

**City Council Work Session  
February 2, 2026**

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

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, Health and Welfare Administrator Angela Liberty, Chief of Police Jeff Lemoine, Police Commission Chair Diana Berthiaume, SAU3 District Educational Services Administrator Tammy Fauteux, Eamon Kelley, State Representative Lori Korzen, Lisa Connell, Berlin Sun and Members of the Public.

Mayor Cone opened the meeting at 6:34 p.m.

**Council Rules and Policies**

Mr. Warren advised the existing rules were included in the agenda packet. If Council wants to make changes, now would be the time as our charter requires rules and policies be reviewed when there's a new election. Councilor Theberge discussed section XXI and feels it is the responsibility of the Mayor to manage public comments. Councilor Korzen commented that in regard to public comments, each situation is different but feels the 3-minute rule should remain as there might be a possibility of many public comments. Councilor Higbee suggested increasing the 3-minute time limit to 5 minutes for public comments. Councilor Morency agrees with increasing the time limit to 5 minutes and sticking with this rule. Councilor Valerino moved to increase the time limit to 5 minutes for public comments under section XXI of the City Council Rules and Orders. Councilor Higbee seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor. Councilor Korzen moved to approve the City Council Rules and Orders as amended. Councilor Theberge seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

**Council Committee Assignments Discussion**

Mayor Cone commented that since there are senior council members, he would like to give them the opportunity to change committees if they wish to. Mayor and Council discussed and agreed to the following committee assignments which will be voted on during the regular meeting this evening.

BERLIN AIRPORT AUTHORITY: Mayor Robert Cone, Chair; Councilors Morency, Valerino, Lavertu and Higbee.

COMMITTEE ON ACCOUNTS & CLAIMS: Mayor Robert Cone, Chair; Councilors Morency, Korzen, Theberge and Plourde.

COMMITTEE ON TRAFFIC SAFETY & TRANSPORTATION: Councilors Morency, Lavertu, Qualls, Korzen and Plourde (Alternate).

COMMITTEE ON ELECTIONS: Councilors Theberge, Morency, Higbee and Qualls.

COMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY ACTION (one appointment): Councilor Higbee

BUDGET COMMITTEE: Entire Council

SEWER APPEALS COMMITTEE: Entire Council with power to act.

PLANNING BOARD MEMBER: Councilors Valerino, Ex-Officio and Qualls, Ex-Officio (Alternate)

BIDPA Member: Councilor Plourde, Ex Officio; Councilor Higbee, Council Appointment.

### **Investment Policy Review**

Mr. Warren advised Council is required to review the investment policy on an annual basis. He doesn't see any edits needed. Councilor Higbee commented he is not recommending changes. Councilor Higbee moved to approve the investment policy as is. Councilor Lavertu commented he has not reviewed the policy and would like to have the opportunity to review it. The City Clerk advised it was emailed to the entire Council last Friday and included in the agenda packet. Councilor Valerino seconded, and the motion carried with the majority in favor with Councilor Lavertu opposed.

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

Mayor Cone invited State Representative Lori Korzen to discuss this with Council as she had brought this up a while ago. Representative Korzen discussed the benefits of setting a tax cap. She commented this is just a proposal to put this into the hands of Berlin voters and let them decide. A discussion was held amongst the Council in regard to amending the City Charter and how this would affect operations. Councilor Morency stated that the actions performed under a proposed tax cap could be done by the Council without amending the City Charter. Mayor Cone discussed potential next steps. Councilor Theberge moved to establish a charter commission. The motion failed with no second to the motion. Councilor Korzen moved to table the charter commission discussion till the work session of February 17, 2026. Councilor Theberge seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

### **Abatement Settlement Recommendations**

Mr. Warren discussed the following abatement settlement recommendations received from the City's assessment contractor.

190 Norway Street (Map 127 Lot 268)  
517 Champlain Street (Map 130 Lot 368)  
576 Champlain Street (Map 130 Lot 316)  
28 Spring Street (Map 128 Lot 157)

All are owned by TKB Properties, LLC. Mr. Warren suggested Council approve the abatement settlement recommendations as presented. Councilor Higbee moved to approve the abatement settlement recommendations as presented and allow the City Manager to execute all documents necessary. Councilor Korzen seconded, and the motion carried with all in favor.

At 7:38 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 – Monday, February 2, 2026**

### **Public Hearing**

Mayor Cone opened the Public Hearing on Resolution 2026-01 NH State Council of the Arts Grant at 7:48 pm. There were no public comments. The hearing was closed at 7:48 pm.

### **Regular Meeting**

Mayor Cone called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at approximately 7:49 pm.

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

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

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

Absent: None

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, Health and Welfare Director Angela Liberty, District Educational Services Administrator Tammy Fauteux, Gina Welch, Jamie Welch, State Representative Lori Korzen, Police Commissioner Diana Berthiaume, Eamon Kelley, Paul Guerin, Sarah Mafera, Eugene Foss, 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 January 20, 2026, Regular Meeting and Work Session. So moved, the motion passed.

#### **Disbursements:**

Disbursement Summary Draft #2002 with a start date of 01/21/2026 and an end date of 02/02/2026 for a total cash disbursement of \$1,102,432.00. 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**

Eamon Kelley, of 396 Grafton Street, spoke in opposition to the proposed tax cap as a resident and taxpayer. Mr. Kelley passed out information sheets to Council members on per pupil costs for the school, the share of education funding, and where school costs are growing. Mr. Kelley noted there is a problem with school funding statewide, not just in Berlin, and stated that Berlin has done a tremendous job keeping costs as low as they can. Mr. Kelley noted that Berlin has been close to the state average in the rising costs, and advised that a tax cap would hamstring the City Council and the School Board. Mr. Kelley stated that the School Board does their best to present a fair budget to the City Council, and that the taxpayers have elected the School Board and the City Council to make hard decisions. Mr. Kelley noted that the tax cap is the wrong issue to address, as state funding has dropped and there have been new state and federal mandates. Mr. Kelley stated that the problem is with Concord and Washington, D.C., and we should direct our anger toward them.

Jamie Welch, of 102 Church Street, spoke in opposition to the tax cap, noting that he has worked in the school for 19 years and has attended a lot of City Council meetings. Mr. Welch noted that the School Board represents the people to be sure that students have what they need to be successful. Mr. Welch also noted that the school funding problem is with Concord, and the lack of funding from the State saddles the taxpayers in Berlin with the cost. Mr. Welch noted that other cities have other sources of revenue, unlike Berlin. Mr. Welch stated that putting a tax cap in place will just give the Council something to blame, as it will tie their hands. Mr. Welch advised that the Council would need to decide what they want cut, as the services will only go down, and there will be no growth. Mr. Welch noted that when the budget needs to be cut, they always look at the Police Department and the school, as they are people heavy. With benefits rising 14% or more, a tax cap would create a crippling situation. Mr. Welch noted that Franklin has a tax cap, and has had to cut program after program, resources for families who eventually choose to leave. Mr. Welch also noted the current expansion of school choice and open enrollment, in which we will lose students to other schools and will have to pay tuition to those other districts. Mr. Welch noted that taxes are tough,

but we need to direct the course in a smart way, not with knee-jerk reactions to solving problems that will just create different problems.

Diana Berthiaume, of 46 Franklin Street, noted that math is math. If 90% of the budget is salaries and benefits, how will we not cut programs, such as hockey. Ms. Berthiaume noted that people will move, as sports are important, and they will go where their child needs to go. Ms. Berthiaume also asked about snow removal by the high school, noting that it has not been done on Willard Street, and students are walking in the street. City Manager Warren noted that the schools were done before the downtown after this last storm. Ms. Berthiaume suggested that the snow removal policy be amended.

Gina Welch, of 102 Church Street, stated that she is a parent, a teacher, and a taxpayer. Ms. Welch noted that the school is the heart of the community and that a tax cap will cut from the schools. Ms. Welch stated that if Berlin wants to grow, they need young families, and families look at schools first. If Berlin has nothing to offer, they will not choose Berlin. Ms. Welch noted that the Berlin schools are still strong, with teachers squeezing blood from rocks and working with a skeleton crew. Ms. Welch noted her frustration at hearing that the fat needs to be cut from the budget, as there is no fat, there is nothing left to cut. Ms. Welch stated that if the school sinks, the community sinks.

Paul Guerin, of 583 Burgess Street, noted that he understands the concerns, however those in the community that are not working for the prisons or the City cannot afford any more in taxes. Mr. Guerin stated that there are no jobs that pay enough for people to be able to afford to live here, and that businesses cannot afford it either. Mr. Guerin stated that those struggling cannot afford what the City wants to support.

Sarah Mafera, of 665 Second Avenue, stated that we may be asking the wrong questions. Ms. Mafera noted that we should be asking how to increase revenue, as there have to be answers out there.

Eugene Foss, of 378 Portland Street, suggested that the City have an audit. Mr. Foss noted that he is not looking to cut, but for there to be no overspending, as they have to keep the City solvent.

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

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

There were no Council Committee Reports.

### **2. Resolution 2026-01 NH State Council of the Arts Grant (tabled 1/20/2026)**

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Twenty-Six

A **RESOLUTION** authorizing the acceptance of a Moose Plate grant in the amount of \$19,500.00 from the NH State Council on the Arts. This grant is to repair, restore, and install the Bartoli Sculpture in the sculpture park downtown.

### **Resolved by the City Council of the City of Berlin as Follows:**

WHEREAS, The City expanded the tennis courts at Horne Field; and

WHEREAS, during the expansion of the tennis courts, the sculpture at Horne Field designed by Louis Bartoli in 1976 needed to be moved to allow for the expansion of the tennis courts; and

WHEREAS, the sculpture will be installed in the sculpture park downtown but needs to be repaired, transported to the park and placed back together as it is made up of multiple granite slabs.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the City Council of the City of Berlin as Follows:

That the City Manager is authorized to receive grant funds in the amount of \$19,500.00 and the proceeds are hereby appropriated for the purpose of the grant, and all grant proceeds shall be deposited with the City Treasurer, and the City Manager is authorized to do all things necessary to effectuate this grant.

This Resolution shall be in full force and effect from and after passage.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second from Councilor Morency, to remove Resolution 2026-01 from the table. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second from Councilor Morency, to read Resolution 2026-01 for a second time. So moved, the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second from Councilor Morency, to read Resolution 2026-01 for a third time. So moved the motion carried.

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second from Councilor Morency, to pass Resolution 2026-01. So moved, the motion carried.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **1. City Manager's Report**

1. Attached is the December and End of Year 2025 Activity Report for the Police Department.
2. We have only received three loads of salt and we are owed approximately 27. The very cold temperatures we had after the recent storm have rendered salt use ineffective. Our plan is to spread salt (sparingly) on the back streets tomorrow and then scrape the streets on Wednesday, the weather is favorable for this. I will be on a video call tomorrow with other public works directors, representatives from UNH technology transfer center and salt vendors to see what the near future will bring.
3. Snow pickup throughout the city is proceeding. In addition, sand barrels will be refilled.

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

### **2. Mayor's Report**

Mayor Cone thanked the Public Works Department for their work during the recent storm.

#### **a. Word of God Church Road Toll Request**

From: Jolinda Hawkins  
Sent: Wednesday, January 28, 2026 7:51 AM  
To: Shelli Fortin <[safortin@berlinnh.gov](mailto:safortin@berlinnh.gov)>  
Subject: Word of God Christian Church

Hello Shellie,

We're hoping we can pass out free coffee and maybe prayers, too.

The date we're hoping to do this is February 28th, 8-10am, across from the Berlin marketplace where they hold the tolls.

If you need more information you can reach me at 603.723.2931. (Call or text)

Thank you,  
Jolinda Hawkins

Police Chief Jeff Lemoine advised that he did not see any problems with this request.

Councilor Higbee asked that Ms. Hawkins be warned that vehicles should be careful pulling back into traffic after stopping.

Councilor Qualls moved, with a second by Councilor Morency, to approve the request from the Word of God Christian Church to give out coffee on Glen Avenue on February 18, 2026, from 8:00-10:00 am. So moved, the motion passed.

b. Town of Gorham 4<sup>th</sup> of July Request

From: Jeff Stewart <[jstewart@gorhamnh.gov](mailto:jstewart@gorhamnh.gov)>  
Date: January 29, 2026 at 10:26:30 EST  
To: Robert Cone  
Subject: Gorham July 4th celebration

Hi Robert,

Sorry to send this to your personal email, but I couldn't find your official mayor email online.

I am part of the July 4<sup>th</sup> Committee and this year we have asked Randolph and Shelburne to contribute \$1,000.00 each towards the celebration.

They will be submitting petition warrant articles and voting on it during their town meetings.

We would also like to request the same from Berlin, but not sure how to submit such a request.

Any assistance you could provide would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Jeffrey S. Stewart, Director  
Parks & Recreation Department  
33 Exchange Street, Gorham, NH 03581

Mayor Cone noted that this year is the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our nation, and he would support contributing to the celebration in Gorham, as neighbors helping neighbors.

Councilor Korzen moved, with a second by Councilor Valerino, to approve the request from the Town of Gorham for \$1,000 for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration, to be funded by the Council Contingency account. So moved, the motion passed.

c. Council Committee Assignments

**Berlin Airport Authority**

- Mayor Robert Cone, Chair
- Councilor Morency
- Councilor Lavertu
- Councilor Higbee
- Councilor Valerino

**Committee on Accounts & Claims**

- Mayor Robert Cone, Chair
- Councilor Theberge
- Councilor Morency
- Councilor Plourde
- Councilor Korzen

**Committee on Traffic Safety and Transportation**

- Councilor Morency
- Councilor Lavertu
- Councilor Korzen
- Councilor Qualls
- Councilor Plourde, alternate

**Elections**

- Councilor Higbee

- Councilor Theberge
- Councilor Morency
- Councilor Qualls

**Emergency Action**

- Councilor Higbee

**Budget Committee**

Entire Council

**Sewer Appeals Committee**

Entire Council

**Planning Board Member**

- Councilor Valerino
- Councilor Qualls, alternate

**BIDPA Member**

- Councilor Plourde, ex-officio
- Higbee, appointed

Councilor Higbee moved, with a second by Councilor Valerino, to approve the Council Committee assignments as presented.

Councilor Higbee noted that he serves on BIDPA as an appointed member, not as the Council representative.

So moved, the motion passed.

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

**3. Public Comments**

Tammy Fauteux, District Educational Services Administrator, noted that she understands the challenges the City faces and knows the impact of the tax rate, but has concerns about a tax cap on the school budgeting process. Ms. Fauteux stated that citizens have noted that enrollment is down, and expect that costs should also be down, however there is a fixed infrastructure. Student-to-teacher ratios do not tell the whole story. CTE classes have an average of 11 students for safety reasons, however the average class size at middle school is 19. Some classes, such as advanced placement courses have lower numbers, as well as intensive support for those students with learning gaps. Ms. Fauteux noted that state aid is a fiscal rollercoaster, especially with EFA accounts and open enrollment, and there is no predictability. The reduction in revenue from state aid is devastating. Ms. Fauteux noted that increases in health insurance, heating oil, and other items do not follow the CPI. They cannot predict the financial fallout from open enrollment, and the funds will have to come from somewhere else. Ms. Fauteux noted that she encourages continued conversations, but would not want to see the City locked into a constraint that they cannot live up to. Ms. Fauteux advised she is not opposed to school choice, but the requirement of local taxpayers to fund placements that they did not approve. Ms. Fauteux noted that tuition would have to be paid to other districts, along with special education costs, for which they have no say. Ms. Fauteux noted that transportation would be the responsibility of the parents with open enrollment, and any additional cost of tuition for schools with higher tuition costs than Berlin would be the family’s responsibility. Ms. Fauteux expressed concern over the rushed maneuver by the legislature for open enrollment, and asked for a pause to protect the stability of public schools.

Matthew Buteau, of 154 High Street, noted that he is a taxpayer, parent, and the School Board Chair. Mr. Buteau noted that the Board has started working on the budget, and will continue this Thursday. Mr. Buteau invited those interested to attend, as it is an opportunity to learn, ask questions, and meet the staff and administration.

Paul Guerin, of 583 Burgess Street, asked where the Berlin school system ranks. Mr. Guerin asked if we are really providing a good education, why do we rank near the bottom, and what are we getting for what we are spending.

#### 4. Council Comments

Councilor Lavertu noted that he attended Berlin High School, served his country for 25 years, and has owned a business. Councilor Lavertu stated that the Council needs to make some tough calls, and stop doing things the same way. Councilor Lavertu stated that the average student in Berlin is a C- student, and businesses look at the work force before choosing a place to move to, as well as the school system for their children. Councilor Lavertu noted most residents are concerned about fixing the roads and reducing taxes. Councilor Lavertu stated that the City needs to look at new ways to reduce taxes, look at the budget line by line, and make some tough calls that will hurt all departments. Councilor Lavertu stated that they need to work harder to entice companies to come to Berlin, as we want our children and grandchildren to stay in Berlin. Councilor Lavertu noted that taxpayers paid more this year than last year, and the community deserves better. Councilor Lavertu mentioned that Paul Grenier got the City through a lot of hard times and brought the prisons which were needed, however they now need a hotel and restaurants to provide jobs. Councilor Lavertu noted that the schools need to do better, and the roads are horrendous.

Councilor Qualls noted that the City has no say over what businesses choose to come here. Councilor Qualls noted that during budget discussions, they will need to ask what services to cut. City Manager Warren noted that the Council needs to give him direction on what services to cut. Department heads have been instructed that this is a tough year and to keep an eye on the budget. The Council will need to be prepared, either at the first budget session on March 1, or after departments have presented, as to what they would like to see changed.

Councilor Morency noted that there were no Capital Improvements last year, and City Manager Warren confirmed that the only items included were things they were committed to already, such as leases. Councilor Morency noted that they are going to go backwards with a tax cap, and that surrounding communities are facing the same issues. Councilor Morency suggested that the surrounding communities start working together and sharing resources.

Councilor Korzen stated that these are tough times, however he is concerned about just cutting, and suggested it should go deeper than that. He doesn't want to cut for the sake of cutting, and suggested reaching out to different departments to work better and smarter. Councilor Korzen stated that he did a quick evaluation of the tax rate over the past five years, comparing the percentage of state education, county taxes, municipality, and schools, and noting that the municipal portion went up in 2025. Councilor Korzen noted that he represents the citizens, and wants to hear ideas.

Councilor Higbee noted that the budget percentages go up and down over time, noting that the municipal portion was 52.9% in 2020 and 48% in 2025, and as low as 40% in 2021. Councilor Higbee reviewed the vote at the last meeting to do a statistical revaluation for \$95,000, noting that utilities are worth roughly \$211 million, and that they are losing 30% of the value, or about \$1.7 million at the current tax rate, in revenue. Councilor Higbee stated that \$95,000 is a good investment to be able to collect that additional revenue from the utilities.

Councilor Theberge noted the declining enrollment in the local schools and stated it is time to merge schools with Gorham. He stated that he is appalled this has not been considered, noting that people are more concerned about losing jobs than improving education for our students. Councilor Theberge also shared concerns over the time of the Police Commission meetings, noting that the 7:30 am meeting time is not convenient. Councilor Theberge asked what they are trying to hide by meeting at that time, and stated that minutes are not available online.

Councilor Valerino noted that the Police Commission has tried different days and times for meetings, and that there have only been a handful of City Councilors or citizens attend throughout the years.

#### 5. Adjournment

On a motion by Councilor Higbee, seconded by Councilor Qualls, the Council voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:53 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.