

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

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2017

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Jacobs-Chair; Donald Campbell-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeanne Conner; Chad Gordon; Carson Thurber; Jeannie Jenkins

Absent: None

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Zirwat Chowdhury, Community Development Director; 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 – September 11, 2017

B) Warrants

MOTION: Donald Campbell motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept and approve the Minutes of September 11, 2017 as well as the warrants as submitted. Motion passed unanimously

3. CITIZENS

Robert Plunkett stepped forward as the Co-Chair of the Charter Review Committee. He wanted to invite the public to an informational forum on Wednesday September 27, 2017 at 5:30pm here at the Bennington Firehouse. There will be a presentation on the different types of government etc, followed by an opportunity for questions and comments on the Charter Review.

The Select Board asked if this would also be on CAT-TV. Mr. Plunkett stated CAT-TV would be there.

No other citizens spoke this evening.

4. MUNICIPAL PLANNING GRANT APPLICATION – BENNINGTON CULTURAL PLAN

Dan Monks introduced Michelle Marrocco of BCRC (Bennington County Regional Commission). She is the Community & Economic Development Assistant. They are seeking approval to apply for a Municipal Planning Grant for a Bennington County Cultural Plan to include Bennington and Manchester. Bennington's Planning Commission has recommended approval.

Ms. Marrocco gave a brief background on the recognition of growth of the cultural community in Bennington. We were listed as #3 on a National list of vibrant small arts communities. Improving the cultural economy is a great way to improve the overall economy of a community.

The grant is for \$35,000 with a local match of \$10,000 required. If approved the grant will be used over (18) months to form a steering committee, define what is a cultural asset is, take inventory of those assets, and develop goals, a vision and action plans. Although BCRC is prepared to cover the full match amount, they would ask each Bennington and Manchester to consider donating some type monetary support. The monetary decision does not have to be made tonight.

Tom Jacobs asked if this was a Federal grant and how they would measure success. Ms. Marrocco noted it is a State grant and success would be in the development of an actual plan and how many of the community members get involved.

Donald Campbell stated he was excited about this. He asked for examples of other communities that have already done this and why it might be good for us. Ms. Marrocco stated Brattleboro has only developed a small plan that was incorporated into their Town Plan. The art field (designers, artists, creative positions) account for 4% of all jobs in the nation. Many areas have been revitalized due to arts communities. We can also set a precedence for the State with this. It creates a leverage and community pride. This can also create more opportunities and resources.

Jeannie Jenkins asked about the match portion. Again Ms. Marrocco noted that BCRC is prepared to cover the match in staff time. However, they would ask each Bennington and Manchester to contribute some type of monetary support to be determined at a later date to show additional support for this project.

Ms. Jenkins asked if there would be any opportunity for public input. Ms. Marrocco stated there would be three public/community meetings prior to an adoption into the Town Plans.

Tom Jacobs noted this could also be a good tool for improving job force. He asked how they plan to recruit for the Steering Committee. Ms. Marrocco stated aside from the few individuals who are very involved the cultural communities, it would be an open invitation.

Mr. Jacobs then asked the Town Manager if some of the monies budgeted for Regional Development could be used here. The Manager stated that was not the original plan, but yes. They could also consider some of the monies in the Contingency budget at the end of the year.

The Manager then asked Ms. Marrocco if Manchester has signed off on this yet. She stated they had not. She meets with their Select Board tomorrow evening.

The application is due October 2, 2017. The final decision would be made mid-December. The Award would be made in January 2018 and work for (18) months.

Zirwat Chowdhury, Bennington Community Development Director stated this is good timing as our cultural history is expanding. It allows us to redefine and expand our cultural history as there has been more development in our role in the Underground Railroad.

MOTION: Jim Carroll motioned and Donald Campbell seconded a motion to accept and adopt the resolution for an application of a Municipal Planning Grant to develop a Cultural Plan for Bennington County.

Discussion:

Jim Carroll asked if Manchester does not agree to approve would Bennington receive the entire \$35,000 benefit. Ms. Marrocco stated they would not. It would have to be modified and simply reduced to approximately \$15,000.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously.

5. TAX SALE PROPERTIES - PROPOSED FOR SALE

The Manager noted the Tax Sale Redemption period for 2016 Tax Sale has ended. The Town now owns (5) of those properties. They had been put out for sealed bid request. The minimum bid was derived from what was owed to the Town in legal fees and delinquent taxes and/or water and sewer. We received (4) worthy bids. The remaining property is being put back out for bid.

Of the four worthy bids, (3) met or exceeded the minimum bid. If the Select Board approves the sale, the excess would then be sent to the prior owner (who lost the property at tax sale). The Town would only receive what is owed in legal fees, taxes and water and sewer. The fourth property although below the minimum, we are recommending acceptance of that bid. This property is in very poor condition and has been empty for a very long time. It is not likely we would receive any closer to the minimum.

Tom Jacobs asked the Board vote of the first three that meet or exceed the minimum bid first and vote on the other property separately. The Board agreed.

The Manager stated the first three properties as follows:

<i>217 Washington Ave</i>	<i>Minimum Bid = \$ 24,822.99</i>	<i>Bid Received \$28,000</i>
<i>937 Gage Street</i>	<i>Minimum Bid = \$20,831.24</i>	<i>Bid Received \$28,600</i>
<i>816 Main Street</i>	<i>Minimum Bid = \$37,118.91</i>	<i>Bid Received \$37,401</i>

MOTION: Donald Campbell motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept the bids as presented for 217 Washington Avenue, 937 Gage Street and 816 Main Street.

Discussion:

Donald Campbell asked the Manager to repeat the division of money that will be received for these properties. The Manager again explained the Town is not in the business of taking and selling homes. The Town will only receive what is owed in delinquent taxes, water and sewer and any legal fees for the process. All excess above that amount will be sent to the prior owner.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously

Tom Jacobs stated he would recuse himself from the discussion/vote of the fourth property 213 Grove Street as he represents the bidder SVMC (Southwestern Vermont Medical Center) in other matters.

Donald Campbell continued the discussion as Co-Chair. The Manager stated the final property for discussion as stated earlier did fall short of the minimum bid. For reasons discussed above he is recommending approval.

213 Grove Street Minimum Bid = \$ 28,687.81

Bid Received \$30,000

The Manager noted that once the property closed, the Town would write off the balance. Discussion continued on the process of Tax Sales. The Manager stated only after two years of delinquency with no repayment plan in place does a property become eligible for tax sale. After a sale the property owner still has one more year to redeem it. The Town is not in the business of or wants to be in any competition for taking homes. Each tax year the Education portion of the taxes is paid out to the school regardless if it is collected or not. Therefore, the Town must carry the school delinquencies as well the town portion.

Chad Gordon stated he supported this bid because although it is \$8,000 short, its \$30,000 we don't currently have.

Donald Campbell noted the bidder is SVMC Healthy Homes program. They have already done several nice projects. It cleans them up and puts them back on the tax rolls.

Dan Monks stated as a Board member of the Healthy Homes they too are not in competition with other developers. They only go after these abandoned homes that no one else seems to want. After the work is completed they are offered to deserving families.

MOTION: Jim Carroll motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to accept the bids as presented for 213 Grove Street. Motion passed unanimously (Tom Jacobs abstained)

Tom Jacobs asked if there were any properties going for tax sale this year. The Manager stated at this time there are (18) properties listed for tax sale. This is scheduled for October 3, 2017 at 10:00am at the Town Offices. We continue to reduce this list until the day of the sale, as people and/or mortgages continue to come through with payments.

6. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager noted he has only one action item this evening. It is a request for Main Street Road closure for the annual Fallapalooza festival on Saturday October 28, 2017 from 7:00am – 4:00pm.

MOTION: Jim Carroll motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to approve the request for the Main Street road closure for the annual Fallapalooza as presented. Motion passed unanimously

The Manager continued with the Semi-Annual Hydrant Flushing announcement. Hydrant Flushing began today and will run for two weeks. Some residents may experience discolored water. Residents only need to run the cold water to flush it clean.

Jeanne Conner asked if the ballots for the Wastewater (Sewer) Bond were ready. The Manager stated they are ready for absentee/early voting.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Jeanne Conner thanked Donald Campbell for all his work on the Act 46 committee. He was the perfect person for that leadership role. Mr. Campbell thanked her for the recognition, however it was a group effort. He believes they have submitted a good plan to the State. Certainly, better than what would have been handed down if we did not choose to develop one. Act 46 effects not only our quality of education but has financial impacts as well.

Mr. Campbell noted the community vote will be on November 7, 2017. You will vote not only to accept the plan but also to choose Board of Directors. He also noted that Cassandra Barbeau, Bennington Town Clerk has been the most helpful in all of this.

Jeannie Jenkins asked if there would be a public hearing or meeting. Mr. Campbell stated they must wait to see if all of the communities involved will be voting before they schedule something.

Jim Carroll praised Officer Chris Lauzon in his assistance in finding Mr. Carroll stolen van over the weekend. In the end all that was taken from inside the van was a phone charger and a vile of his father's ashes. Mr. Carroll hopes the ashes will change the suspects attitude, as there is no coming back from a dose of Joseph Carroll in your life.

Chad Gordon noted the next regularly scheduled Select Board meeting falls on Columbus Day. He asked if a meeting will still be held. The Manager stated there would be a meeting. Tom Jacobs agreed.

Tom Jacobs asked which presentation is scheduled for that meeting. The Manager stated the Rescue Squad would be before the board on October 9, 2017. Mr. Jacobs stated he would like to resurrect the invitations to local businesses to come before the board. He believes it is good exposure for those businesses and allows the Board to see how they can improve communication etc.

There was no other business this evening

Tom Jacobs stated there was no need for Executive Session.

Motion: Jim Carroll moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to close the meeting. Motion passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary