

Memo

To: Mayor and Council
cc: Department Heads
From: Pat MacQueen, City Manager
Date: May 21, 2012
Re: Manager's Report

Moving Downtown Forward – Day of Caring

Several volunteers representing various downtown and local businesses turned out Friday to help with the First Annual Downtown Day of Caring. Spearheaded by Sylvia Poulin of the Berlin Main Street Program, this event was created as a result of discussions related to the Moving Downtown Forward Initiative. Several parks including Bickford Park, Gill Park, and the Laura Lee Viger Botanical Gardens were among those areas that were weeded, raked, mulched, and cleaned up. Volunteers spent nearly eight hours getting downtown green spaces ready for planting as well as painting benches, picnic tables and flower boxes. At the end of the day, the volunteers were treated to a barbeque dinner catered and donated by Lloyd Murray of the White Mountain Chalet. IGA, Coca-Cola, and PSNH also donated food and drinks to the event. The weather was perfect and the event was well organized. Berlin is very fortunate to have citizens and businesses that are willing to work and help out in its public spaces. Public Works and Recreation and Parks staff were extremely helpful in pulling this day together. Organizers consider the day a success and are already talking about plans for next year. Attached is an article on the event from today's Union Leader.

Notre Dame Cleanup

After about seven years and seven hundred thousand dollars, we can say that the Notre Dame property owned by the City has been cleaned up of its contamination issues. There

are Activity Use Restrictions (AUR's – can't drill into the concrete) on the stairwells and landings that must be honored, but the building is ready for reuse and hopefully TCC will be able to accomplish that reuse. We have put in to NHDES for final reimbursement of the funds needed for all of this cleanup work which included lead, asbestos and PCB's.

Tax Deeded Properties

Of the 36 Tax Deeded properties, about 15 of them will require evictions. All of these were visited last week to meet the tenants and become familiar with the properties. Notices to Quit will likely be sent out this week.

As a side note, 483 School Street will be coming down this week.

WWTP Phase II Improvement Bids

The pre-construction meeting with Apex was held at the WWTF and blasting surveys have already been done. Materials are being ordered. We expect actual construction may begin as early as next week.

I&I Work

Flow meters have been moved again from the main trunks off Main Street from the Avenues and also the trunk at Bridge Street. We have also visited about 30 homes of which several will have to have separation. The Phase I contract work is still slower than we would like but the Contractor claims he is still on schedule.

State Prison Inspection Report

Attached is a notice from NH DES to the Plant Maintenance Engineer at the State Prison chiding them for having installed spray booths without the proper permits and for failing to timely submit Annual Emissions Reports as required for the last five years and other related issues.

Invasive Insect Traps to be Set

Attached is a flier we received from NHDES regarding traps they are putting out in Ash Trees to test for the invasive emerald ash borer beetle from Asia. This beetle has not yet been detected in NH but if they catch it early, there is presumably more they can do to fight it than if they catch it late. I have already seen these traps on Rt 3 between I-93 and Rt 302. They do look like purple box kites in the trees.

Legislative Matters

It is very difficult to ferret out all the issues of the current pension debates going on in Concord. SB 228 as originally passed by the Senate would repeal a flawed pension spiking provision enacted several years ago. The House Special Committee on Public Employee Pension Reform has taken the opposite approach by amending SB 228 by requiring an assessment on every NHRS employer that provides any end-of –career payments on retirement including accrued sick leave, longevity pay, early retirement incentive pay etc. Under current law there is a 125% threshold before the penalty assessment kicks in which is eliminated in this amendment which means any payment beyond wages will incur a penalty. The example given in the Legislative Bulletin #21 is an end of career payment of \$15,000 would increase the pension amount by \$2,500 per year on a 30 yr career employee retiring at age 60 with an average final compensation of \$50,000. Under this amendment of the House, the spiking assessment to the employer would be \$25,000. NHMA is urging that municipal officials let their legislators know that they should reject the committee amendment and any floor amendments to SB228 and simply pass it as it was originally presented to the House repealing the spiking provisions.

Combined with this pension concern are possible amendments to SB229. SB229 would establish a defined contribution pension plan for new employees in the state as opposed to the defined benefit plan which the state currently has in place. The amendments being considered would create a study committee to issue recommendations for the defined contribution plan, but if the study committee doesn't make its report by the due date of 11/1/12, a default defined contribution plan would kick in. NHMA opposes these amendments because many of the huge unfunded liabilities of the current defined benefit plan stem from imprudent and inadequate knowledge about the financial impact of making changes to the existing plan.