

**City Council Work Session
October 28, 2019**

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

Others present: City Manager James Wheeler, Superintendent of Schools Julie King, Richard Laflamme, and Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun*.

In the absence Mayor Grenier, Councilor Remillard chaired the meeting.

Additional School Budget Information

Mr. Wheeler distributed school budget information listing where additional funding for the schools might come from. He outlined a plan that would use some of the City's unappropriated fund balance (UFB) to add \$130,586 to the School budget, resulting in a UFB for the City of \$811,541 which is under the DRA's recommended minimum of 5%. He emphasized that all of these numbers are projections until the DRA sets the tax rate in November. Mr. Wheeler indicated that he confirmed there is no law or rule that prohibits the City having a UFB below 5%.

Mr. Wheeler then reviewed necessary capital improvements that total \$294,000 including new plowing equipment and a larger than expected County tax bill. There is \$421,546 budgeted for road work on Hutchins Street which could be delayed, leaving \$127,546 to appropriate to the schools. Councilor Remillard said that we can start a resolution at the next meeting to appropriate additional funding or wait until the tax rate is set and the projected numbers are final. She suggested that there is money set aside for the Riverwalk, around \$128,000, that could be appropriated to the School fire alarm.

Councilor Higbee had questions about the urgency of replacing the fire alarm saying that we don't fully understand how serious an issue this is. He added that he's had some experience managing buildings with older fire alarms and some can be fixed; others are dangerous and need immediate attention. Superintendent King said that the fire department came to do a drill and the cafeteria and CT zone did not activate; however alarms could be heard from other parts of the school. Ms. King said she would get additional information and relay it to the Council. Councilor Rozek also asked when the fire panel was last tested. Council conceded to waiting until the tax rate is set to appropriate additional funds to the school department.

Councilor Berthiaume asked about code compliance issues that were mentioned at the last meeting. Ms. King noted that, though the high school has had students right along, it is the age level of the building occupants that brings about additional code compliance. K-1 code specifies that students have to exit the building at ground level. There are exceptions that say if the K-1 students are on a floor other than ground level, there needs to be a dedicated stairwell to exit. This is done so that the little ones are not holding everyone up in an emergency exit or being stampeded as they exit.

Ms. King added that the code review person is independent and has worked on retrofitting older buildings before. Councilor Rozek commented that there was a savings of \$300,000 by closing Brown School; however all these capital items are cutting into the savings.

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

Mr. Wheeler reported on Smart Start.

A matter regarding a potential settlement was discussed.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Berthiaume to come out of non-public session. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Rozek moved to seal the minutes of settlement agreement as releasing them would make any action taken ineffective; Councilor Higbee seconded and the motion carried.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Berthiaume to authorize the City Manager to execute a Settlement and Release of Claims agreement with Public Service dba Eversource in which PSNH will write off \$19,009.89 of cost to the City associated with the company's Smart Start program. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Morgan questioned Bryan Lamirande's change of position at the school. Chair Remillard stated that he is now in charge of maintenance and buses and Ms. Moore has taken the finance position.

Councilor Rozek moved with a second from Councilor Higbee to adjourn the meeting. so moved, the motion carried. The meeting ended at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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