 8 weeks during the project.

Other

Mr. Wheeler reported that one of the bills up for hearing is HB324 that would dictate that all utility values be done by the state. The difference is staggering with RSA 83f values being half of what the true values are. RSA 83f specifically states that those values shall not be used for local taxation. The utility lobby is pushing to have this bill passed. The bill would eliminate local control of values. Mr. Wheeler stated that Chris Boldt and Robin Frost will be testifying against HB324 in Concord.

Mayor Grenier noted that HB 525 would remove the 4% per year decrease in stabilization grants for schools. He stated that the House Education Committee will hear testimony and he wants to send a letter. Council conceded to sending a letter stating that they have taken a position on the loss of funding.

Councilor Higbee confirmed that the City would still lose the funding in this coming year. Mayor Grenier noted that there is no way the bill would be passed if it interrupted revenues in the coming year

Non-Public Session

Councilor Remillard moved with a second from Councilor Rozek to enter into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II(e) Consideration of pending claims. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

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

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to seal the minutes of the non-public session until a settlement has been reached as releasing them would make the action taken ineffective. The motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Councilor Rozek moved to adjourn; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried. The meeting ended at 7:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant