

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **FEBRUARY 20, 2017**

6 **MINUTES**

7 **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Thomas Jacobs-Chair; Michael Keane-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeanne Conner; and  
8 Donald Campbell.

9 **BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** Justin Corcoran and Jeannie Jenkins.

10 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan Monks-Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager;  
11 Matt Harrington-Bennington Chamber of Commerce Executive Director; Michael McDonough; John  
12 Shannahan; Sam Restino; Steve Smith; Jim Therrien-Bennington Banner; Mike Cutler-CAT-TV; 6 citizens; and  
13 Nancy Lively-Secretary.

14 At 6:00 PM, Chairman Tom Jacobs called the meeting to order.

15 Mike Cutler announced that CAT-TV will be broadcasting the Candidate Forum on February 24, 2017 at  
16 5:30pm with all of the Bennington Select Board and Bennington School District candidates present.

17 **1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

18 Recited by all present.

19  
20 **2. CONSENT AGENDA**

21 **A. MINUTES – JANUARY 23, 2017**

22 **MINUTES – JANUARY 30, 2017**

23 **B. WARRANTS**

24 **C. 2017 LIQUOR LICENSE RENEWALS**

25 *Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded to accept the Consent Agenda as amended to*  
26 *remove the Minutes of January 30, 2017 due to the abstention of Tom Jacobs and Jim Carroll for that*  
27 *meeting creating a lack of quorum. The motion carried unanimously.*

28 **3. CITIZENS/BOARD DISCUSSION**

29 Mr. Jacobs and Mr. Keane shared the Citizen Survey Results and Responses as expressed by the 530  
30 voters that had participated in the survey below:

- 31
- 32 • Lack of well-paid employment and diversity of businesses
  - 33 • Business growth – or lack thereof
  - 34 • Lack of doing things to attract the 25-45 year old age group (millennials) and their families
  - 35 • Improving the appearance of our Downtown
  - 36 • Are you satisfied with Town Governance? – 37%-yes; 36%-no; and 27%-need more information
  - 37 • Bennington is a great place to live in but the town government needs an overhaul and should explore a mayoral form of government

- Would like to see new leadership in the town offices with fresh ideas and priorities
  - We need professional management and a plan to revitalize Bennington
  - The Town Manager has done an excellent job
  - Infrastructure improvements are a plus for our town
  - Town government needs to use the local legislators to get the State to pay more attention to solving the needs of Bennington
  - Bennington gets a lot of lip service from elected legislators and senators
  - School enrollment is declining and people move out after graduation
  - Keep community conversation going
  - Bennington has so much potential but doesn't live up to it
  - There has been an economic decline for the past 30 years and we have way too many empty store fronts in the downtown
  - Taxes are too high for the services we receive and allocations are disproportionate
  - Develop multiuse buildings downtown and improve the transportation system
  - Downtown businesses close too early during the week and have limited hours on weekends
  - Roadways are difficult to navigate and there is a lack of bike paths and walking paths
  - Improvements need to be done to the education system to attract young families
  - Drugs are rampant, babies are being born with opiate addictions and will need services throughout their school years, and it seems like this could be controlled in our small town
  - Where do you shop? – 41%-big box stores; 40%-online; and 19%-locally owned stores
- Mr. Keane did research on the above shopping statistics and discovered the following:
- At the end of December 2016, Amazon had a market value, or capitalization (shares outstanding x stock), of 355.9B.
  - At the end of December 2016, the combined market value of Walmart, Target, JC Penney, Nordstrom, Best Buy, Macy's, Kohl's, and Sears was 297.8B.
  - From 2006 to 2016, the above retailers had dropped in market value by anywhere from 96% to 1% while Amazon increased by 1,934%.
  - Retailers going out of business is happening everywhere, not just Bennington.
  - In the month of January 2017, Amazon increased by 37.1B to 393B while the others continued to decline.

Citizens present commented as follows:

- Maintaining conversations with the community is a top priority
- 50 years ago the population of Bennington was 14K when the population of the country was 150M; today the population of Bennington is still 14K when the population of the country has grown to 330M
- We focus so much on bike trails, we should build trails to give snowmobilers access to Bennington in the winter
- Although there are activities for adults, Bennington needs to address activities for children, such as, an outdoor pool, skating rink, and skate park
- Re-open the skating rink at Stark Street and perhaps bring back some of the old time activities like street dances
- We need to establish community programs of neighbor helping neighbor to keep the elderly in their homes – to “age in place”. The University of Vermont's Center for Aging and Disabilities,

81 or other experts who have experienced this, could be asked to have their experts come down to  
82 speak to interested parties.

- 83 • It was noted that there are issues that untrained people will not be able to handle
- 84 • A public rest room should be put on Main Street
- 85 • Bennington is the only town in Vermont that has Battle Day Weekend and this needs to be  
86 promoted to increase the draw to this event throughout the State.
- 87 • Would like the Select Board to appoint someone to sit on the Advisory Committee of the  
88 Bennington Senior Center
- 89 • Would like availability to all the costs of the Greenberg Project coming from federal and state  
90 dollars
- 91 • Ultimately, the Greenberg Project will affect our local social services, health care, and school  
92 system which will translate to tax payer dollars
- 93 • Will a local sales tax be coming? Manchester has lowered their real estate taxes by \$1M  
94 because of it

95 Board comments:

96 The Board thanked all those who created and participated in the survey.

97 Mr. Jacobs commented that there are improvements in the Downtown in process and bike paths are  
98 being constructed. All of this takes time and we are working toward achieving our potential. He also feels  
99 that the dialogues with the community should be more often and better publicized. Nothing comes without  
100 financial investment and ideas – we cannot continue as we are.

101 Mr. Jacobs noted that in March or April a committee of nine will be developed to study our governance  
102 and how we do business. This will not be a fast process but the outcome will be a recommendation to the  
103 Select Board and to the public.

104 Mr. Jacobs stated that the Greenberg Project is being done by a private investor and has not asked the  
105 citizens of Bennington for any financial support. We have been asked to put the parking lot in, but this can be  
106 paid for by other means than tax payer dollars, such as, if we become a TIF District.

107 Mr. Jacobs answered that instituting a local sales tax requires a Charter change and we're not at that  
108 point yet.

109 Mr. Hurd added that he was very much in favor of a local sales tax. Bennington generates more sales  
110 than Manchester and the +\$1M that we would receive from that could also be used for capital projects for the  
111 community, as well as, a tax reduction. The Charter amendment would need to be approved by the voters  
112 before it goes to the Legislature for approval, and won't be on the ballot before 2018.

113 Mr. Monks added that he does have information on the Greenberg Project "in excruciating detail" if  
114 anyone would like to see it.

115 Mr. McDonough noted that the Greenberg Project should result in increased tax revenue, and not in  
116 increased tax burdens.

117 Mr. Carroll suggested that the Chamber of Commerce and the BBC join forces to come up with three  
118 things that are the "Bennington's identity".

119 Ms. Connor felt that the children should be consulted as to what they would like. She also stated that  
120 we should adopt what other towns within the State have done that were successful, and Mr. Jacobs noted  
121 that this is being explored “but no two towns are the same”.

122 Mr. Keane added that suggestions like the activities for youth and programs for the aging could be put  
123 on the Town’s website. Many things need to happen at the same time instead of one after the other.

124 Mr. Campbell stated that initiatives driven by the private sector with the town’s support, i.e., the  
125 Greenberg block and Appalachian Trail access, are generally more successful than those originated by the  
126 Town when everyone would like their property taxes lowered.

127 **4. OTHER BUSINESS**

128 None.

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130 ***At 7:17 PM, it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried unanimously.***  
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134 Respectfully submitted,

135  
136 Nancy H. Lively  
137 Secretary  
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