

City Council Work Session

March 2, 2020

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

Others present: City Manager Jim Wheeler, Assistant Chief Dan Buteau, Superintendent Julie King, Fire Chief James Watkins, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Patty Chase, Richard Laflamme, Gina Welch, Jamie Welch, Barbara Tetreault, *Berlin Daily Sun* and public.

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

Review of Fire Department Fee Changes

Mr. Wheeler noted that the first read of the ordinance occurred at the last regular meeting. Since then, there have been some changes and they are reflected in the handout. The changes the Council wanted are reflected in Ordinance #2020-02 R1.

Councilor Rozek asked Chief Watkins if he's been working on any grants. Chief Watkins replied that he's working on two federal grants, one for self-contained breathing apparatus and one to replace Engine 3. There is a grant with homeland security for a mobile repeater. He said that he is talking with the USDA about getting an extra set of gloves, and hoods for the crew so that gear could be removed at the scene rather than bringing it into the cab. The equipment is covered with carcinogens.

Chief Watkins added that portable radios are also critical. In a recent bid, the specs were not specific enough and the equipment purchase will be re-bid soon. The Chief also credited Pat Lefebvre with contacting the manufacturer of a piece of FD dispatch equipment and getting an alternative to replacing a \$14,000 piece of IT equipment.

Police Department Grant Resolutions

Assistant Chief Dan Buteau explained that every year, the PD applies for a series of grants. The first is Operation Granite Hammer which has funds available for opioid reduction drug investigation. The PD applies for Homeland Security money for an Intelligence Liaison Officer who gathers and shares intelligence.

The PD receives funding from the Byrne JAG grant for participation in the State's Drug Task Force. This is done in conjunction with the Sheriff's department.

The NH Highway Safety Agency provides funding for proactive patrols regarding seat belt use, bicycle patrols, red light running, child passenger seat, DWI and other offences.

There is grant money available from the NH Fish and Game to patrol the ATV trails. This is especially needed during festivals.

Assistant Chief Buteau noted that to streamline the process, the grants specify that the Police Chief is authorized to sign and effectuate the grant.

BUILD Grant Announcement

Councilor Higbee confirmed that BUILD is the former TIGER Program. Ms. Laflamme reported that a BUILD grant is no smaller than \$5 million and no larger than \$25 million. The project has to be shovel ready and if awarded, the money is spent down quickly. The local match is 20%; however for rural areas, that may be negotiable. We have been monitoring this application process for a few years and the grant period usually opens in March and is due in July. This round, the applications are due May 18, 2020 which is two months sooner than in past years.

Criteria is safety, infrastructure, state of good repair where the City will have a plan to keep the area in good repair, economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and innovation.

Mr. Wheeler indicated that he is seeking the Council's support for staff to work on the application. The City will put together a team including Burgess Biomass, Wilson Engineering and likely another consultant. Funding will be from Fund 51 which is leftover bond money for road work. Councilor Rozek asked how much it will cost to get the application done and Mr. Wheeler estimated \$10,000 to \$15,000.

Mr. Wheeler noted that the downtown reconstruction project could be \$14 million and it would include the snowmelt. Burgess will assume the cost of operating the snow melt and they will hire a fulltime position that will be responsible for a greenhouse and for the heated streets. Ms. Laflamme noted that this project is innovative, and its financing includes a public/private partnership. Councilor Eastman asked if the street being torn up for two years is part of the economic impact and Mr. Wheeler confirmed that it is not. Mayor Grenier added that the cost to mill and overlay without reconstruction would likely be close to the match amount the city would have to pay for the complete reconstruction.

Councilor Eastman asked if there are other capital improvements that would qualify for the grants and Mr. Wheeler indicated that other possible projects lack some of the pieces needed. This project tells the right story for this grant. Councilor Otis expressed his support saying that this is a game changer and very much worth it, but it has been a hard sell to the community. Ms. Laflamme stated that this is not so much a heated street project but a reconstruction of the downtown as well. Councilor Remillard agreed that streets and sidewalks need to be redone and this is a very creative way to get on top of the list to get it done.

FY 21 City Manager's Budget

Mr. Wheeler presented the FY21 City Manager's budget. The budget has the department's request as well as any comments from the department heads; the next column is the City Manager's proposed budget. This budget projects a tax rate of \$44.37 per thousand which is a \$4.55 increase from last year. It uses \$800,000 of unappropriated fund balance.

Table 2 is a summary of the budget. The City's operating budget attributed to the general fund increased by 3.2% and encompasses expected growth such as union pay increases, and health insurance. The capital budget was cut but there is an increase of \$906,536.30. The school operating budget is up 12% and they have a capital budget of \$401,301.56.

In the pilot agreement with Burgess, they are to sell recs over \$400,000. Mayor Grenier added that it was negotiated that in year 6 the city would receive 15% of the revenue of the recs after vendors get

paid, or 15% of the net rec revenue. Mr. Wheeler stated that this yielded \$523,000 that we were not planning on. There could be more but it is not something we can count on.

The last page is a chart that shows the apportionment of the budget by department. In this budget \$100,000 of expense is .25 on the tax rate.

Mayor Grenier proposed changing the budget meeting of March 11 to March 12 and Council agreed.

Non-Public Session

Councilor Rozek moved to go into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3II (d) land matters; Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Land matters were discussed.

Councilor Rozek moved to come out of non-public session; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried.

Councilor Rozek moved to seal the minutes of the non-public session indefinitely, as releasing them would make the action taken ineffective; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

There being no further business in work session, Mayor Grenier moved on to the Regular meeting, after a 5 minute recess.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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