

City Council Work Session September 16, 2019

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, James Bower, Public Works Director Ben Hall, Jamie Welch, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun* and public

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

Hiring - Library

Library Director Denise Jensen has announced her retirement. She plans on working through to the end of October. Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Berthiaume to hire a librarian to replace Ms. Jensen.

Comprehensive Right of Way Ordinance

Mr. Wheeler explained that Donahue Tucker & Ciandella sent a letter regarding drafting a comprehensive right of way ordinance that can be used in any community to accommodate wireless in the right of way. It is expected to cost about \$1,000 to \$2,000 per community, depending on how many communities participate. Councilor Rozek asked for a specific example and Mr. Wheeler said that some companies are using telephone poles as mini cell towers and that is not addressed in our ordinance. We may ultimately want to do this and the cost would be a lot more if we were to do it on our own. Councilor Remillard confirmed that if the cost is too high, we could pull out. Councilor Remillard moved to proceed, subject to the final cost; Councilor Rozek seconded and the motion carried.

Princess Theater Bid Document

Mr. Wheeler referred to a draft bid document in the Council packet saying that there would be two options for anyone who is interested in the Princess Theater. In the first option, the purchase price would be \$1 and the purchaser would have to demolish the building in its entirety. This option would be for someone who wants to recycle the brick. The second option would be to demo the timbers, add a roof and then the project would be ready for future development. Councilor Remillard questioned whether the City would retain the option to choose the bidder. Mr. Wheeler added that the bid requires \$5,000 bid security and \$5,000 at the time of award. Other prequalification could be added. Councilor Higbee stated that we could ask the bidders to demonstrate capacity. He asked about the southwest corner of the building that needs immediate attention and Mr. Wheeler noted that he has asked a contractor to look at it. Councilor Otis asked how much it would cost to demo the building and Mr. Wheeler estimated at least \$50,000. The consensus of the Council was to move ahead with the bid.

Sewer Abatement Request

Mr. Wheeler reported that we received a request for sewer abatement after the 30 day window specified in the rules. This citizen winterized his property in Berlin. Water works provided a letter attesting that the water meter froze and burst and water ran out onto the basement floor. Councilor Remillard stated that generally, water is shut off in the street if someone will not be at the property through the winter. She proposed granting the abatement in its entirety. Mr. Wheeler said that the Water Works abated the assessment and worked out a payment plan; Mr. Bower was dealing with

water and assumed this also addressed the sewer bill. Councilor Remillard moved to fully abate the sewer bill for 569 Rockingham Street, \$3831.00; Councilor Gentili seconded. The motion carried 5/4 with Councilors Berthiaume, Theberge, Gentili, Higbee and Remillard voting for the motion; Councilors Otis, Morgan, Rozek and Mayor Grenier voting against.

Mr. Wheeler said that he received a call from Dennis Thompson who has a house as a second home on Church Street. He had a plumber winterize the home and did not go there after September. He was asked to supply additional information during the regular abatement process and we did not get any. He has since called and explained that an outside hose was running and the water did not go down the sewer. Council conceded to allow Mr. Thompson another chance to supply additional information.

Mr. Wheeler commented that we will see more of these because people are buying second homes here. The sewer abatement rules or perhaps the ordinance could be changed. Councilor Remillard suggested adding a flyer to the water bill mailing that would specify that water needs to be shut off at the street if the property is being winterized.

Public Works Equipment

Mr. Wheeler reported that in an effort to understand what it would cost to refurbish the existing loaders Nortrax brought a technician in and photos of the equipment were sent to John Deere. The company indicated, in the condition they are in, safety of the operator is compromised if the equipment were to tip over. It would cost \$35,000 each to repair and the loaders are 16 years old. A plan is in the works to lease new equipment and in between five and ten years, we would keep turning it over. This would reduce the time spent repairing and more time could be spent on preventative maintenance.

In 2003 the Council decided to standardize on John Deere because we already had two in our fleet. It made sense to have tires, and parts on hand that would fit the whole fleet. Mechanics are accustomed to working on them and operators are used to working with them. Councilor Berthiaume asked why we use loaders and Mr. Wheeler replied that they replaced a fleet of graders that were used to plow. The graders were used because they use only one operator rather than a driver and wingman needed for a plow truck. Councilor Berthiaume asked if this is the opportunity to purchase equipment that will salt and sand at the same time. Mr. Hall noted that the hills and tightness of some neighborhoods needs the flexibility of the loaders; however there is an opportunity to introduce other equipment. Mr. Wheeler agreed saying that we need the loaders as the backbone, then we can fill in with other equipment. He stated that there are salt trucks on order that were purchased without the plow; adding the plow would be \$35,000 per truck.

Councilor Rozek commented on the rust that was allowed to accumulate on the equipment adding that when we go to sell, they have no value. He asked if the State would allow their equipment to get into such condition. Mr. Hall said that the State operates under a different mindset and work atmosphere. Every operator is allowed to maintain their own equipment. In Berlin four mechanics deal with all of the City's vehicles and equipment. It takes an enormous amount of time just to get all the vehicles inspected. He said that he plans to generate a routine maintenance that will prevent the equipment from getting into such poor condition.

Mayor Grenier commented on the age of the equipment and having only four mechanics. Of the four, it is likely there is one on vacation, and there is one working exclusively on police vehicles. The city has three garbage packers that are tired; there were multiple failures of the sno go and generally an aging

fleet. Mr. Wheeler agreed saying the preventative maintenance gets pushed aside because the equipment is old and the mechanics are working on significant failures. The concept of moving to a lease program will leave room for PM work.

Councilor Rozek stated that we don't have to go with John Deere; we could go out for bid on the same size machine. Mr. Hall noted that there are specs that need to be met, such as the full locking front differential which only John Deere has. We will need to determine if any other manufacturer is suitable. Mayor Grenier said that a plan is being worked on to pay without affecting the tax rate.

Councilor Rozek asked about contracting out and Mr. Wheeler said that if the Council wants to seek pricing, he could work on that but it could not be done this year. Councilor Higbee added that there would be an impact to Public Works. The loaders are estimated to cost \$320,000 each and we need 5 for a total of \$1.6 million before discounts that would carry over into a lease.

Mr. Wheeler said that he contacted the bond bank and we are in Year 6 of a 12 year bond and we may be able to refinance to pay the lease. More will be known next Monday. If we decide to go with the John Deere, the Council will need to waive the bid process to get the loaders in. The goal is not use the loaders this year; we will find temporary equipment if necessary. Mr. Hall said that he heard October 23 for delivery of the salt trucks. Mr. Wheeler confirmed a consensus to go ahead with the plows on the trucks. To a question about whether our mechanics work on the leased vehicles, Mr. Hall stated that John Deere offers a program where they do the services and they can do the preventative maintenance as well. More information on pricing will come next week.

Other

Chief Jay Watkins will be the new fire chief starting October 7.

Councilor Rozek asked about the State budget and Mayor Grenier said that the framework for a budget is in place and September 25 there may be a vote on the new budget.

Non Public Session

Councilor Higbee moved to go into nonpublic session per RSA 91-A:3II I Consideration of legal advice provide by legal counsel; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

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

There being no further business in the Work Session, 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.