

City Council Work Session
January 7, 2019

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Community Development Director, Pamela Laflamme, Assessing Coordinator Brian Chevarie, Claire Stiles, Finance Director Patty Chase, School Superintendent Corinne Cascadden, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun*

Mayor Grenier noted that *John Deschamplain* was unable to make the meeting this evening to receive his plaque. The Mayor will deliver the plaque to his home.

Mayor Grenier asked to add Educational Issues to the agenda. Councilor Rozek moved to add the education discussion to the agenda; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried.

Review of Investment Policy

Mr. Wheeler stated that RSA 48:16 requires a yearly review and adoption of the investment policy. Councilor Rozek moved to approve the investment policy with no changes from last year. Councilor Remillard seconded.

Councilor Higbee confirmed that BIDPA and the Sewer fund are included. Councilor Theberge questioned whether the Council receives the quarterly reporting and Ms. Chase assured him that the report is in the Council's box quarterly. All voted in favor of the motion.

Mileage Rate for 2019

Mr. Wheeler noted that the Federal mileage rate is going to .58 per mile and the city follows the IRS rate with Council approval. Councilor Remillard moved to approve the mileage rate increase to .58 per mile, up from .545 per mile; Councilor Morgan Allain seconded and the motion carried.

Proposed CDBG Grant Administration Award

Ms. Laflamme stated that we received one proposal for CDBG administration from Donna Lane in the amount of \$17,000. We've worked with Ms. Lane before and she has a lot of experience. Councilor Remillard moved to hire Donna Lane to administer the St. Regis CDBG Rehabilitation Project Community Block Grant for a sum not to exceed \$17,000. So moved, the motion carried.

Dog Licensing Fees

Shelli Fortin reported that she had a note to raise the dog licensing fees by \$1; however there did not seem to be a motion authorizing the increase. We register 1100 dogs per year. Ms. Fortin said that she did a poll of cities and towns to see what they do and all of the cities charge the additional dollar. Mayor Grenier noted that we would need to have a resolution and public hearing and a start date of March 1. Ms. Fortin advised that we have started registering dogs for 2019.

Councilor Gentili advocated for leaving the dog license fees the same. Councilor Nelson noted that the police are chasing dogs and there is expense. The current fees are \$6.50 for an altered dog; a non-altered dog is \$9 and \$2 for seniors. Mayor Grenier could see that the Council has mixed feelings and he suggested looking at this again in October so that a decision can be made for 2020. The Council

conceded. Mayor Grenier asked that we have information regarding how many hours are spent chasing dogs and how many are unregistered dogs. We may want to increase fines for unregistered dogs rather than increasing fees.

Letter from Robert Goddard Re: Statistical Update

Mayor Grenier indicated that the letter was received a week ago explaining the BOA's position. He asked Mr. Chevarie to review where we are now. Mr. Chevarie said that a lot has gone into building an assessing model with updated values. Staff has spent many hours reviewing the model with KRT. The analysis is based on sales prices being above the assessed values. The Board has concerns on the land component and on buildings with improvements. The Board spent 4 hours with Skip Sansoucy and progress was made.

A revised update has been sent to the board chair. Mr. Wheeler added that the Board will have to consider the new information. Mayor Grenier said that the Board has promised to be very thorough and when there is a model they are comfortable with the Board of Assessors will move forward. Councilor Remillard agreed saying that the Board wants to be able to substantiate the values. Councilor Otis asked if there is a time line to get tax bills out and Mayor Grenier replied that he's hoping it will get done in the next two weeks. Mr. Wheeler commented that we have drawn down half of the TAN or \$750,000.

Councilor Higbee asked if this has impacted the Board's confidence in KRT. Mr. Chevarie said that the Board is working collaboratively with KRT. Councilor Rozek asked why the differences between values and sales was not addressed earlier. It was explained that it is only with sales that the differential comes about. Mayor Grenier added that the mean ratio for utilities showed a loss of \$14 million and that was our first indication that residential values had risen. Because we equalize so high, it increases the county tax. Councilor Remillard stressed that the tax rate needs to be affordable.

Education

Corinne Cascadden reported that the School Board is holding a special meeting this Thursday. They will be trying to piece together and revisiting grade reorganization. The schools received a Report of what is educationally sound and recommendations of how to put grades together in terms of programming. The Board also has a priority to save the jobs of the people they employ. She added that some programs stand to gain by putting grades together. She encouraged everyone to go to the meeting Thursday at 6:00 p.m. in the High School Library. Ms. Cascadden commented that the district lost \$800,000 and they can't continue to operate in the same way. They also can't just wait to see what will happen but have to be prepared.

NH Education Commissioner Edelblut will be in the area soon. In the system of competencies, 11th graders should be on a career path. There are some tough decisions to make and they have to be made in the mindset of enrollment decreasing and enhancing programs. The School Board will be meeting with legislators in February. Mayor Grenier said that the effort to coordinate education in the valley has been a rouse. There was no intention of solving the problems with education. Ms. Cascadden affirmed that we can provide the best education for our students.

Non-Meeting

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Morgan Allain to enter into non-meeting per RSA 91-A:21(b) Collective Bargaining. All voted in favor by roll call.

Councilor Rozek moved to come out of non-meeting; Councilor Morgan Allain seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Grenier moved on to the Regular Meeting at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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