

**City Council Work Session  
February 17, 2026**

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

Others present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Dir. Of Strat. Initiatives and Asst. City Mgr. Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Library Director Ann Brungot, Chief of Police Jeff Lemoine, Police Commission Chair Diana Berthiaume, SAU3 District Educational Services Administrator Tammy Fauteux, Lisa Connell, Berlin Sun and Members of the Public.

Mayor Cone opened the meeting at 6:31 p.m.

**Downtown Rehabilitation Traffic Configuration**

Mayor Cone stated there will be a discussion on the downtown rehabilitation traffic configuration during this work session and suggested adding it as an item to the regular meeting after public comments in order to get the public's input before making any decisions. Councilor Korzen moved to add item 2A to the regular meeting under new business. Councilor Higbee seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

Councilor Korzen moved to add an item to the work session to discuss the reconciliation process. Councilor Theberge seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

Mr. Warren presented the two plans for the downtown rehabilitation traffic configuration which include Main and Pleasant Street, being 2-way traffic or Main and Pleasant Street being one-way traffic. This was discussed at length at a recent Planning Board meeting and at this point, we are looking for direction from the Council as funds need to be committed and plans drawn by Fall of this year. Ms. Laflamme discussed the consultant's findings and different options of both plans. A discussion was had on the merits of both options.

**Proposed Amendment to the City of Berlin Charter**

Councilor Korzen stated at the last work session there were two conversations. One about making an amendment to the Charter to implement a tax cap and the other was about establishing a Charter Commission. He commented he's done some research and there's a difference between amendment and a change to the Charter that changes our form of government. He stated that according to what he's reading from the RSA versus the Charter, he believes amendments can be made without commissioning a Charter Commission and it would still come back to the voters. An amendment could be made that way and that is according to RSA-49B. Definition of a revision versus an amendment.

Mr. Warren commented that section 5 of our Charter spells out three options. He believes that putting a tax cap in would fall under this section. He would have to consult with legal counsel for clarification. Mr. Warren commented he would obtain clarification from legal counsel and hopefully have the information at the next meeting. Councilor Morency commented that if the real need or want of this is for a tax cap, then the Council could look at the upcoming budget, look at that tax cap, see where that brings us and inform the public what exactly we're losing, what we're gaining and where the tax rate will be so they know what they're getting. This could be done without a tax cap. This can be done meanwhile, and we would know where we stand when it passes and the public would be more educated when they're voting.

### **Abatement Recommendations**

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

**118 Mt Forist Street (Map 111 Lot 173)** Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2025 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$151,800 to \$85,100, as the inspector noted the interior requires a complete renovation. There is no plumbing or heating available and the sewer is broken. Councilor Morency moved to approve the property abatement as presented. Councilor Higbee seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

**667 Lancaster Street (Map129 Lot 100)** Ms. Hurley recommends approving the abatement application for the 2025 tax year and reducing the assessment from \$166,600 to \$165,000, due to the detached garage being found to be in fair to poor condition. Councilor Korzen moved to approve the property abatement as presented. Councilor Higbee seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

### **Reconciliation Process**

Councilor Korzen commented there was a discussion a couple weeks ago about our audits being behind due to having to catch up on reconciliation. These late audits are also delaying our annual reports as the audit is included in it. Mr. Warren stated that the audits have already been partially completed. This is one item holding them up as well as the work program for our auditor. He reminded Council of past discussion where he stressed the need for this position in Finance. This is what this person would do. It will be proposed in the budget presentation to fund this position and also to bring a contractor in short term to assist in the reconciliation process. The finance dept. is short-staffed and the person that should be doing this has such a workload that they cannot. An assistant finance director position is needed, which reconciliation will be their primary duty.

At 7:21 p.m., there being no further business in Work Session, Mayor Cone recessed before moving 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 – Tuesday, February 17, 2026**

### **Regular Meeting**

Mayor Cone called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:28 pm.

#### **a. Pledge of Allegiance**

#### **b. Roll Call**

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

Absent: Councilor Valerino

Also present: City Manager Phillip L. Warren Jr., Dir. Of Strat. Initiatives and Asst. City Mgr. Pamela Laflamme, City Clerk Shelli Fortin, Finance Director Holly Larsen, Chief of Police Jeff Lemoine, Police Commissioners Lisa Arguin and Diana Berthiaume, Library Director Ann Brungot, Nathan Richard, Chris Poirier, Paul Grenier, Roland Berthiaume, Gina Welch, Jamie Welch, Paul Guerin, Theodore Bosen, Thomas McCue, Jeffrey Quackenbush, Lisa Connell, Berlin Daily Sun and other members of the public.

**c.** Councilor Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Korzen, to accept the minutes of the February 2, 2026, Regular Meeting and Work Session. So moved, the motion passed.

#### **Disbursements:**

Disbursement Summary Draft #2003 with a start date of 02/03/2026 and an end date of 02/17/2026 for a total cash disbursement of \$1,145,598.44. Councilor Theberge moved, with a second by Councilor Qualls, to accept the disbursement summary and pay all bills as recommended by the Committee on Accounts/Claims. So moved, the motion passed.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Jamie Welch, of 102 Church Street, responded to comments made by a Councilor at the last meeting, which were that people were opposed to the tax cap because they wanted to protect their jobs. Mr. Welch stated that he was the only teacher that spoke at that meeting, and clarified that he is concerned about student opportunities. Mr. Welch advised that Manchester is currently facing issues due to their tax cap, noting that they may have to lose between 40 and 100 positions to meet the 3% cap. These cuts will affect everything from staffing, to busing, programs, and student services. Mr. Welch noted that the current budget increases are mainly due to health insurance costs and decreased state funding. Mr. Welch stated that a tax cap may work in some communities, however Berlin is similar to Franklin or Manchester, and it would not be sustainable in a community like this. Mr. Welch stated that if the Council wants to cut, that is their prerogative, however we also need to realize we are the people to protect student opportunity. Mr. Welch stated that a tax cap would not be a good direction for the City, as even if bills were cut by 20%, they would be paying 80% for nothing.

Jeffrey Quackenbush, of 167 Washington Street, and a Planning Board member, spoke concerning the downtown traffic configuration. Mr. Quackenbush noted that there is limited space on Main Street to accommodate walking, driving, and parking, and stated that the space should be designed with pedestrians in mind. Mr. Quackenbush noted that 2-way traffic prioritizes traffic over parking and pedestrian space, and will create more congestion and safety hazards. Mr. Quackenbush noted that the design may be appropriate for cities with wider streets, but would be a mistake and would harm business in Berlin. Mr. Quackenbush noted that there were three options presented at the Planning Board meeting, which were one-way on both streets, two-way on both streets, and one-way on Main Street with two-way on Pleasant Street. Mr. Quackenbush noted that nobody at the Planning Board meeting spoke in favor of two-way traffic on both streets.

Nathan Richard, of 301 Denmark Street, thanked the Council for approving the Coffee and Prayer road toll event for the Word of God Church. Mr. Richard also shared a prayer.

Chris Poirier, a Trustee at the Eagles, asked about the plan for Green Square and Exchange Street. Pamela Laflamme advised that they may lose one or two parking spaces to get truck traffic through. However, if traffic is two-way, trucks would be routed up Pleasant Street for the truck route. Ms. Laflamme advised the island would still be there, and Exchange Street would be squared off with Main to improve that intersection.

Paul Guerin, of 583 Burgess Street, spoke in opposition to the two-way traffic design, stating it is too narrow and would create a lot of safety issues. Mr. Guerin suggested that the Fire Department would have quicker response times if they were to allow for an emergency vehicle lane down Main Street, with the ability to keep the lights red at the intersection.

Ann Brungot, of 11 Quinn Court, noted concerns about parking at the Berlin Public Library. Ms. Brungot noted that there is limited parking on upper Main Street, and two-way traffic reduces this even more. Ms. Brungot also noted that the handicapped parking space in the current design is north of the Library, and the universal entrance is on the south side of the building, and it would be difficult to access especially in winter.

Ally Lefebvre, of 46 Franklin Street, advised she is a student at Berlin High School and noted that she was disappointed with comments made at the last meeting, which were insulting and inaccurate. Miss Lefebvre stated that she is an A student, an athlete, and a volunteer, who also manages diabetes. Miss Lefebvre noted that school is what a student chooses to make of it, and many fight battles that cannot be seen. Miss Lefebvre advised that BHS produces more than C- students.

Tessa Bump, of 23 Presidential Avenue, noted that she is a student at BHS and found the comments about the C-student body at the last meeting highly offensive. Miss Bump noted that many students at BHS work extremely hard, however students must choose to put the effort in. Miss Bump noted that many students are dedicated and committed, and they are more than just a number on paper.

Paul Grenier, of 492 Champlain Street, noted that he is in favor of keeping the traffic pattern downtown the way it is now. Mr. Grenier noted that two-way traffic on Main Street would concentrate too much on traffic, be disruptive, destroy the business community, and not provide enough parking. Mr. Grenier also spoke in opposition to the tax cap, noting that the most recent Charter Commission was formed in the mid 1990's. Mr. Grenier noted that the proposed Charter recommendations are voted up or down as a whole, and the last time it was voted down. Mr. Grenier noted that a Charter amendment is a more extensive process than what they think it is. Mr. Grenier noted the concerns over rising property taxes, and noted that the County and State also affect the tax rate. Mr. Grenier noted that when he was Mayor, he went to every department after they presented their budget to discuss possible cuts. Mr. Grenier noted the current Open Enrollment legislation will put the school system in a bad situation. Mr. Grenier stated that a tax cap is a lazy man's way of doing the job, and called upon the Council to ask tough questions.

Tom McCue, of 27 Cambridge Street, noted that he is the Chair of the Planning Board and Main Street Program, however is speaking as a resident, taxpayer, and business owner. Mr. McCue stated that what we have now is working, and that he cannot visualize two-way traffic in the downtown area. Mr. McCue stated that we need to focus on the reason for this project, which is needed infrastructure improvements. Mr. McCue noted that this project is a huge benefit for the City, and an opportunity to continue efforts for downtown beautification and improving the appearance of the community. Mr. McCue stated that walkability in the downtown area is important and that people will come if given the opportunity, with events such as Drive in the 50s. Mr. McCue stated that the removal of the Woolworth building will be a big help to provide parking for those with mobility issues, but he would not want to see current green spaces be used for parking. Mr. McCue stated that many visitors heading further north drive through downtown on their way up Route 16 on Friday, and back through on their way home on Sundays. Mr. McCue also spoke in opposition to the tax cap proposal, noting that property tax is an issue especially for those on fixed incomes or younger families. However, Mr. McCue stated it is a short-term reaction to a situation, would handcuff the administration, and is short-sighted and irresponsible.

Theodore Bosen, of 13 Bisson Road, shared his thanks for the capability and professionalism of the first responders who assisted him after an accident 10 days ago. Mr. Bosen also spoke about the reconfiguration of the downtown area, noting that to attract business and build a sense of community, they need to facilitate pedestrian traffic. Mr. Bosen advised that one-way traffic on both streets allows for parking on both sides of the street and ease of access to businesses. Mr. Bosen stated that two-way traffic will reduce pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks, be unsafe, and create more noise and pollution. Mr. Bosen noted that the City should demand that the snowmelt portion of the project be re-instated to avoid a citizen suit for refusing to act, as they are entitled by law to the full grant appropriation. Mr. Bosen stated that the snowmelt project would attract business and pedestrians, and increase the desirability of investment. Mr. Bosen provided a letter to be shared with the Council and added to the record concerning the reconfiguration of downtown traffic to two-way and the tax-cap Charter amendment, which was filed in the Clerk's office and shared with the Council.

Roland Berthiaume, of 46 Franklin Street, advised that every minute does count when responding to an emergency from the Fire Department, and that they do have a button that allows them to change the traffic lights to red if needed. Mr. Berthiaume suggested that this be maintained through the reconstruction. Mr. Berthiaume noted that emergency vehicles going around with one-way traffic is much safer than going against the flow of traffic down Main Street.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

### **1. Council Committee Reports**

There were no Council Committee Reports.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. Resolution 2026-02 Humanities to go Grant Dr. Josh Duclos Library (1<sup>st</sup> read)**

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Korzen, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for March 2, 2026. So moved, the motion carried.

### **2. Resolution 2026-03 Humanities to go Grant Mary Adams Library (1<sup>st</sup> read)**

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Qualls, to table the Resolution and schedule a public hearing for March 2, 2026. So moved, the motion carried.

### **2a. Downtown Traffic Decision**

Mayor Cone stated that he would like to see Main Street and Pleasant Street stay one-way for walkability.

Councilor Korzen advised that he does not see how 2-way traffic would work, and noted that he did like the option of one-way on Main Street with two-way on Pleasant Street. Councilor Korzen stated that he did not believe Pleasant Street would be used to bypass Main Street, as there would be three traffic lights.

Councilor Theberge noted that he would like to see downtown remain as it is, with one-way on both streets. Councilor Theberge stated that his one caveat is that he would like the Fire Department to be able to control the lights to quickly service calls on the east side. Councilor Theberge noted that the improvements will still improve the downtown area even if it remains one-way.

Councilor Qualls stated that she supports two-way traffic on both streets, and noted that these roads held double lanes years ago. Councilor Qualls stated that they need to do something drastic for change, and if they decide that the new traffic pattern does not work, they can reverse the decision. Councilor Qualls noted that businesses used to line Main Street, and is hopeful this will encourage more development.

Councilor Plourde stated that he is in favor of two-way traffic on both streets. Councilor Plourde noted that he listened to the presentation by Ilana Preuss on what increased traffic could do for the community, and if others took the time to attend the presentations they may feel differently.

Mayor Cone agreed that the renderings of the area with two-way traffic are beautiful, and it is tough to decide.

Councilor Morency asked about deliveries, and how this will be done with two-way traffic. Councilor Morency noted that he was in favor of one-way, but now realizes they could go back to one-way if two-way does not work out.

Councilor Lavertu noted that he is in favor of two-way traffic, as they can come up with solutions to the delivery problem. Councilor Lavertu noted that he would like to see Mechanic Street and the proposed street at the Woolworth location be one-way onto Main Street, as it is key to businesses to move traffic to Main Street. Councilor Lavertu asked if the grant could be used to fix buildings with leftover funds, and was advised that this would be outside the parameters of the grant. It was noted that other grants may be available for beautification or improvements.

Councilor Higbee noted that he attended many of the presentations on the downtown project, and would vote for two-way traffic on both streets as he trusts the engineers that this is a viable option. Councilor Higbee noted concerns about the loss of parking, but stated that extra spaces could be gained with the demolition of the Woolworth building. Councilor Higbee noted that opening up the area by Bickford Place will tie Main Street and Pleasant Street together and encourage development on Pleasant Street as well.

Mayor Cone asked what two-way traffic would do for walkability. Councilor Higbee noted that the sidewalks will not be narrower, and there will be bump outs for safety. Councilor Higbee noted that he has faith in the engineers, as they know we want a walkable downtown. Pamela Laflamme confirmed that the sidewalk will not be narrower, it will be a flexible design with physical barriers rather than a traditional raised sidewalk.

Councilor Korzen asked if the third proposal, with two-way traffic on Pleasant and one-way on Main Street, was off the table. Ms. Laflamme noted that creating a bypass to Main Street would be risky for business. Also, only one side of the road will be designated as Route 16, and Main Street could be designated as such, if it was two-way traffic.

Councilor Lavertu asked what the grant includes, and was advised it is a total full-depth repair. Councilor Lavertu asked if a river walk could be included along Dead River. Pamela Laflamme advised this could be done in the future if the property owners agreed, as the land is not owned by the City. City Manager Warren advised that work would also be outside the scope of this grant. Ms. Laflamme advised that Federal Highway and NHDOT have approved extending the southern project limit to the end of Veterans park to accommodate truck traffic. This will include an overlay of Glen Avenue and Pleasant Street in the additional project area.

Councilor Korzen noted that even if they keep the same traffic pattern, it will be revitalized. Councilor Korzen noted that many in the public spoke against the two-way traffic pattern. Councilor Korzen noted that it may cost less to keep the one-way traffic.

Councilor Plourde noted that Ilana Preuss was the consultant for the downtown area, and this was one of her ideas to increase foot traffic.

Councilor Plourde made a motion to approve the two-way traffic plan for downtown, which was seconded by Councilor Higbee.

Councilor Morency noted that this would give them the option to go back if needed.

Councilor Higbee noted that the total redesign, including lighting and signs, will make it easier for the change.

So moved, the motion carried with six in favor and one opposed.

### 3. City Manager's Report

1. Attached is the January 2026 Real Estate Transfer Report.
2. Attached is the January 2026 Fire Department Activity Report.
3. Attached is the EMS activity report.
4. Attached please find the BWW – Municipal Water Usage from October 01, 2025 to January 02, 2026 (February 2026 Billing Quarter).
5. We are catching up on salt deliveries; at present we are still owed approximately 400 ton or 13 truckloads. We are returning to our deicing policy of using salt primarily now that deliveries are catching up.
6. Breakdowns have plagued snow removal, at present 2 sidewalk tractors are down awaiting parts. Two dump trucks are also down. Both lead time on parts and the lack of one mechanic are slowing down repairs. One rubbish packer is down as well, we are using the spare truck, which may be an issue this week as we have a "double day" on Friday due to the Monday holiday.
7. Annual requests for bids will be going out within the week, these bids are for fuel oil, propane, line striping, HVAC services and electrical services.

City Manager Warren advised that CGI Insurance will be going up 6% this year, which is better than the trend of 10-15%

Councilor Lavertu asked if they would have enough salt for the winter and City Manager Warren noted that he was cautiously optimistic as the supply is now there.

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

#### 4. Mayor's Report

##### a. Appointment to BIDPA – V. McMorrow

Dear Mayor and Council:

I am interested in serving on the Berlin Industrial Development & Park Authority. Janet Nickerson & the board has asked that I consider joining them and as there is a vacant position, and I would like to fill that vacancy. As a business owner in Berlin, I have spent the last several years trying to help the economic development of the city by investing in property, starting businesses, and bring awareness to the beautiful area of Northern NH. I feel my experience in entrepreneurship and marketing would be helpful to the board.

I am told there is a vacancy for the term ending in July 2027. I appreciate the opportunity to serve the City of Berlin in this capacity.

Sincerely,

Vicky McMorrow  
164 Green St.  
Berlin, NH 03570

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to approve the nomination of Vicky McMorrow as a member of BIDPA with a term to expire on July 31, 2027. So moved, the motion passed.

Councilor Higbee noted that Ms. McMorrow was helpful when working with the consultant, Ilana Preuss, and he is happy to see her join BIDPA.

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

#### 5. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

#### 6. Council Comments

Councilor Theberge apologized for his outburst at the last meeting, and noted that he has spoken with the Police Chief and Commissioner and they corrected the misinformation he received. Councilor Theberge noted that he should have spoken with them before his comments at the meeting.

Councilor Plourde commended Councilor Theberge for his apology.

Councilor Plourde shared some research that he did on SAU3 from the NH Department of Education, noting that 48.38% of students in Berlin are economically disadvantaged, compared to the state average of 23.65%. The percentage of students identified with disabilities in SAU3 is 21%, and the state average is 13%. All students take the same state assessment test. Councilor Plourde noted that it is just as important to educate students with disabilities or special needs. Councilor Plourde noted that the Council represents the entire City, and they should not disparage our largest department or discourage students and staff. Councilor Plourde noted that the three richest towns in NH are Hanover, Rye, and Windham, and the three best schools are Hanover, Rye, and Windham. Councilor Plourde noted that you cannot judge a school just by the standardized test scores, as many other factors are involved. If a student wants to succeed, they will, and Berlin has a good school system with committed teachers. Councilor Plourde noted that they should be concerned with the lack of tax revenue for the school, not teacher performance. Councilor Plourde noted that they have heard from teachers, and have principals, school

board members, and the superintendent to oversee the school. Counselor Plourde noted their job as a Council is to be sure the school has adequate funding for students to succeed.

Councilor Korzen noted that it was a tough vote for him on the downtown traffic configuration.

Councilor Korzen stated that he hears from many people who are struggling, and that the tax cap could be a mechanism to keep things within a framework. Councilor Korzen noted that he is not out to shut down any departments, but to represent the taxpayers. Councilor Korzen noted that he wants the school to do well, and do have to support it, but they also have to support the taxpayers. Councilor Korzen noted that the tax cap was not intended to reign in spending, but to be a guardrail.

Councilor Lavertu noted that he would like to see the budget process start earlier, with limits set by the Council first.

Councilor Lavertu apologized for his comments about the school system and noted that he appreciated the students coming to speak. Councilor Lavertu noted that the critique was not his, but was from the state report card on the Berlin schools. Councilor Lavertu noted that he believes they can do better than a C- average, and that was his goal.

Councilor Lavertu thanked Paul Grenier for his tenure with the City and noted that he appreciates his wealth of knowledge.

Councilor Higbee shared concerns about the tax cap being based on the CPI, which does not look at union contracts or the cost of equipment.

Councilor Higbee noted the reason the taxes for the school are so high is not something they can fix here. Councilor Higbee noted that they need to elect people to the state legislature that will take their responsibility for adequately funding education seriously.

Councilor Morency noted that he realizes everyone is worried about taxes. However, taxpayers will need to know what they are losing, as he has half a dozen studies that show that a tax cap will erode local services. Councilor Morency stated that it is the Council's job to look at the budget and see where they can save. Councilor Morency noted that they will have to make hard choices, but does not want a hood over them, controlling them. Councilor Morency advised he is opposed to the tax cap, and encouraged the Council to do the work, look at the numbers, and get the budget as low as they can.

## 7. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Higbee, seconded by Councilor Qualls, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:09 pm. So moved, the motion carried.

A True Record, Attest:

Shelli Fortin  
City Clerk

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