

**BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING
BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY
130 RIVER STREET
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

MONDAY, JULY 25, 2016

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Jacobs – Chair; Michael Keane-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeanne Conner; Jeannie Jenkins; Donald Campbell;

Absent: Justin Corcoran

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (8) Citizens

At 6:00 P.M., **Tom Jacobs** called the meeting to order.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

*A) Minutes – July 27, 2016
July 20, 2016*

MOTION: Jim Carroll motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to accept and approve the minutes of July 11, 2016 and July 20, 2016 as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

B) Warrants

It was noted in the Select Board Training on July 20th, 2016 that it is acceptable to have only the Chair or Vice Chair (physically) sign the warrants if the remaining members approve them. Jim Carroll asked if members could still ask questions regarding the warrants. Tom Jacobs said yes, this is just an administration function only. The warrants must be approved by all members before the one signature is made. Jim Carroll expressed opposition to this. Donald Campbell stated it is up to each member to read and approve the warrants. He suggested a separate vote for the warrants at each meeting. Mr. Carroll did not agree. There were no further questions.

MOTION: Jeanne Conner motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to accept and approve the warrants as submitted and to allow for (1) signature by the Chair or Vice Chair Signature administratively.

VOTE: **Motion passed** - *Vote: (5) Approve vs. (1) Oppose (Jim Carroll)*
(Justin Corcoran absent)

C) PROCLAMATION: Ride 4 Gabe

Michael Keane read the proclamation. It will be presented to the riders as they pass through town on Sunday, July 31, 2016

MOTION: **Jim Carroll motioned and Jeanne Conner seconded to accept and approve the Ride 4 Gabe proclamation as submitted. Motion passed unanimously**
(Justin Corcoran absent)

3. CITIZENS

Michael Keen (of no relation to Vice-Chair) stepped forward and identified himself as a Dorset resident, however he works in Bennington. Mr. Keen travels VT Rte 7 each day and is requesting an increase in the speed limit between Exit 2 and the railroad crossing in East Dorset. He conducted an on-line poll and 85% of the people agree there should be an increase in the speed limit. Attached is the petition to the State of Vermont Department of Transportation with 243 signatures as well as some correspondence with the State. The State looks to the municipalities affected for input and written comment/request. Mr. Keen has been to several of the different Town meetings for approval. Bennington and Arlington are the last two.

Mr. Keen feels there are many benefits including making this route to Killington more attractive to tourists instead of going up through New York. It could bring more tourists our way.

Tom Jacobs stated he had not previously heard this being an issue. He is also concerned that the State is putting this on the Towns. The Manager stated he would need to request a speed warrant analysis, which would then be forwarded to the State.

Mr. Jacobs suggested this be placed as an agenda item for further discussion. Jim Carroll is concerned about the increase. Currently the speed limit is (55) mph; many people therefore go (65) mph. If it were increased to (65) mph wouldn't people then push it to (75) mph.

Mary Garesh stepped forward to speak about the Pleasant Street Block Party. Mr. Jacobs stated this was already an agenda item and asked her to hold her questions/comments for that appropriate time.

Sam Restino stepped forward to speak about the head-on collision on Rte 7 South near the cemetery. He asked if the visual speed limit sign was still available. If it were he would like to see it placed at that location permanently. He would also like to see the speed limit reduced there.

Mr. Restino also spoke about the upcoming Bennington Battle Day weekend. He fears we are losing the image of the Battle Day. Mr. Restino would like to see the drummer competition return.

The Manager stated this is the Fire Department's weekend. This year it will once again be the Annual State's Convention (of Fireman). There will be many firefighters and their families in town.

Jim Carroll spoke of the high expense for the drummer competition. It has always been very expensive. Also the organizers have lost many volunteers. They are struggling with what little volunteers they have. Mr. Restino stepped forward and stated he would volunteer to help that weekend.

Two Americorp Vista volunteers stepped forward. Rory Price and Nevin stated they are apart of this national service organization. Each year several members move to a particular town in need and serve one year helping the community. Currently there are (3) members in Bennington. Next year there will be (5) members coming to help serve Bennington.

In their time here Americorp Vista volunteers developed the Youth Appreciation Day celebration. Previously only 30% of Bennington youth felt they contributed to the community. It was the fourth lowest response within Vermont. This number has come up slightly since this celebration started in 2013.

Each year the event has been held at Willow Park and focuses on the youth and celebrates them in general. There is music, food activities etc. Some of the benefits are reducing stress levels, families get to explore and enjoy Willow Park and see that the Town cares about its youth. This also fosters trust between the youth and the Town.

Many businesses in the area make donations and volunteer time to put on this event. They too experience benefits from the celebration. Approximately 300 people attend this event each year. However they are still struggling with funding and volunteers. They are looking for more community partners to ensure this event continues. Americorp Vistas may not always be present to organize the event. They do not want to see it go away.

The Manager asked why on the handout list of donations and volunteer organizations the Town of Bennington was not listed. We provide the location and donate all the clean-up services at no charge. The Americorp Vista volunteers stated they now want the Town to be at the table from the beginning. They need people to help plan and organize this event.

Jeannie Jenkins stated this is a community event. We need to keep this on the radar.

Michael Keane suggested they learn to keep reminding us.

Jim Carroll stated he understands it's hard to go around and ask for donations. Mr. Carroll said he would jump in and help.

Jeanne Conner strongly encouraged collaborations with other organizations. Leave lots of notes for their successors of what went right and what went wrong. She stated she is also willing to help.

Mary Morrissey stepped forward and requested the reconvening of the Renewable Energy group. Sun-Edison is an international solar company. Many of the companies now doing business in Vermont and our area are under their umbrella. News was released that Sun-Edison has now filed bankruptcy. She is not sure of what the possible problems could be with decommissioning etc. Ms. Morrissey does not want to see solar graveyards in 20 years.

Tom Jacobs agreed that this group needs to reconvene. He would like to add Michael Keane as a member of that group. Mr. Keane agreed and stated that solar energy is moving faster than we're used to. We need to proceed with caution.

There were no other citizen comments this evening.

4. BLOCK PARTY – PLEASANT STREET

Mike Harrington stepped forward to present. He reviewed the history of the Catalyst Project, which started approximately 1.5 years ago. Many local organizations have been a part of the committee including Department of Health, UCS, the Chamber of Commerce and some local residents.

The Pleasant Street Block Party will be held on Saturday July 30, 2016 from 12:00pm-2:00pm. There will be free food such as hamburgers, hot dogs, veggie burgers as well as the

Hemmings Popcorn Cart. Many family activities are planned as well such as music, jump rope, a miniature pony, a llama and Gamer's Grotto will provide some Wii Games to play on-site.

There have been many donations from organizations in town such as the Health Center, some local landlords and the local EMS. The food is free and shall be prepared by some of the local Firemen and EMS workers. We are encouraging volunteers to help clean up afterward. Wilcox Ice Cream has offered a free ice-cream cone to each volunteer for their clean up efforts as an incentive.

Mary Garesh, resident of Pleasant Street voiced some concerns. She stated it was a good neighborhood where people get to know each other; not the dangerous reputation it has. She acknowledged however that many of the residents are economically depressed and feel excluded from Bennington as a whole.

Ms. Garesh continued by noting the door notices for the Block Party locate the party as "down at the Thatcher House"; However no lives in that section. Participants/residents are expected to carry chairs if they want to sit and no bathroom facilities will be available so they will have to return home if facilities are needed. St. Peter's since then has offered to put out chairs and open their bathroom facilities. There needs to be some kind of meeting to get this word out

Mr. Harrington stated they were concerned about blocking people in if they had the party farther up Pleasant Street. Street traffic will need to be closed and not everyone would be able to get out if needed.

Jeanne Conner asked if they need volunteers. Mr. Harrington stated they are still open for more volunteers.

Jim Carroll applauded Mr. Harrington's efforts. Some people will never be satisfied but at least there is an effort.

Mr. Harrington noted there is a Project Catalyst website. It is linked from the Town's website.

Sam Restino asked if Project Catalyst would move onto other areas in the future. Mr. Harrington stated the resources are limited right now. However, they are identifying other areas and what their needs may be. Each neighborhood has different needs.

5. ARTICLE 30 – PROPERTY MAINTENANCE ORDINANCE

Michael Harrington presented the ordinance. He noted that this version is almost same as last seen. Only few minor changes were made as requested. Now is the time for the public to speak on this matter.

Tom Jacobs noted that this is the first cut. We haven't had something like this before.

Michael Keane reminded the public that several people have worked a long time on this. The group included realtors, business owners, property owners and Town Council.

Dan Monks clarified that this will apply to vacant property only. Mary Garesh asked if it were just vacant land would this apply as well. Mr. Monks stated it would if the empty lot was in the Central Business District.

Mr. Jacobs again reminded the Board that this is the first effort and it can be revisited if needed.

Donald Campbell stated he would like to review the document closer as he thought it was going to be something different.

Mr. Monks again reminded the Board and public that the truly problematic properties are the ones that are completely vacant. Those that are occupied supply no significant problems.

Ms. Conner asked if there would be a warning supplied first. Mr. Monks stated that Kevin Goodhue, Town Building Inspector typically sends a letter first identifying the issues. In the past most will do something once that letter is received.

Tom Jacobs stated the Board would revisit this in two weeks at the next meeting. Any comments or concerns should be sent to Mr. Harrington at the Town Offices.

Mr. Harrington again noted that this ordinance is posted on the Town's website for review by public.

6. SET FY 2017 PROPERTY TAX RATES

The Manager stated the education portion of real estate taxes has gone down this year. The Town portion of taxes has gone up slightly, however less than anticipated. It will be the first time in almost (20) years that the combined rate will be almost level funded. In the past years the education portion constantly outpaced the Town's.

FY' 2017's tax rates are as follows (per \$100 of the assessed value of property):

General	\$0.6319	(up by \$0.0397)
Highway	\$0.3772	(down by \$0.0106)
Fire (Village)	\$0.0784	(down by \$0.0047)

The increase in General Fund includes the voted upon amounts for various local agencies. The Manager also noted that the Rural Fire tax rate is separate and will be a different amount

Motion: Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded to set the Town FY'17 General Fund, Highway Fund and Village Fire tax rate as presented. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

7. BORROWING (F-350, GATOR & MOWER)

The Manager noted these items were approved already in the budgeting process. The bank has allowed us to combine the borrowing for a total of \$64,000 for all three items.

Motion: Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded to waive the reading of the borrowing note presented. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

Motion: Jim Carroll moved and Jeanne Conner seconded to approve the borrowing as presented. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

8. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager stated he mailed 439 letters today with return postcards to those in the PFOA affected areas. This is to determine the level of interest of connecting to municipal water lines should we run them in their area.

Testing for PFOA's continues. There have been some additional hits in the Chapel Road area. We are not sure yet how much more this would add to the cost of the project. Levels continue to decrease as they move outward.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Michael Keane thanked the Manager and VLCT (Vermont Leagues of Cities and Towns) for the Select Board Training Session recently. The Towns of Shaftsbury, Readsboro and North Bennington joined us. It was a full day.

Mr. Keane also thanked the investors of the Greenberg property. This can be the trigger event. He asked the Select Board and the public to think about what the bigger picture is; think about what they want Bennington to be in (10) years.

Tom Jacobs noted this wouldn't be just the Greenberg lot. We need a community vision and agenda. He would like to see on a future agenda a discussion regarding the Town's Charter. We need to think about how that will fit the future.

Mr. Jacobs continued by expressing concern about extended stay facilities in Bennington. Lodging facilities that allow people to virtually live there are doing a disservice to those residents. Many are not fit to house people and/or families; they are not acceptable conditions. He would like to also put this on a future agenda for discussion.

Jim Carroll congratulated Polly Vanderlinde and the Sonatina School for their musical flash mob at the four corners. This made him think about the many other things that could be done with those crosswalks. He suggested using them as billboard space for upcoming events. He asked the Chamber of Commerce and the BBC (Better Bennington Corp) to consider this.

Jeanne Conner attended a Select Board / School Board meeting and felt it was a very productive use of time. They focused on one subject and dove deep instead of skimming many subjects in one meeting. Ms. Conner also asked if the Select Board ever had a student representative on the Board. She asked the Board to consider the idea.

The Manager stated we have had interns at the Town Offices in different departments. Most have been college students and designed their own program.


Tom Jacobs noted there was a need for Executive Session.

Motion: Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion finding that an Executive Session be held on a contracts matter and that premature general public knowledge of that matter would place a person(s) involved at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

10. Executive Session

A. Contracts

Respectfully submitted,


Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary