

City Council Work Session June 3, 2019

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme Finance Director Patty Chase, Public Works Director Eric Grenier, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Claire Styles, Bryan Lamirande, Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun and public

Mayor Grenier called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

Mayor Grenier mentioned that Fire Chief Lacasse's father passed away and he asked for flowers to be sent for the services. Councilor Rozek so moved, Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried.

Tax Deeded Properties

Ms. Chase reported that she is working on tax liens for June 6th. She confirmed that some payments will come in prior to going forward with a tax deed.

Tax deeding will occur on June 12th. Ms. Chase showed slides of several properties that are on the tax deed list. She asked for guidance on several properties that have the potential for environmental issues. There are also mobile homes in the trailer park that are slated to be deeded. Some owners have chosen to pay their lot fees but not their taxes.

There is a property at 640 Hillside Avenue that is owned by the heirs of Robert Lavoie. There are contamination problems with the properties and DES and now EPA are involved. The heir is a nun in a convent in Canada. Eventually the property would end up in probate in Canada. It is a great parcel and the goal is to clean it up and get it back on tax role. We would only take it with a waiver of liability for the city from EPA approved by the City's legal counsel.

We want to continue with a lien on the PPA properties, not a tax deed. We would need direction to keep the liens in place.

There was discussion regarding the mobile homes at the trailer park that are up for tax deed. The Association has taken an interest in 23 Arlington St and if the City takes the property, they will demolish it. The Association did not indicate an interest in any other trailers in the park. There was some question about whether it is worth tax deeding the trailers because they are not valuable. Councilor Remillard was adamant that the City should take the trailers because if word gets out that we are allowing taxes to go unpaid, there will be more that will not pay. There was some discussion about lot fees and if the City would be liable to pay them. Councilors asked for more information on the trailers.

Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Rozek to forego tax deeding for potential environmental contamination on Ramsey Street (M127;L13); Flint Street (M127;L14); 640 Hillside Ave (M127;L15); PPA Cell House (M128;L262); PPA Hutchins St(M133;L105); PPA Hutchins St (M133;L6); PPA Perry St (M134;L9). The tax deed on 161 Main Street (M119;L54) will also be withheld; So moved, the motion carried.

May 24 Meeting with Governor Sununu

Mayor Grenier reported that Governor Sununu met with city officials as well as Councilors Rozek and Remillard. Before the meeting, the Governor did not understand the gravity of the unsustainable cuts to education funding that were made by the Legislature. He left the meeting knowing he wanted to do something. On June 6, the Senate will vote on the budget; the Senate version is not as generous as the House budget. We won't know what the State will contribute until the end of June. Stabilization money is in the State budget; however we don't know yet how much will be restored.

Hutchins Street Project

Eric Grenier explained that he was asked to prepare a plan in February for mill and 2" overlay of Hutchins Street from the East Side arterial to Chapman's facility. This would not be a full road reconstruction but an improvement to pavement construction. The estimate of \$546,000 is high but we won't know actual cost until it goes out to bid. Mr. Grenier did not suggest high strength pavement due to its cost.

Councilor Rozek asked if we have the manpower to crack seal pavement. Mr. Grenier noted that the work needs to be done at night; and there is not enough manpower. He added that he has a draft bid package for sealing that is not complete yet; however he felt that he would finish before he leaves. Mayor Grenier stated that there is a section of road on Forbush Avenue that is very bad, and a section on Hillsboro Street by the old fire station that needs pavement. He suggested adding those to the bid and if the City gets some money from the State, we would be ready to go subject to the availability of funds. We will have a separate bid package for crack sealing.

Other

Mr. Wheeler noted that the letter to the Abenaki Nation has been changed so that it can be signed by their representative as well as the City. The City will notify the Abenaki when earth is to be disturbed on Mt. Jasper and the Abenaki will agree not to interfere with work to be done. It has not yet been signed but Mike Eastman has indicated that he would sign on behalf of the Abenaki.

Councilor Higbee mentioned, for the benefit of citizens present, that the properties being tax deeded have not paid property taxes for three or more years. Even after the deed is executed, they still have the opportunity to repurchase.

There being no further business Mayor Grenier moved on to the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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