

December 5, 2017
Planning Board

Present were: Regular Members Tom McCue, Lori Langlois, Greg Estrella, Aline Boucher, Richard Cassidy, Naomi Levesque, Helene Rayborn, Ex-Officio Members Lucie Remillard, and Bryan Chevarie.

Alternate Member Christina Lefebvre was excused for the evening.

Others Present: Pamela Laflamme, Community Development Director; Jim Wheeler, City Manager; Corinne Cascadden, Superintendent of Schools; Michel Salek, Code Enforcement Officer; Barbara Tetreault, Berlin Sun; Lane Strahan, public

Public Comments – No one spoke

Approval of November Minutes

Lori Langlois noted that although she was present and is cited as making a motion during the November meeting, her name was omitted from the “Present were:” section of the minutes. Mr. McCue proposed that the word “conversation” in the second sentence of the last paragraph of page one needed to be modified to read “public hearing.” Ms. Levesque added that it would be wise to add language signifying that the public hearing had ended, ideally after the third sentence of this same paragraph. Ms. Rayborn made a motion to approve the minutes as amended with a second by Ms. Levesque. So moved, the motion carried.

Capital Improvement Plan

Note: This agenda item was added to the schedule of the meeting after the official agenda was posted. The review of this Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) necessitated immediate attention as City Council was awaiting the Board’s opinion.

City Manager Jim Wheeler distributed CIP binders to the group and explained that this is a six-year plan that encompasses a variety of needs for every department in the City. Typically, the CIP will include items that are estimated to cost \$10,000 or more. The revenue for these requests is primarily derived from property taxes, however, the sewer fund, BIDPA, grants, and airport operations are additional sources of funds.

The binders include a summary section along with other sections where individual projects/items are detailed more thoroughly. Mr. Wheeler explained that there were four sheets that did not make it into the binders that should have. In an effort to provide the Board with complete information, copies of the missing material were shown to the group. Three of these pages involved Public Works infrastructure projects – retaining wall replacements, street & sidewalk repair, and improvements to the library’s façade. The final

missing page related to the demolition of blighted tax-deeded properties. Mr. Wheeler indicated that the link to the CIP on the City's website will be updated to include these omitted pages.

Corinne Cascadden, Superintendent of Schools, was given the opportunity to expound on the details of the school system's CIP items. Ms. Cascadden explained that there is a strong desire and need to construct an access road around Berlin High School. The original building plan included an access road when the school was built in the early 1970's, however, development laid dormant for years. It has become clear that this access road would be a critical component of the safety of the students and faculty, which is always a primary focus of the school system. Ms. Cascadden touched on some of the safety and security improvements that the City has achieved in recent years along with how they were able to utilize grants to leverage funding. There are currently grant opportunities the City is exploring to help achieve these security-related goals as the state of New Hampshire is reallocating millions of dollars of surplus money to fund well-being, security, and other related projects. This access road is planned to be completed throughout four phases of development.

Mr. Estrella sought confirmation that this plan would not create a complete loop around the school building until phase four of the project. Ms. Cascadden explained that the area that will connect the two access roads is going to be challenging to develop due to topographical reasons, which is why it has been planned as its own phase. It was noted that this plan is not anticipated to disturb any of the historical trails that are located in the area of Mt. Jasper.

The group went through pages of the CIP binder in closer detail and discussed varying levels of priority for these projects. Ms. Boucher pointed out that this is essentially a wish list of upgrades/improvements for each department and wondered if the City had an anticipated budget for these requests. Mr. Wheeler noted that the City was able to accomplish a lot over the past two years, particularly with Route 16 development. Burgess BioPower's payments in-lieu of taxes helped fund these upgrades. City Council is committed to accomplishing as many improvements as reasonably possible, while remaining fiscally responsible. It was made clear that the group was not voting on authorizing any specific projects with the review of the CIP binders on this night. Ms. Remillard made a motion to accept the Capital Improvement Plan as presented, seconded by Ms. Boucher. All in favor, the motion carried.

Commercial Solar Zoning Discussion

Ms. Laflamme passed out a copy of a zoning ordinance that City Council had reviewed the prior night at their weekly meeting. A committee to study this issue was formed with members of the Planning Board and City Council. This committee focused on the best possible location for commercial solar projects. It has been determined that the entire

Industrial Business zone is best suited for this type of development, along with select areas in Rural Residential zones. The proposed resolution states that commercial scale solar photovoltaic systems will be allowed in all of the Industrial Business zones and only in a section of the Rural Residential zones that is generally described being located north and west of NH Route 110 – bounded by Route 110, the White Mountain National Forest, Jericho Mountain State Park, and the town boundary line with Gorham. Council did their first reading of the resolution during this meeting and will hold public hearing on December 18, 2017. The group was sure to be cognizant that concerns coming from any potential abutters will be addressed.

The Board discussed an article from the *New Hampshire Business Review* entitled “Region’s renewable needs spark a NH solar surge.” This article touches on nine proposed solar projects in New Hampshire. One of these developments, a 20 megawatt facility, is propositioned to be located in Berlin. Ms. Laflamme explained that she anticipates the company will be in front of the Planning Board as early as this upcoming spring. The group discussed the Coos transmission loop and how we’re approaching capacity with our current infrastructure. Mr. McCue noted that this could potentially go a long way to improve the perception about the North Country and our willingness to be receptive to alternative business styles.

Residential Solar Zoning Discussion

The Board discussed potential challenges and disputes that could arise if residential solar arrays were to become prevalent throughout the City. The group was in agreement that regulations are necessary in order to protect the rights and concerns of abutters. These regulations would also allow room for zoning and planning trepidations to be addressed. In an attempt to streamline the process, Ms. Laflamme explained it would make sense for special use permits to be required for these residential solar arrays since the Planning Board meets every month and a homeowner would not have to wait for the next Zoning Board of Adjustment meeting. The group is also mindful that too many regulations and procedural steps may discourage a homeowner from installing solar equipment. Councilor Peter Higbee and Ms. Laflamme proposed the idea of a list of bullet points for an ordinance where if they are all met then a special use permit will not be required. However, the homeowner would still need to obtain necessary building permits in this situation. The City recognizes the potential benefits solar energy can have to homeowners and therefore does not want to be overly burdensome, but retaining a certain degree of control aids in protecting the rights of abutters as well.

Project Updates

Ms. Laflamme explained that HEB Engineers will hold a public hearing regarding the upcoming scoping work for the Riverwalk project. This meeting will be held concurrently with the Planning Board meeting, likely not until the February gathering. Ms. Langlois inquired whether there is still a gazebo in the proposal. Ms. Laflamme explained that HEB

has subcontracted an architectural company who may or may not incorporate a gazebo into the plans. Other aspects of the project were discussed by the group, including potential in-ground lighting instead of the typical bollard style lights.

Ms. Laflamme notified the Board that North Country Growers is still working on finalizing their financing. They were granted an extension on the purchase agreement to the first quarter of 2018.

Mr. Estrella asked when the welcome sign is going to be installed. Ms. Laflamme explained that we most likely won't see progress until June or July.

Other – No one spoke

Public Comments – No one spoke

Member Comments

Mr. McCue noted that it is not uncommon for the financing of a project as large and involved as the North Country Growers greenhouse to take more time than anticipated.

Planner Comments – Ms. Laflamme stated that the next meeting of the Planning Board will be Tuesday, Jan 9 because the first Monday of the month falls on New Year's Day. Consequently, City Council meets on Tuesday January 2.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Ms. Remillard moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Levesque and the motion carried. The meeting ended at 8:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Bryan Chevarie