

CITY OF BERLIN
New Hampshire

Minutes of Council Work Session of 3/23/2026
City Council Chambers
6:30 pm

Members:

Mayor Cone
Councilor Valerino
Councilor Morency
Councilor Korzen
Councilor Higbee
Councilor Plourde

City Staff:

Phillip Warren, Jr, City Manager (via Zoom)
Holly Larsen, Finance Director/Tax Collector
Shelli Fortin, City Clerk

Public: Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun

Christian Judson
Paul Guerin
Andre Bergeron
Other members of the public

At 6:35 p.m. Mayor Cone opened the meeting.

Recreation Department

City Manager Warren discussed the Recreation budget, noting that the Recreation Director position has not been filled. Alex Terry has been filling in as the Director in the meantime.

Mr. Warren noted that the newly formed Recreation Commission has been a great help. They are currently working to identify programs offered at the Recreation Center that are not offered somewhere else, to avoid duplication, and have found that programs are not as redundant as they thought. The after-school program offered by the school is geared toward younger children, and they are hoping to establish a base age of 4th or 5th grade for open gym at the rec center. The summer program offered by the school is five weeks long, and the rec program is for the whole summer. They are looking to split the group this summer into those 4th-5th grade and younger, and those 6th grade and older. They have discussed charging \$15 per week for the summer program to help offset the cost of labor and administration. Financial assistance will still be available for those unable to pay with a more formalized application. They have discussed asking those requiring financial assistance for a trade-off, such as chaperoning programs when needed. Mr. Warren noted that many of the programs offered through the Recreation

Department are run by others, such as the soccer program run by Tony Valliere, and instructional hockey by Berlin Youth Hockey.

In answer to a question from the Council, Mr. Warren advised that the salary currently offered for the Recreation Director position is not in the range of what other communities pay, which is \$60,000 or more.

Mayor Cone asked about help for the summer program, and suggested recruiting from the Early Childhood program at WMCC. Mr. Warren advised that he is planning to advertise at the college for help, along with the High School.

Councilor Higbee mentioned the importance of publicizing what is available for [programs for children in the community. Mr. Warren advised that the website does have the ability to send notifications to those who sign up for information, and the Recreation Commission is looking into this. Mayor Cone noted that the school is helpful with sending home flyers advertising available programs. Councilor Korzen suggested a universal calendar on the website including events for children.

In reviewing capital improvement items, Mr. Warren advised that the camera system still does not have a hard drive. Councilor Morency asked about insulation, and Mr. Warren advised that the ceiling tiles do help with this.

Street Lighting

Mr. Warren noted that the budget for street lighting is for the cost of electricity, as they have not added any additional lighting. There is \$10,000 budgeted for maintenance, which includes traffic lights.

Traffic lights at Hutchins Street and the Cleveland Bridge intersections were discussed, and Mr. Warren advised the issues at these intersections are caused by the wiring. When asked about grant money, Mr. Warren advised that there is no money available.

The solar lights on Hutchins Street to the Cleveland bridge were discussed. Mr. Warren advised these will have to be installed on the street side, to avoid the shade of the trees.

Public Works

City Manager Warren presented the Public Works budget, and reviewed staffing, noting that there are 26 staff employees, 3 supervisors, and an assistant director. There are currently 4 open positions, which consist of one mechanic, two laborers, and one sewer crew position.

Mr. Warren reviewed the amount of sand and salt used this year and noted that he has authorized five more loads of salt for this season. Mr. Warren advised that salt and sand are applied based on a chart which is based on the type of precipitation and the temperature. The Clear Roads research program for ice and snow maintenance provides guidelines to use less material and

provide better application. The new 10-wheeler that they are buying with the grant will have a segmented plow blade and a side dump spreader.

Mr. Warren advised that they are looking at picking up solid waste just three days per week, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. This would allow for additional laborers on both Monday and Friday, and would reduce the number of issues with holidays. Mr. Warren noted that there is too much garbage to pick up for just one truck, but they could use two trucks for the three days. Recycling would be the same bi-weekly schedule on the same three days. This will also save on the number of ads placed for holiday garbage pick-up reminders, and the number of calls received at the office about pick-up on holiday weeks.

Councilor Morency asked about the mechanic positions, and was advised they have three heavy equipment mechanics and one for smaller equipment and vehicles. They are responsible for all the vehicles in the City, including the airport. They currently only have two heavy equipment mechanics, which does not allow them to be proactive with maintenance.

When asked about the general maintenance and solid waste budgets, and the increases and decreases, Mr. Warren noted that employees are paid based on what work they do for the day. They will be working harder to be sure the work is applied to the correct budgets.

The issue of recycling was discussed, and it was noted that many households are not doing this. Education and enforcement would be needed, but this would require another position. Recycling is a benefit to the environment, as well as cost savings to the City by reducing tipping fees.

Mr. Warren explained that the uptick in longevity is due to experience, as staff increase years of service, and is based on information from the payroll system. The increase in clothing allowance is based on union negotiations and open positions.

The Council discussed the cost of solid waste and noted that they have tried to address this in the past with discussions about a pay-as-you-throw system. Council members noted that pay-as-you-throw may provide savings, however trash would be dumped in other places such as Jericho or Success Pond Road to avoid charges, which would cost the City more in the long run.

Mr. Warren reviewed the Capital Improvement budget. There is \$150,000 budgeted for the East Milan Road landfill, which will be based on financing for five years. The match for the 10-wheeler grant will come out of the Public Works Equipment budget. New mowers are needed for Parks Equipment, as the ones they have are old. Money has also been budgeted for the crack seal machine, as the cold patch does not last for potholes. Mr. Warren advised that the cost to rent the crack sealing machine is not high, as the majority of the cost is in the materials needed.

Mayor Cone also requested that \$500,000 be included for pavement management. Mr. Warren advised that the road from the Cleveland Bridge to the Gorham town line will cost about \$532,000, and noted that they will need to use a mix suitable for large trucks at the intersection.

Sewer

City Manager Warren advised that there is no expansion of services for the Pollution Control facility, however items needed are big and expensive. They have a well-defined Capital Improvement Plan, which has been funded on a regular basis. The costs of operating the plant have increased.

Mr. Warren reviewed the history of the sewer system and the plans for improvements, noting the need to replace the pipe across the river that was damaged in the storm. They have also been working to reduce inflow and infiltration from storm drains.

Mr. Warren noted that the biggest item to watch for the future will be PFA's, as they are not an issue now, but as standards change may be in the future. There are limited ways to treat this problem.

Councilor Korzen asked about NHRS contributions and was advised that this cost is in addition to what employees pay.

Other

Councilor Korzen asked about the Biomass payment in lieu of taxes, which was paid late this year. This revenue will be factored in this year.

Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Korzen, seconded by Councilor Plourde, the meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by Shelli Fortin

Note: Minutes are unofficial until they have been accepted by the Council by motion.