

GARDINER CITY COUNCIL MEETING
Wednesday, June 17, 2015
Gardiner City Hall

Mayor Thom Harnett called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Roll Call:

Present for the meeting were Mayor Thom Harnett, Councilors Terry Berry, Scott Williams, Richard Heath, Maureen Blanchard, Jon Ault & Patricia Hart. Councilor Phil Hart had not arrived yet. Also present were City Manager Scott Morelli and City Clerk Lisa Gilliam.

Executive Session Per 1 MRA 405(6)€ to Consult with Legal Counsel (Cobbossee Sewer Interceptor Project/Harrison Ave.):

Motion by Councilor Heath to enter into Executive Session per 1 MRSA 405(6)(E) to consult with legal counsel on the Cobbossee Sewer Interceptor matter; motion seconded by Councilor Ault. Motion carried by unanimous vote 7-0 (Councilor Phil Hart not present). Wastewater Director Doug Clark and Special Counsel Mike Hodgins were also present for the Executive Session discussion.

Councilor Phil Hart joined the meeting at 6:02 p.m.

Motion by Councilor Patricia Hart to authorize the City to accept the agreement; motion seconded by Councilor Ault. Motion carried by unanimous vote 8-0.

Executive Session – Buyback of Foreclosed Property:

At 6:35 p.m. a motion was made by Councilor Berry to enter into Executive Session to consider the buyback of a foreclosed property; motion seconded by Councilor Phil Hart. Tax Collector Kathleen Cutler was present for the executive session discussion.

Council ended executive session and returned to open session at 6:40 pm.

Motion by Councilor Berry to authorize the City to sell the property located at 702 River Avenue back to the previous owner for the amount agreed upon by the City Council and Tax Collector; motion seconded by Councilor Phil Hart. Motion carried by unanimous vote 8-0.

PETITIONS, PUBLIC HEARINGS (Public comment for anything not on agenda):

Mayor Harnett opened the meeting up for public discussion. Hearing none, Mayor Harnett closed the public discussion portion of the meeting.

Councilor Ault, who spoke on behalf of the Gardiner Food Co-op & Café, presented Councilor Phil Hart with a free membership to the Food Co-op. The Co-op wanted to thank Councilor Hart for his contribution and volunteer work in assisting them with the building preparations prior to their grand opening. Councilor Hart was very gracious and thanked them for the membership. Councilor Ault said the membership would also give Councilor Hart voting privileges.

Consent Agenda:

No consent agenda items.

New Business:

Presentation on Alewives:

Nate Gray from the Marine Department of Resources and Bill Monagle from the Cobbossee Watershed District addressed the City Council and the large audience in attendance on the local alewives population. Tina Wood presented a video that was recorded on May 8, 2015 which showed the alewives trying to swim upstream; she stated that many of the fish are dying because they are not able to complete their journey past the New Mills Dam. Councilor Berry noted that the New Mills Dam is also maintained by the towns of Richmond and Litchfield along with the City of Gardiner. Councilor Blanchard suggested this group meet and discuss this issue with the New Mills Dam Committee. Councilor Blanchett asked why they are requesting the city's support at this time? Mr. Gray's response was "why not now" and stated it would be the best thing for the population of alewives that are being affected.

Douglas Watts, an Augusta resident who is well versed on this topic of alewives, was also present to speak on this issue. Mr. Watts noted the investment and growth the City of Gardiner has made in its community and that a healthy population of alewives would be furthering the City's investment in the river and streams in Gardiner. Discussion followed. Mr. Gray said the support from the City Council would provide the safe passage of alewives in the stream, which is vital to their existence. Mr. Monagle noted the importance of the alewives impact if they are lost from the local streams. Mr. Gray said there is no next step, it's mainly the awareness of this issue within the community. Greg Pond briefly spoke about the importance of the alewives and the support needed from the City of Gardiner. Councilor Patricia Hart said the City would not be able to support this project financially but wants to be kept updated on this subject. Mr. Gray stated there would be fundraising needed at some point to move this project forward. There were no motions made by the City Council.

A brief break was taken and the meeting resumed at 8:10pm

Victualers License – Vegan World Foods:

Manager Morelli gave a brief description of this victualers license for a new business named Vegan World Foods. Councilor Ault moved to approve the victualers license for Vegan World Foods; motion seconded by Councilor Williams. Motion carried by unanimous vote 8-0.

FY 16 Budget Discussion:

Manager Morelli briefed the Council on the City and State budgets. Municipal Resources, a consulting firm, was scheduled to make a presentation but will not speak before the City Council until sometime in August; once their presentation is complete the city will need to schedule a public forum with the community to openly discuss the options that have been presented in their report. This delay will bring an added cost to the City because there will be no budget in place. After reviewing the City's options, Manager Morelli recommends moving forward with the City budget discussions. His recommendations include a first read of the budget on July 1st and a final hearing on July 15th with the budget going into effect on July 25th. The City Manager said the new budget would reflect a tax increase of \$103 to the average home owner; he also noted there would be an increase in the Homestead Exemption for homeowners. Discussion followed.

Councilor Blanchard suggests cutting some funds to Johnson Hall, the Boys & Girls Club and Gardiner Main Street, along with other suggested cuts that included the use of tablets by the City Council. Councilor Blanchard suggested giving more money to the Ambulance Department and local food bank. Councilor Williams asked Librarian Anne Davis to speak on the possibility of cuts to the Library and the effect it would have. Librarian Davis spoke briefly on possible cuts to the city library, she said the Children's Librarian is considered a vital part of the library services and that she would not want to make any cuts to that. Councilor Williams stated he was not comfortable with making deep cuts to the Boys & Girls Club. Councilor Berry said departments that are showing increases are the places where the city needs to make cuts, those departments would be the Police, Fire & Ambulance, the Library, Public Works, and Buildings & Grounds. Councilor Heath said he is in favor of supporting the non-profits. Discussion continued.

Mayor Harnett said he has lived in Gardiner since 1992 and greatly appreciates the services the City provides to its residents and has a great deal of trust in the efforts of the City Manager; he further said that he would be in agreement with the suggestions that Manager Morelli has made in the City budget. Mayor Harnett also noted his concern with the low voter turn-out for the School Budget Referendum and the impact that will have on the property owners in Gardiner; he is also aware of the concerns the Council has with the effect this budget will have on the residents. The Mayor stated he will only support full funding for the Boys & Girls Club because it's the only recreational organization for the youth in Gardiner and the surrounding communities. Mayor Harnett said he would not support cuts to Gardiner Main Street due to the positive impact their efforts have had on the new business' that have been brought to the community.

Councilor Hart is in agreement with the Mayor about not cutting funding to Gardiner Main Street due to the benefit of their program to the City. Councilor Phil Hart suggested that businesses who benefit from Gardiner Main Street should consider making a contribution to the program; he also said the City Manager does a sincere and honest job when presenting the budget by making cuts that don't greatly impact the necessary services that the City needs to provide to it's residents. Councilor Phil Hart said he appreciated the suggestions made by Councilor Blanchard and that he doesn't want to overlook those ideas. Mayor Harnett wanted to know what direction the Council would like to go in with this year's budget. Manager Morelli reminded the Council that \$135,000 in debt will be coming off the books for the Public Works Department in the budget that would be presented next year. Discussion followed.

Motion by Councilor Heath to approve a 2.4% tax increase; motion seconded by Councilor Patricia Hart. Discussion followed. Councilor Berry said he would like to see the 2% increase approved. Councilor Williams said that cutting services for the youth could have a negative impact on the community including public safety issues. Manager Morelli recommends the 3.4% increase, but said this is the Council's budget and after review he would present it back to the Council with further suggested cuts. Manager Morelli also said he would like some guidance to which City services the Council would like cuts made to. A brief discussion followed concerning the paving budget and the non-profits.

Councilor Heath amended his original motion to direct the City Manager to go with the 2.4% budget contingency with non-profits and the paving budget lines not being included in any of the proposed cuts; there was no second to this motion. Discussion followed.

Councilor Blanchard stated again that the non-profits need to be included and considered with any cuts to the budget. Councilor Phil Hart said the Manger should have the opportunity to make suggested cuts to the non-profits, saying that in the end the City Council makes the final decision. Councilor Ault is worried that including the non-profits for budget cuts would put their services at risk. Mayor Harnett said this would only be giving the City Manager direction to move this budget forward, nothing is final and the Council can always bring back certain budget lines for further discussion. Discussion followed. Motion carried 5-3 with Councilors Berry, Phil Hart and Blanchard voting no.

Consideration of Continuing Resolution to Authorize Expenditures from July 1, 2015 through August 31, 2015:

The City Manager introduced Finance Director Denise Brown who was present to speak on the resolution. If this resolution is approved it would allow the daily operation of City services (as recommended in the FY16 Budget) to continue, it would not include non-profits, capital requests or the county assessment. Ms. Brown said she would recommend the first order that was presented to the Council. A brief discussion followed. Councilor Berry moved to approve the continuing resolution which would allow city services to continue through August 31, 2015; motion seconded by Councilor Heath. Motion carried by unanimous vote 8-0.

Ambulance Service Discussion:

Manager Morelli stated this item was originally included on the agenda in case the Town of Farmingdale voted against continuing their contract with the Gardiner Ambulance Department. Manager Morelli was pleased to announce that at the Annual Town Meeting for Farmingdale the residents voted to keep the City of Gardiner as their ambulance provider; it was also noted that the Town of Farmingdale voted to rejoin the Gardiner Library. There were no motions made.

Consideration of 1 Year Extension of Assessing Contract:

Manager Morelli said the 3 year contract with City Assessor Curt Lebel will be expiring and that he would recommend the approval of this contract extension. Motion by Councilor Berry to extend the contract with City Assessor Curt Lebel; motion seconded by Patricia Hart. A brief discussion followed concerning the decrease in hours that the assessor is working and how it has/will affect the level of service to the residents. Finance Director Denise Brown said she has not received feed back from city staff of any residents indicating the decrease in hours have had any negative impact. Councilor Phil Hart said the Assessor and staff have been very good to work with whenever he's had any questions that require their assistance. Motion carried by unanimous vote 8-0.

Sewer Abatements:

Wastewater Director Doug Clark presented the various requests for abatements marked as List A. Discussion followed. Mr. Clark said the residents normally allow him access to their property and allowed him to verify the issues. Mr. Clark said he would be in favor of recommending the abatements presented. Councilor Heath made a motion to approve the recommendation of Mr. Clark on the abatements as presented on List A; motion seconded by Councilor Ault. Motion carried by unanimous 8-0.

Mr. Clark reviewed the next group of abatement requests marked as List C, which were requested abatements from property owners. On List C was a request from John Shaw, which Mr. Clark would not recommend abating. Councilor Hart spoke with Mr. Shaw who would like the extra fees waived, because the property was vacant and he was not aware of any leak. Mr. Clark said in that case the water at the Shaw's was treated by the city and therefore would need to be charged to Mr. Shaw. Motion by Councilor Berry to accept only the abatements recommended by Mr. Clark; motion seconded by Councilor Ault. Motion carried by unanimous vote 7-0 with Councilor Heath abstaining due to a personal friendship with Mr. Shaw.

City Manager Scott Morelli recommended the Council give Mr. Shaw another 30 days to provide better proof of his issue. Discussion followed. Motion by Councilor Patricia Hart to deny the abatement request from Mr. Reed; motion seconded by Councilor Phil Hart. Motion carried by unanimous vote 8-0. Motion by Councilor Phil Hart to grant Mr. Shaw an additional 30 days to provide more information on his abatement request; motion seconded by Councilor Williams. Motion carried by unanimous vote 7-0 with Councilor Heath abstaining.

CITY MANAGER UPDATE:

Manager Morelli had no updates for Council.

CITY COUNCIL UPDATE:

- Councilor Berry: No updates.
- Councilor Williams: He said that his 93 year old Grandmother on occasion will accidentally activate her life alert. Councilor Williams wanted to thank the Gardiner Ambulance Department who now routinely visit her once per month to see how she is doing.
- Councilor Phil Hart: Thanked Public Works Director Tony LaPlante for the good work he and his crew have been doing.
- Councilor Blanchard: She recommended job sharing amongst the City Councilors for the various committees they serve on.

- Councilor Heath: Remarked on the appearance downtown after the Bailey Auto building was torn down. Since it's removal and clean up it has made the downtown area across from the Library much better looking.
- Councilor Ault: Congratulated the Gardiner Food Co-op for winning the \$25,000 grant from State Farm. He said he received a complaint about a tire divot at the Gardiner Common; it is very noticeable and he was concerned with someone falling in that area. PW Director Tony LaPlante was still present and said he would make sure that was seen to.
- Councilor Patricia Hart: She reminded everyone that the Gardiner River Festival would be this upcoming weekend. She also remarked about the Kora Shriners Parade being a huge hit and also noted how nice the downtown area is looking.
- Mayor Harnett: Also remarked on what a nice event the Kora Shriners Parade was and that he had an enjoyable time being in the parade riding in a convertible. The Mayor then mentioned that Johnson Hall would be showing a movie this week and that the first Waterfront Concert of the season was also a big hit. He said that he had traveled to Illinois this past week to talk about the Heart & Soul program and what an honor it was to represent Gardiner and to share the positive impact this program has had on our community.

Executive Session Per 1 MRSA 405 (6) © to Discuss a Real Estate Matter (TW Dick):

At 10:08 pm Councilor Patricia Hart made a motion to go into Executive Session; motion seconded by Councilor Williams. Motion carried by unanimous vote 8-0.

Adjourn

Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Gilliam, City Clerk