

STATE OF THE CITY OF BERLIN

JANUARY 2017

It has been a few months since I last wrote a public report. Though we face some very serious challenges, overall the City of Berlin is doing well. The large road project we undertook last year on Hutchins Street really came out quite well. Because financing for the project was almost all federal money passed through the NH DOT, we had to conform to strict guidelines set forth by the state, including competitive bidding and acceptance of final design. There is hope we can take the sharp corner out of the Bridge Street intersection in the very near future, as well as looking at street lighting that Councilor Theberge has strongly advocated for.

The Route 16 project is approximately 50 percent complete, but already it is a real treat to drive on. Once complete, sometime mid to late summer, Berlin's main arteries will all have been completely reconstructed. With the announcement that Berlin received two grants totaling over \$900,000 for the Riverwalk project, upper Main Street will be something for all of us to be very proud of. The city's investment in Heritage Park is starting to pay dividends well beyond what the City Council had hoped for, and let's not forget the awesome work of the Androscoggin Valley Chamber of Commerce. They are doing exactly what they said they were going to do and in just this short time, the park looks great. Thank you Paula and all the folks at the chamber. Where would our economy be without you!!!

Our economy here in the Berlin area continues to be uneven. There continues to be really great success stories, (Capone Iron Corp., Gorham Paper and Tissue, Burgess Biopower) that are offset by the continued struggles in the retail segment. Remember, it is vital that we all shop locally. Our shopkeepers are the ones who support our various community activities and they live work and play here and are our neighbors.

There are new efforts abound by environmental groups and others to rein in and in some cases, reverse the progress we've made in ATV recreation. In the Nash Stream area, some people are trying to stop ATV usage. Many are from out of state who don't want to share the great outdoors with the rest of us. The ATV community needs to stand up and wake up to the new realities. We all need to be respectful when using ATVs on trails and on streets and highways, but make no mistake, it's time to organize. Absent of a strong lobbying organization to speak

on ATV's behalf, the activity will be severely curtailed.

This year's budget process will prove to be a bear. The NH Retirement System has sharply raised rates this year at the very same time the state is also curtailing aid to local education.

The total impact across the city this fiscal year will be approximately \$400,000, just to keep even. These are unsustainable. I am working with a consortium of communities across the state to reverse cuts to schools and the efforts are really too early to report. That is the primary reason the City Council could not muster the 2/3 majority needed to inject new money into the Berlin Visiting Nurses Program. Although I did not agree, I respect the will of the City Council and we must work together to transition folks to other services who do this for a business. Medicare billing is difficult and with the uncertainty that abounds from Washington, now is not the time to have a divided City Council. Collectively, along with the expert advise from City Manager Jim Wheeler, we will work through these difficult issues.

With the NH Public Utilities Commission pushing the Smith Hydro divestiture process this year, we will soon know where we stand. Will we own and operate Smith along with other communities assets? There is great interest in the hydro portion of Eversource's portfolio but lukewarm interest in the other generation assets. Berlin is positioning itself to deal with all possibilities. One area of Eversource's efforts that Berlin is 100% behind is in Northern Pass transmission. It is estimated that Berlin will see immediate tax relief to the tune of \$250,000 to \$350,000 annually in the first 5 years, or roughly equal to what this year's downward cost shift to us from the state is. There will be hundreds of jobs created during construction with as much impact to us locally as was the Burgess Biopower and Federal Prison jobs. Remember Berlin/Gorham's restaurants and inns then? This will be a gift that will keep giving long past completion.

Finally, my family and I have lost two very important people in our lives recently. Tony Urban, who passed away late December, was Berlin's Rock of Gibraltar. His love of student athletes was second only to wife Carolyn and daughter Pam and brother Rudy. Tony was a mentor of mine and was a brutally honest advisor. The other was my dear sister-in-law Diane Horne who passed away last week. Diane was a kind hearted person who loved life and her family very much. She was a mother away from home to many kids who attended Brown School and made sure those kids got a fair shake. My wife Brenda and Diane were very close, our family has been left with a huge void and she will be sorely missed by husband Mike and sons Ant and Colby. May both rest in peace.

Paul Grenier, Mayor