

City Council Work Session
March 16, 2026

Present were: Mayor Cone, Councilors Korzen, Morency, Valerino, Higbee and Plourde. Councilors Qualls, Theberge and Lavertu were absent.

Others present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Deputy Chief of Police Nathan Roy, School Board Vice-Chair Eamon Kelley, Planning Board Chair Tom McCue, Lisa Connell, Berlin Sun and Members of the Public.

Mayor Cone opened the meeting at 6:31 p.m. The meeting was moved to the auditorium due to the large crowd. Mayor Cone reminded the public that the audio is not the best in the room and to please speak loudly and clearly during public comments.

Budget for Administration/Funds/IT

City Manager Warren advised that the sewer funds will be reviewed with the Public Works budget. Other funds include BIDPA and the Airport. In reviewing the administration budget, Mr. Warren invited the council to ask questions as this budget is a status quo budget with two exceptions including the new assistant comptroller position in the finance department. Councilor Korzen questioned the high increase in health insurance. Mr. Warren responded that some employees are on a legacy plan that saw a modest increase. Councilor Korzen discussed the health insurance buyout amounts and stated that moving forward, going through other departments, he would like to have a conversation about the significant amounts. Mr. Warren advised that the buyout amounts are the result of collective bargaining. Councilor Korzen asked about the increase in assessing. Mr. Warren advised the increase is for the statistical revaluation the council agreed to do. Councilor Morency asked about the fuel rates. Mr. Warren advised the bids are due March 18th and we've already received notice from a vendor that they will not be bidding because of the uncertainty in oil prices. His expectation is that if unreasonable bids are received, he will exercise the section of our bid that says we can refuse to accept any and all bids if this is in the City's best interest and take the wait and see approach.

Mr. Warren said that the amounts in the IT budget are to pay for the existing software we have and to replace end-of-life equipment. There's no new added equipment. The amounts also include the 3rd party provider that manage our IT services.

Mr. Warren reviewed the airport budget and advised that at this point, the airport is not making enough revenue to be completely self-sufficient. There's a line item called general fund revenue in the amount of \$116,001. The budget needs to be supplemented by that amount. Councilor Korzen asked if we are mandated to have an airport. Mr. Warren responded we have the Berlin Airport Authority and yes, we are mandated fiscally as we've received a lot of grants over the years to enhance the airport. He advised that the BAA has signed a lease agreement with the National Guard and part of the agreement is that they will get Jet A fuel from the airport which will help financially.

Councilor Higbee reviewed the BIDPA budget advising it only increased by \$22,000 which is for marketing. He reminded everyone that this is an enterprise fund and doesn't affect the tax rate.

Traffic Pattern for Raise Grant

Mayor Cone reminded the public that the work session is only for the Council to discuss. The public will have the opportunity to speak during the regular meeting under public comments. His plan tonight is to entertain a motion to suspend the rules which will allow to bring the traffic pattern as new business. Mr. Warren asked that the Council make a final vote this evening as Stantec has already started the process and they need direction. Councilor Higbee moved to suspend the Council rules to allow reconsideration of the traffic pattern. Councilor Valerino seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor by roll call vote.

Abatement Recommendations

Mr. Warren discussed the following abatement recommendations received from Ms. Monica Hurley, Assessing Agent:

747 Kent Street (Map 133 Lot 081) Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2025 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$189,800 to \$154,700, as the inspector noted the property is in need of major updates and the overall condition should be listed as “poor” rather than “fair”. Councilor Morency moved to approve the property abatement as presented. Councilor Higbee seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

873 Fifth Avenue (Map109 Lot 032) Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2025 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$133,700 to \$105,100, as the inspector noted the property is in need of major updates and the overall condition should be listed as “fair” rather than “good”. Councilor Valerino moved to approve the property abatement as presented. Councilor Higbee seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

626 Cheshire Street (Map130 Lot 029) Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2025 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$18,600 to \$16,500, as the inspector noted the new shed was not started yet and the ‘paving-conc’ was in poor condition. Councilor Korzen moved to approve the property abatement as presented. Councilor Valerino seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

25 Wentworth Avenue (Map114 Lot 027) Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2025 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$121,000 to \$84,300 as the inspector noted the property was in need of major updates and the overall condition should be listed as “fair” rather than “very good”. Councilor Valerino moved to approve the property abatement as presented. Councilor Korzen seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

Timber Tax Warrant

Mr. Warren presented a timber yield tax levy for Lucien and Muriel Blais (Tax Map & Lot: 123-6 & 406-29) in the amount of \$17.50. Councilor Morency moved to approve the timber tax warrant as presented. Councilor Higbee seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

Other

Mr. Warren distributed documents to Council he received from White Horse Recovery. He advised that Matt Plache, Executive Director at White Horse Recovery contacted him and wanted to know if the City Council would be in favor of entertaining a proposal where the facility you see on the documents would be built on the property located at 60 Pleasant Street which is owned by the City through tax deeding. It would be a 16-bed recovery center. He’s soliciting funds from various sources, one of them being the Federal Government. If funding is successful, he is asking if the City Council would entertain conveying the tax deeded land at low of no fee and if the Council would support a proposal like this. Mr. Plache is looking for a support letter from the city. Mayor Cone stated he would like more information and the public’s input. Councilor Korzen asked how long as the City owned the property and if we potentially see someone purchasing it as that would get it on the tax roll instead of a non-profit. Mr. Warren advised from an ownership standpoint; the City took the property for nonpayment of taxes through tax deeding in 2022. He commented he is not aware of any inquiries made about this property. That building is in extremely poor shape; it is basically a teardown. Councilor Morency commented this would be a good fit for White Horse Recovery and he would like to get the public’s input. Mr. Warren suggested adding this item to a future agenda. It could be added to the work session and receive public comments during the regular meeting that evening. Mayor Cone agreed.

At 7:11 p.m., there being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Cone moved on to the Regular Meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,
Danielle Rioux
Executive Assistant

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

CITY COUNCIL MEETING – Monday, March 16, 2026

Regular Meeting

Mayor Cone called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:11 pm.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

b. Roll Call

Present: Mayor Cone, Councilors Higbee, Plourde, Morency, Valerino and Korzen.

Absent: Councilor Qualls, Theberge and Lavertu.

Also present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Deputy Chief of Police Nathan Roy, School Board Vice-Chair Eamon Kelley, Planning Board Chair Tom McCue, Lisa Osgood, Lisa Vien, Paul Guerin, Bernie Martel, Seth Quarrier, Fr. Kyle Stanton, Dennis Murphy, Richard Poulin, Brandon Bedard, Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun and other members of the public.

c. Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Valerino, to accept the minutes of the March 2, 2026, Regular Meeting and Work Session and the March 9, 2026 Budget Work Session. So moved, the motion passed.

Disbursements:

Disbursement Summary Draft #2005 with a start date of 03/03/2026 and an end date of 03/16/2026 for a total cash disbursement of \$1,349,613.26. Councilor Morency moved, with a second by Councilor Valerino, to accept the disbursement summary and pay all bills as recommended by the Committee on Accounts/Claims. So moved, the motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Lise Osgood, of 532 Rockingham Street, stated she loves the idea of the grant but is not in favor of the 2-way traffic. She finds it more relaxing driving one-way and it offers more parking. She stated the intersections with a 2-way will be crazy. She gave examples of different intersections it would affect and the confusion it would create. She commented 2-way traffic will also create issues with deliveries.

Lisa Vien, owner of Hair Improvements, 340 Main Street, asked why everybody that's affected as far as business owners were not informed and allowed to vote as it affects all of them directly.

Paul Guerin, of 583 Burgess Street, stated he lives in this City for a couple of reasons the first one being he doesn't like traffic. Placing more traffic lights will create more issues as the City can't afford to fix the existing traffic lights. He discussed an issue he experienced at the 12th Street bridge traffic light. He has concerns with parking and is not in favor of the 2-way traffic pattern. He doesn't think a 2-way will generate more business on Main and Pleasant Street.

Bernie Martel, of 664 Fifth Avenue, commented there haven't been any plans shown showing the traffic patterns and how this will all work. Mayor Cone commented there's been multiple Planning Board meetings where the engineers were present with plans being shown. Planning Board Chair Tom McCue stated there were three or four public sessions with Stantec, the engineer for this project. These public sessions were not part of the Planning Board. One of the public sessions was part of the Planning Board meeting as a forum. There were many opportunities to attend. Mr. Martel commented that most of the people present this evening didn't find out about this till it came out in the newspaper.

Seth Quarrier, of 314 Burgess Street, stated he is generally opposed to the 2-way traffic pattern. It is hard enough for pedestrians to cross the streets as you currently have to look in one direction and asking everybody to look in two directions will make it harder. He suggested closing Main Street to traffic and allowing pedestrians only as done in other cities.

Fr. Kyle Stanton, of 162 Madison Avenue, commented he reviewed the plans. He is concerned about losing parking where Main and Pleasant Street meet in front of the church as this is a busy area daily and there is already limited parking. The 2-way traffic pattern proposed would make it very complicated for funeral processions, weddings and

more. Police assistance to direct traffic would be required for such events. He commented that the current one-way traffic pattern flow is relaxing and comforting and works well.

City Manager Warren suggested that since the meeting attendees seem to be united in their concerns regarding the 2-way traffic plan that it may be helpful to poll the crowd, he then asked who was in favor of 2-way traffic and one person raised their hand. He then asked who was in favor of one-way traffic and the majority of the people in the room raised their hand. Warren then stated that, in his past position as a moderator, this would be the point where he would recommend to “call the question” and move to the motion, since speakers were united in their displeasure with the 2-way plan.

Tom McCue thanked Councilor Morency in his function as State Representative and the other members of the Coos County Delegation who successfully killed HB1721 which would have done away with the renewable energy portfolio standards. It would have been a crippling bill not only for the Burgess Biomass but for heating plants such as at Androscoggin Valley Hospital, Littleton Regional Hospital and White Mountains Regional High School.

Dennis Murphy, of 1859 Hutchins Street, commented he is a lifelong resident of Berlin and discussed his 49 years' experience in retail. He reminisced about Berlin's busy downtown and commented that the biggest commodity that Berlin had was its parking on Main Street and its vitality. By taking away that one commodity will destroy retailers. He feels that the public needs to be informed of what Stantec's plans are exactly. Losing all those parking spaces doesn't make any sense. He is opposed to 2-way traffic on both Main and Pleasant Street. Has a scout leader for 35 years, one of the activities he does with the scouts is place American flags on Main Street. When the proposal for the plans come out, we have to remember that the sidewalks should still maintain the flagpole holes.

Richard Poulin, owner of 95 Main Street, stated he held a meeting for business owners, and the vote was unanimous to keep it a one-way traffic pattern. He feels business owners weren't notified properly. Posting in the Daily Sun and the Website is equivalent of his psychic hotline. He doesn't know anybody here that knows the entire plan. He gave an example of when someone requests a variance, letters are sent to all abutters as it affects them. Business owners didn't get such notifications. He suggested setting up a meeting with the merchants to review plans and get their input. There are many opportunities that no one knows. The Council needs to hear people.

Brandon Bedard, of 571 Third Avenue, commented that a lot of parents and young families doing quick errands don't have time to walk from two parking lots over with their young children to run in to get a card at Hallmark or run into Maureen's to get a gift card. By removing parking, it greatly increases traffic which is more dangerous for families and children.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

1. Council Committee Reports

There were no Council Committee Reports.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Traffic Pattern for RAISE Grant (renew)

Mayor Cone thanked the public for attending as it's motivating and awesome to see the power the public has and always had to come together and be as one. That is what makes these decisions right and brings the City forward. Councilor Korzen moved to go back to one-way traffic for Main and Pleasant Streets. City Manager Warren offered an amendment to the motion language. The motion should state that we instruct our engineers to design a one-way traffic pattern for Main and Pleasant Streets. Councilor Korzen moved to amend his motion to include the City Manager's suggested language. Councilor Korzen suggested that the Council takes this as a learning moment and moving forward to be more open to other things and maybe not have all the answers and then take some time not to rush and ask questions and reach out to those affected. Councilor Higbee commented there were opportunities for folks to get involved and look at the drawings, the ideas, suggestions and give their input. It was advertised multiple ways. He did vote in favor of the 2-way traffic pattern as he did listen to the experts which advised that to resolve the retail situation, a 2-way street would be beneficial as it creates more traffic. They enforced that this would be better for the merchants. He commented that the Councilors who voted in favor of the 2-way traffic pattern had reasons for doing so. They were advised it would be good for the downtown and wanted what was best for Berlin. He wants this project to be a good thing for the City of Berlin as it will benefit future generations. He is delighted that people are

happy, and the goal is to improve the City. Councilor Morency reminded everyone that when items like this come up there are meetings scheduled which are advertised a month to a month and a half prior in the newspaper and on the City's website. He invited everyone to visit the City's website. Councilor Valerino seconded the motion. So moved, the motion carried unanimously by roll call vote.

2. City Manager's Report

1. Attached is the February 2026 Real Estate Transfer Report.
2. Attached is the February 2026 EMS activity report.
3. We have been working to ensure that storm drains are clear in anticipation of rainstorms and the spring thaw. In addition, potholes that have occurred during the winter are being addressed.
4. There is a lot of trash and animal waste (both dogs and waterfowl) on city parks. This is hidden by the snow. It is unfortunate but staff is addressing it as time permits.
5. The traffic light at the East Mason – Hutchins Street intersection is going to need the underground wiring replaced in the near future, this is what is causing the intermittent issues as of late. A quote has been requested.
6. It appears that enforcement of solid waste and junk, unregistered vehicles will need to be reinstated – complaints are coming in on both.
7. Many of the unregistered and inoperable vehicles that have been parked at the Salvation Army lot are being removed.

Councilor Valerino moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to accept the City Manager's Report and place it on file. So moved, the motion passed.

3. Mayor's Report

- a. Letter from Donna Godin re: Downtown Traffic Pattern

Dear Mayor Cone and City Council Members:

I was born and raised in Berlin. I lived in Berlin until 1998 when I moved to Gorham. My parents are still in Berlin. I love and care about the well-being of my home town.

I write to you today to let you know that I completely oppose the two-way Main and Pleasant Streets proposal. I understand that the grant can only be used for downtown revitalization and that there are deadlines, but, it's important that this project is done right the first time. I'm not opposed to change and beautification, but I am opposed to greater congestion, less parking, less accommodations for the elderly and disabled, less safety, and less business to Main Street stores, as through traffic will bypass Main Street. Main Street is barely wide enough for three lanes of cars. A two-way street will take away half of the parking that currently exists on Main Street. There is currently not enough parking on Main Street as it is.

I've heard from some long-time Main Street business owners, like Maureen Patry and Richard Poulin, and they are against the two-way streets. If anyone knows best, it's them. We owe it to our business owners who have given their time, money and dedication to downtown Berlin for decades to listen to them and their concerns.

Main Street works just the way it is. Plenty of parking on both sides of Main Street. Oneway traffic makes it more safe with more open space. If it's not broken, then why change it? If you research why Berlin changed from two-way to one-way streets back in the 1950's, it's because there was too much congestion with two-way. Safety risks included head-on collisions, difficult left turns, challenges for pedestrians crossing or stepping out from parked cars. Two-way traffic created bottlenecks in a narrow downtown grid, especially with delivery trucks and large vehicles. Snow removal and snow berms created issues.

Please choose to revote and vote to stay with one-way streets. I've seen only a few people on social media in support of two-way streets and many people against them. Let's make what we have and what currently works even better and more beautiful. I appreciate your time in reading my letter and your consideration.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Donna L. Godin

b. Letter from Cam Bradshaw re: Downtown Traffic Pattern

Subject: Two way traffic on main and pleasant streets is problematic

I am an enthusiastic and experienced pedestrian; I do most of my errands in Berlin on foot and I also walk for the pure pleasure of it. Berlin is a great city for walking, with plenty of views and quiet streets. I believe that converting the downtown streets to two way traffic will be less safe for pedestrians and for motorists. Consider these four areas, although there are many more problems.

The intersection of Main and High is already tight, requiring motorists to pull out far into traffic to see around the bowling alley. As long as I am on the south side of High I can cross Main safely as long as I make sure there is no traffic heading north. With two way traffic I will have to watch for cars heading north and south on Main and turning right from High. This is a busy pedestrian area with the Library, St. Barnabas and the bowling alley.

The intersection of York and Pleasant is a natural place to cross if you're coming from the Avenues or the schools neighborhoods. As long as I am south of York I can cross relatively safely to the pedestrian path in Bickford Place. The two way proposal envisions that path being converted into a street, offset from York. That gives me many, many chances of being hit by a car while trying to cross with cars entering from York, the new street, the drugstore parking lots, as well as the through traffic.

The intersection of 110 and Pleasant is a place I already avoid crossing. There are five businesses that generate traffic to a busy intersection. It is tricky to walk south from here on either side of Pleasant due to cars entering and leaving from Dunkin and Carons. Two way traffic will make it even harder for pedestrians to navigate, and for motorists to enter and leave. I think there will be traffic jams here.

Market Place Shopping Center has a busy parking lot. It can be a bit of a bottleneck already with traffic entering and leaving. Having cars pulling in and out from both directions will only add to the confusion. Folks walking to the store will have to be extra vigilant. And customers who prefer to park street side will have to cross two lanes.

The plans add some stoplights to control the more complicated traffic patterns, but why add infrastructure that can be avoided by keeping one way streets? And on Mainstreet there would be no need for bump outs if it is kept one way. It is quite to safe to cross now, especially at Bickford Place. A straight curb is easier to plow and sweep.

It's easy to get carried away thinking this is free money but I understand there is a small match. Save our money. The simplest solution is often the best. Engineers and consultants prefer fancier solutions because they are more fun and more lucrative. We just need a city that works for us.

Many other good reasons not to go two way have been expressed by others. No one I have talked to is in favor of this plan.

I would also say go easy on the landscaping. It takes a lot of effort and expertise to keep perennial garden beds looking good. A few strategic planters filled with annuals, plus some trees is an easier lift.

Thank you for reading.

Cam Bradshaw
813 6th ave

Councilor Korzen moved, with a second by Councilor Valerino, to accept the Mayor's Report and place it on file. So moved, the motion passed.

4. Public Comments

Janet Tremblay, of 15 Countryside Avenue, asked how much the RAISE grant project is going to cost. Mr. Warren responded \$19,500,000. She questioned the tax rate going up \$0.57. Mayor Cone stated the tax rate has not been set yet. Mr. Warren commented it should be set in May.

Tom McCue, of 27 Cambridge Street, thanked the Mayor and Council for their vote. He commented that it was previously mentioned that the 2-way traffic pattern could be changed back to one-way, but no one asked how much that would cost. He commented that all the folks that were saying they didn't know this was coming, which was unfortunate. It seems to him that a lot of folks knew about the snowmelt component of this same project. There were a lot of discussions about it.

Ray St Onge, of 351 First Avenue, questioned when the revaluation is happening. Mr. Warren responded this year starting in July. He asked if a statistical revaluation is a physical revaluation or just a percentage of your property. Mr. Warren responded it will be a statistical revaluation and explained the process.

Eamon Kelley, of 396 Grafton Street, mentioned Stantec presented different traffic pattern designs, but there's still no plans presented showing the one-way traffic pattern on Main and Pleasant streets. Mr. Warren stated that Stantec needs the initial decision so they can begin the design process. The design documents will be made available on the City's website.

Kelly Poulin, owner of Hallmark, 107 Main Street, commented she didn't know so many people were interested in Main Street and is very thankful. She helped with the grant writing process and the figures came from her business when people couldn't access her store during a snowstorm. With that said, they had to show there was economic hardship when it snowed. She suggested that moving forward a little more communication with the businesses would be good. Some of these business owners were really in an uproar about parking on Main Street, when they are the ones parking on Main Street. As business owners, we need to provide active parking because it financially hurts our businesses.

Donna Godin, of Gorham, suggested the City increase its social media presence. She viewed the City of Berlin Facebook page and stated the last posting was from March 1, 2023. She suggested posting agendas and minutes which might increase public participation.

5. Council Comments

Councilor Korzen commented he heard comments about the snowmelt project and the cancelation of it. Did the government cancel it or did we not have enough money to do the whole project. There's a bit of confusion as far as why the snowmelt was removed. Mr. Warren commented there was no confusion in the message delivered. The government removed it. The City was instructed by US DOT that the snowmelt portion had to be removed and were holding us harmless and allowing us to expend all of those funds towards the other parts of the project. Councilor Korzen commented that the revaluation will likely result in increased values which will lower the tax rate, but it doesn't mean it's free for all in getting more money. He commented that, as a Council, they need to make sure they are spending wisely, doing things effectively and being efficient with what they are spending. Realistically, in the past 10-15 years, our city has been shrinking, we are losing businesses, losing revenues, the Biomass bankruptcy. There are a lot of issues. As we grow, we can have conversations about expanding and making things better. We've had some successes. He believes that taking over EMS will be an overall good thing. They are consistent in bringing in revenue.

6. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Higbee, seconded by Councilor Valerino, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:08 pm. So moved, the motion carried.

A True Record, Attest:

Danielle Rioux
Executive Assistant

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