

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

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2016

MINUTES

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

Absent: None

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michael Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (16) Citizens

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

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

A) Minutes – October 24, 2016

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

MOTION: Donald Campbell motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept and approve the minutes of October 24, 2016 as presented, as well as the warrants as submitted. Motion passed unanimously

C) Proclamation: Small Business Saturday

Michael Keane read the proclamation

MOTION: Jim Carroll motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to accept and sign the Small Business Saturday proclamation as submitted. Motion passed unanimously

3. CITIZENS

Sam Restino stepped forward regarding several recent protests at the “Four Corners”. He asked if there was a permit issued to do so or a policy in place for this. Mr. Restino is concerned about citizen safety.

Tom Jacobs stated there was no official policy in place and referred to our First Amendment Rights. The Manager stated the Town simply asks those who organize such an event notify the Manager's office and to not block pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Mr. Restino also wanted to recognize all the recent work done on sidewalks and roadways on the east end of Town. Town crews have worked hard and the work looks great. It is greatly appreciated; Kudos to the Town crews.

Michael Harrington stepped forward to remind the residents of Bennington to fill out the Citizen Survey recently released. A link may be found on the Town's website. Paper copies are also available through the Town Offices. We will be accepting surveys until November 30, 2016 so that we may have the results available in January 2017. To date we have received 343 responses.

No other citizens stepped forward.

4. INTERFAITH COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

Charlie Gingo stepped forward. Tom Jacobs thanked Mr. Gingo for all that he and his organization does.

Mr. Gingo reviewed the history and growth/development of the activities they provide. They are a non-profit that became incorporated in 2001; however their roots began in the mid-1970's. He listed the many programs in Bennington they are responsible for. Some include the Food & Fuel program, Free Health Clinic that began in 2009, Dental Assistance program, Kitchen Cupboard (food pantry), Healthcare Navigation, Women's Health and Drug & Mental Health Screening programs.

The organization runs on 165 volunteers and the generosity of our community. They also partner with several doctors and dentists locally. Mr. Gingo is concerned that poverty is becoming "normalized". We need to see it and not just walk past it each day. If someone is caught up in poverty they are focused on what/how they will eat etc now. It is very hard for them to see to see how to make a better life looking forward.

Mr. Gingo reviewed most recent census statistics regarding poverty in our area and the average costs of apartments. Poverty is defined as earning \$11,000 per year (or less) for a single person; \$24,000 for a family. It can be cross-generational or situational (divorce, job loss, fire).

Poverty can stop a community from reaching its full potential. We need to connect the dots between economic development and social well-being. Mr. Gingo listed some ideas that included: Focusing on job creation, training, mentoring & apprenticeship, more access to affordable housing, advocating for high quality education from K-12 and high quality and access to child care.

Mr. Gingo encouraged the Board to continue activities and make decision based on the suggestions above. We need to embrace poverty not ignore it any longer.

Tom Jacobs noted a successful community is a healthy community; however this does come with an expense. We must get involved and tackle head on.

Jeanne Conner asked which Dentist was involved with the clinic. Mr. Gingo stated Dr. Carmichael out of Shaftsbury Dental.

Justin Corcoran thanked Mr. Gingo for all that he & the organization do. He feels Board's job is to help lower the current poverty rate in Bennington which is according to the census numbers noted early, approximately 20%.

Jim Carroll also thanked Mr. Gingo and his volunteers. He discussed briefly the idea of "livable wage". This changes someone from being a "net consumer" of tax money to a "net contributor" to tax money.

Jeannie Jenkins thanked Mr. Gingo and was thankful for his presentation. It is important for people to understand these numbers

Donald Campbell asked if Mr. Gingo sees any efforts from the State level. Mr. Gingo was unsure how the new incoming administration would approach these issues. There is always a squeeze on the limited resources and many are competing for them. He has not lost hope however.

Jeanne Connor asked where someone could donate food to the Kitchen Cupboard program. Mr. Gingo stated there are several run programs in the area including Sacred Heart. To contribute to specifically the Kitchen Cupboard program food donations or Price Chopper/Hannaford gift cards may be given at the First Baptist Church on Main Street any time.

5. SENIOR CENTER NON-RESIDENT FEE PROPOSAL

The Manager stated costs are periodically reviewed. It has been noted that many “outsiders” utilize the Senior Center including residents of Pownal, Shaftsbury, Arlington and even Hoosick Falls, NY. It is wonderful that these area residents want to join our programs, however it is the taxpayers of Bennington who fund the center. It could be nice if these area residents contributed to the costs. The overall Senior Center budget is approximately \$130,000 per year. The proposed fees are not substantial for the non-residents but they can helpful to run the buildings and programs.

Tom Jacobs noted the Board had received several comments from the public that were in their packet.

Donald Campbell stated he did not have an appetite to solve a problem that he was not so sure we have. He would like to see hard data of who uses the center, for which programs etc. Mr. Campbell suggested offering a free membership, requiring basic information be filled in so we can begin gathering that hard line data.

Justin Corcoran agreed with Mr. Campbell and liked his suggestion. He did appreciate, however, the Manager looking for ways to help cure inefficiencies.

Tom Jacobs opened the meeting for comment to those present.

Steve Smith area resident and senior citizen stepped forward. He defined this community as more than just Bennington. Those other residents also come to Bennington to shop and eat out etc. Seniors do not need more financial stress. Many of them are living in poverty as well. The Senior Center is an important social aspect. Isolation makes poverty worse. Mr. Smith also suggested an Advisory Committee be formed for the Senior Center.

Tom Jacobs, along with most members of the Board, agreed they are not ready to make any decision regarding these fees. He would like to gather important information and perhaps have the conversation in the future. He supported the ideas of a free membership program to help gather the information. Mr. Jacobs also supported the idea of developing an Advisory Committee for the Senior Center.

Sam Restino wanted to remind the Board and the public that “Senior” is defined as over (50) not only those over (65) years of age.

A Senior Center attendee (no name given) spoke of the great benefits she has experienced by joining the “Bone Builders” program.

Another Senior Center attendee (no name given) says she lives on Social Security Income only. She is not rich; however she does not know what she would do or where she would go if she couldn’t afford to go to the Senior Center. It is a great place! She gets to socialize with

people like herself and doesn't feel so alone. She also volunteers many hours there as well. If she and others didn't volunteer who would do the work?

It was asked if the Town was utilizing any Federal Grants for renovations, nutrition, or transportation costs. The Manager stated at this time there has been no requests to do so.

Jim Carroll thought volunteerism could be a great way to help this situation. He suggested having the out of town residents commit to a certain amount of volunteer hours instead of charging a fee.

The Manager stated he would work with Tracey Knights, Director, on a Free Membership registration program for January 1st, 2017.

6. POLICY REGARDING AGENCIES ON MARCH BALLOT

Tom Jacobs stated he had received a request to make changes to this policy. The Manager stated the request was signed by four agencies that are required to petition to be on the ballot every year because their individual requests are more than \$7,500 each. The Manager noted currently the combined requests for all (16) agencies stands at a total of \$135,000. Those agencies that request less than \$7,500 and do not change the requested amount from previous year only need to petition once every three years.

Donald Campbell acknowledged that these were non-profit organizations doing social work, which never have enough money. He suggested working a total budget line item and the organizations would receive a capped percentage. The Manager explained that is not allowable by law. Each organization, by State law can petition for any amount they want.

Justin Corcoran suggested they make no changes to the policy. It seems to be working well and was designed to be an incentive not to ask for too much. The Town has no control over how much each organization petitions for. If the totals (of all agencies) is \$200,000 and they all pass, the Board either needs to raise taxes to acquire that money or cut over \$200,000 from a budget that is already been approved and set by that point.

The Manager stated no action is required to keep the policy in place at this time. The Board may bring this back for further discussion on a future agenda. Justin Corcoran stated this policy is not about these four agencies, it's about the possible impact on the taxpayers.

7. SIDEWALK SEATING POLICY – 2nd READING

Dan Monks reviewed the history of this policy. He noted the additional changes as requested from the last meeting.

Motion: Donald Campbell moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to accept the Sidewalk Seating Policy as written and presented this evening. Motion passed unanimously

8. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager stated although the Town owns the land the Transfer Station sits on Casella Waste owns/runs the Transfer Station. Fees have not changed in approximately (20) years. The

lease agreement with Cassella states the Town must approve any proposed changes in fees. These attached proposed fees are for trash collection only. Almost all electronic disposals are now free, as is recycling for Bennington residents.

Tom Jacobs stated the Town however runs the metal pile. The Manager confirmed this and added the Town also runs the leaf and yard waste (& chipper) pile.

Motion: Michael Keane moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded a motion to accept the proposed (increased) Transfer Station Fee Schedule as presented.

Discussion:

Donald Campbell asked if there could be some negotiation. He would like to see waste oil be accepted at (5) gals or less for free. Mr. Campbell would like to encourage those who change their own vehicle oil etc to recycle it instead of just throwing it on the way side. The Manager stated this could be requested.

Justin Corcoran had questions regarding terms of the lease for the land with Casella. The Manager reviewed that history and stated they have been a good partner.

**VOTE: Approve (6) vs. (1) Opposed (Justin Corcoran)
Motion passed**

The Manager noted the State of Vermont has now encouraged the Town to apply for the “Planning Funds” for the Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade. These funds are the first step in the formal design and upgrade. Once granted these funds become part of the overall bond and repayment is not required until two-years after the project is completed.

Motion: Michael Keane moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded a motion to authorize the Manager to apply for Planning Funds for the Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade.

Discussion:

Jeannie Jenkins asked if this was in response to the need for an upgrade to our treatment plant. The Manager stated it was. The recent RBC issues brought further light upon this. We currently have (24) RBC’s on-line and running. In the near future there will be at total of (26) on-line. Once the additional two are on-line, the crews will take two older units off to thoroughly clean and perform some routine maintenance.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously

The Manager discussed payments in this warrant for the connection to municipal water for those properties with PFOA contaminated wells and adjacent to existing municipal water mains. The State has committed to reimbursing the Town for these costs.

Tom Jacobs reminded the public that there is still an opening on the Housing Authority. He then asked when a representative would be presenting to the Board. The Manager stated

previously there had been several scheduling conflicts. They are now ready for a date to be set. The Manager suggested the first regularly scheduled meeting in December. Mr. Jacobs agreed and suggested the Board give them a list of basic information they will be looking for so they are prepared.

Donald Campbell had some additional questions regarding the Downtown Hotel Study. The Manager reminded him this report is not to the level of actual development. Dan Monks stepped forward and stated this report will give a five-year window of impact (if any) on not only a downtown hotel but also the competitors in the area as well.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Jeanne Conner praised the “Empty Bowls” event/fundraiser. The volunteers, food and attendance were wonderful. Also a great amount of information was available.

Tom Jacobs praised Cassandra Barbeau, Town Clerk and Kayla Thompson, Assistant Town Clerk for all their work on Voting Day. They did a great job on such a busy day. Everything went very smooth.

Michael Keane agreed with Mr. Jacobs. Mr. Keane volunteered that day; both Ms. Barbeau and Ms. Thompson were there at 5:00AM and stayed well after 8:00pm that night. It was a long stressful day however they did an impeccable job.

Donald Campbell praised the Town’s Staff at Willow Park. They did a great job for the cyclist’s competition.

Mr. Campbell asked about the closure of the Recreation Center on Sundays. The Manager stated as student lifeguards go back to school we enter into a staff shortage for the pool. The Sunday shutdown is expected to be temporary. We hope to have the Recreation Center back open on Sundays in January.

Tom Jacobs stated there was a need for Executive Session however due to the late hour all members of the Board agreed to defer the Executive Session discussion to the next meeting.

Motion: Jim Carroll moved and Michael Keane seconded a motion to close this meeting. Motion passed unanimously

~~10. Executive Session~~

~~A. Personnel~~

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary