

City Council Work Session

Pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04, Section 8 and Emergency Order #12, Section 3

November 23, 2020

At 6:30 p.m. Mayor Grenier opened the meeting. Due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with Governor Sununu's Emergency Order #12 pursuant to Executive Order 2020-04 this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Please note that there is no physical location to observe and listen contemporaneously to the meeting, which was authorized pursuant to the Governor's Emergency Order. However, in accordance with the Emergency Order, this is to confirm that we are:

- a) *Providing public access to the meeting by telephone, with additional access possibilities by video or other electronic means;*

We are utilizing the Zoom platform for this electronic meeting. All members of the Council have the ability to communicate contemporaneously during this meeting through the Zoom platform, and the public has access to contemporaneously listen and, if necessary, participate in this meeting through dialing the following phone # 1-646-558-8656, meeting ID **882 4423 1588**; Passcode **449669**, or by clicking on the City Council agenda on the City's website, www.berlinnh.gov.

- b) *Providing public notice of the necessary information for accessing the meeting:*

We previously gave notice to the public of the necessary information for accessing the meeting, including how to access the meeting using Zoom or telephonically. Instructions have been provided on the City of Berlin's website of the Council at City Council-agendas

- c) *Providing a mechanism for the public to alert the public body during the meeting if there are problems with access:*

If anybody has a problem, please call Pam Laflamme at 603-752-8587 or e-mail at: plaflamme@berlinnh.gov

- d) *Adjourning the meeting if the public is unable to access the meeting*

In the event the public is unable to access the meeting, we will adjourn the meeting and have it rescheduled at that time.

Please note that all votes that are taken during this meeting shall be done by Roll Call vote. By roll call, each member is to state their presence, and whether there is anyone in the room during this meeting, which is required under the Right to Know law.

Present at roll call were: Mayor Grenier at City Hall and in the room with James Wheeler; via Zoom, Councilors Theberge, Rozek, Higbee, Remillard, Otis, Morgan and Eastman who noted they were alone in their respective rooms; Councilor Berthiaume was excused.

Others present: City Manager James Wheeler, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Community Development Director Pamela Laflamme, Tara McKillop from AV Home Care, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Daily Sun.

AV Home Care Presentation

Ms. McKillop stated that the agency has reported to the Council yearly in November which is Home Care month. This year has been like no other and they continue to go into client's homes, helping with whatever is necessary. Keeping staff has been challenging due to stipends that were offered and some staff with compromised health issues who cannot work. The agency has served 137 residents from Berlin and discharged 87 for a total of 224 people from Berlin served. There are 24 staff living in Berlin out of 48.

Fundraising has not gone well this year. In their third year of doing charitable casino funding, they only made \$400 for Dorothy's Gift. AV Home Care has asked for level funding of \$8,774 for several years; however there are residents who are not paying their portion. In that case, Dorothy's Gift and the City funding would make up the difference. There will be an estimated shortfall of \$3,000. Ms. McKillop mentioned that Gorham took notice of Berlin's contribution to AV Home Care and they were upset about the difference in the funding amounts between Berlin and Gorham. The goal is always to keep residents in their homes safely and independently. Councilor Remillard asked if the number of clients is more or less than last year. Ms. McKillop replied that they have a slightly higher number of clients.

Mayor Grenier asked if Dorothy's Gift contributions are broken out by communities and Ms. McKillop stated that she could get that information. He confirmed that the Dorothy's Gift campaign starts around the Holidays. With no further questions, Ms. McKillop left the meeting at this time.

Tax Rate

Mr. Wheeler introduced Holly Larsen, the City's new Comptroller/Finance Director.

He reported that the City has submitted all documents to obtain the tax rate to the DRA's web portal. The portal allows the City to enter the amount of UFB they want to apply to reduce the tax rate. The minimum UFB remaining in the budget, that the DRA will approve, is 5%. Using \$400,000 of UFB, the City's tax rate would be \$35.93 which is a reduction of \$4 from last year. Councilor Eastman said that this will stimulate more economic activity. Mayor Grenier noted that the City gained \$78 million of value in the revaluation. Councilor Remillard asked if there is an estimate of the increase to apartment buildings. Councilor Eastman thought it was an increase of approximately 20% and the Assessing Office would have the actual increase.

Councilor Higbee moved with a second from Councilor Eastman to authorize the City Manager and Comptroller to lock in the tax rate at \$35.93, as presented. Councilor Higbee expressed that he is happy to see the UFB with more than a 5% cushion. In the vote that followed, all voted in favor in a unanimous roll call vote.

Request to Fill Laborer/Equipment Operator Positions

Mr. Wheeler reported that there is an additional position vacant due to a retirement. He is looking to advertise to fill the position.

Councilor Higbee moved to fill the position; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

PWD Equipment Update

Mr. Wheeler stated that last Thursday, an independent inspector reviewed the PWD loaders to see if they could meet the RODES certification. There was also a certified welder from Alpine Machine on hand and recertification was obtained for two out of four loaders. The other two are beyond recertification. The cost was \$7,500 per machine and ½ day of a welder's time. We now have eight pieces of equipment ready for snow.

Councilor Rozek asked what would be done with the two remaining loaders that were uncertifiable. Mr. Wheeler noted that there is a proposal from Nortrax that holds last year's pricing. He asked if the City is prepared to replace two, knowing that the price is not going to go down. Councilor Eastman confirmed that we lease the machines for 5 years for an annual payment of about \$32,500. Councilor Eastman suggested staggering the purchases buying one this year, and one next year.

Demolition Bids

Mr. Wheeler stated that we had favorable bids for the demolition of the Princess Theater and for a partial demolition of the building adjacent to the firehouse. The low bid for both projects was from Cross and we have had good experience with them. The bid for the Princess was \$110,000 which does not include the landfill costs. \$200,000 was budgeted and hopefully we will be able to reallocate some funding to the demolition of a Second Avenue property. Councilor Remillard asked when the building would be demolished and Mr. Wheeler said that it should be a few weeks from when he makes the award. Councilor Remillard confirmed that traffic during the project will be handled.

The FD Adjacent Building had a low bid of \$58,175. Councilor Higbee moved to authorize the City Manager to execute the document to award the demolition bids to Cross for \$110,000 for the Princess and \$58,175 for the FD Adjacent Building; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

BIDPA Consultant Selection

Councilor Higbee reported that BIDPA put out an RFP to developers who work in the hospitality business. They want to know if Berlin has what it takes to make a hotel successful. There were five qualified firms who sent in proposals and three were interviewed by a Committee of BIDPA. The Committee chose Pinnacle Advisory Group from MA. They will start their work within 5 or 6 weeks. They will study whether the feasibility exists to have a hotel in Berlin and if not, then what it would take to make it feasible. Their proposal is for \$15,000.

Mayor Grenier noted that this study will be paid for from the BIDPA enterprise fund. Councilor Rozek confirmed that they would look at different locations within the city. Mayor Grenier confirmed that they will talk with landowners as well.

Councilor Higbee moved to hire Pinnacle Advisory Group for the Hotel/Lodging Feasibility Study project for a sum not to exceed \$15,000.00 from BIDPA and to authorize the City Manager to enter into a contract with PAG and allow him to do all things necessary to execute the contract; Councilor Morgan seconded and the motion carried unanimously by roll call.

Other

The Broadband discussion will be at the next meeting. Mayor Grenier suggested taking the 5th Monday off so the next meeting will be December 7. He also stated that Beano Lamontagne will meet with the Council on December 14 to talk about programs to promote development.

Councilor Rozek moved to adjourn; Councilor Remillard seconded and the motion carried. The meeting ended at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Susan Tremblay
Administrative Assistant

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