

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

***MONDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2014***

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Greg Van Houten- Chair; Sharyn Brush-Vice Chair; Tom Jacobs; Jim Carroll; John McFadden; Michael Keane; Justin Corcoran

*Absent: None*

**ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Mike Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; RJ Joly, Highway Superintendent; Patrick McArdle – Rutland Herald; Keith Witcomb - Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (12) Citizens.

At 6:00 P.M., **Greg Van Houten** called the meeting to order.

**1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Greg Van Houten, recited by all.

**2. MINUTES – OCTOBER 06, 2014**

There were no corrections for the minutes of October 06, 2014

**Motion:** **Sharyn Brush motioned and Michael Kean seconded to approve the Minutes of October 06, 2014 as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (Justin Corcoran & John McFadden abstained)**

**3. WARRANTS**

The next warrants of FY'15 were reviewed. Sharyn Brush questioned a payment to Goldstone Architecture. Dan Monks stated 272 Union Street has had a court order for many years to make some improvements to the exterior. At this point it has been 8 years and nothing has been done. This is a quote for this work to be completed.

There were no further questions. Warrants were then circulated for signatures.

#### **4. CITIZENS**

Loyal Wescott discussed the amount of Police visits to two properties on Pleasant Street. He noted that there was even an arrest made at one of them today. He wanted to continue by discussing again, certain sections of the Constitution and sex offender laws he would like in place. Greg Van Houten reminded him that some of those laws don't work the way most people would think. Mr. Van Houten thanked Mr. Wescott for his concern and coming forward, however the Select Board has its limitations, as do those laws.

Mr. Wescott then suggested that landlords be charged a fee if the police are required to make a visit to one of their locations due to an offender issue.

The Manager reminded the Board and the public that the new Catalyst Project is creating a closer relationship between landlords and the Police Department. Today's arrest is proof of the improved cooperation.

#### **5. A.D.A. SIDEWALK AUDIT PRESENTATION**

Greg Van Houten noted this was an on-going conversation that began last year. Charlie Murphy presented the findings. He works for the Vermont Center for Independent Living. There is a need for better access to sidewalks in the community. They worked with several organizations to create this audit including AARP, Town Officials and the ADA. Several aspects were studied including conditions of sidewalks, streets and driver's behaviors. After the report was finalized he met with the Town Manager, Jim Sullivan of BCRC and RJ Joly, Highway Superintendent, to discuss the results.

Tracy Dorman spoke of her experiences getting around Bennington. She is not a resident but she enjoys working, shopping and playing in Bennington. She is proud of this report and hopes that officials will consider the recommendations and prioritize them in the budget.

Maggie Bernstein has been a resident of Bennington for 5 years but had worked in Bennington for 8 years prior. She spoke of her challenges getting around downtown now that she is disabled. Ms. Bernstein spoke specifically about the difficulty crossing at the Four Corners. The length of time (26 seconds) is not long enough to get across the street and is very fearful.

Mary Garresh thanked the Select Board for taking a serious interest in making Bennington more accessible for the disabled. She understands that some of the improvements can be very costly but others can be done at a low cost and make a big difference. The cross time at the Four Corners is one of those low cost items that can be corrected.

Cindy Everson spoke of the benefits of walking for all abilities. She shares support in addressing these issues. She also invited the public and the Select Board to attend a Public Concerns meeting that will be held at the Benmont Mill on November 18, 2014.

Mike Bethel moved forward to discuss the issue of sidewalk gaps. Some are wider than others and are very difficult to navigate. He gave an example of streets that had a smoother transition. It was explained that the larger gap is set by State of Vermont specifications. If a sidewalk project is funded by State or Federal money than it must be done to their specifications. Those that are completed within Town budget monies are done to our standard, which is the tighter gap.

Tom Jacobs asked if some of the improvements could be done piecemeal through budgets. The Manager stated some could be. An audio notice is needed at County Street intersection. We will be looking at that improvement this budget session. Others will have to be piecemealed through different budgets.

John McFadden and the Manager continued by discussing how cross-times are determined and the addition of other cross signals in town.

Greg Van Houten thanked everyone for bringing this forward. It is good timing as the Select Board enters into the next budget discussions.

## **6. STATUS OF JOB AVAILABILITY – WENDY MORSE VT DET**

Wendy Morse introduced herself as the Regional Manager at the Vermont Department of Employment and Training. She is also a member of the Bennington Economic Partners group. Currently the State of Vermont's unemployment rate is 4.4%. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> lowest in the nation. Bennington's unemployment rate is 5.1%. This is lower than last year.

Ms. Morse continued by stating further statistics relating to job openings within Bennington and within in a 25 mile radius. Currently there are 1,116 job postings. She clarified that some of these postings could hold multiple positions within the 1 posting. Healthcare and Social Assistance currently have the most positions available. Employers are finding a gap because of a lack of qualified people.

John McFadden asked if there was anything the Select Board or the School Boards can do to help change that. Ms. Morse stated she does work with the CDC, however those kinds of changes take a significant amount of time.

Michael Keane asked about the levels of openings. Ms. Morse stated that that are a wide range from entry level to management. Mr. Keane stated that a central location to look for employment is needed to bridge the gap between employers and those who are looking. Ms. Morse stated that the Department of Labor is the best most central location for this. Mr. Keane asked about outreach to employers. Ms. Morse stated they do multiple "hiring events" and job fairs throughout the year. They also conduct cold calls.

Discussion continued regarding bringing apprenticeship programs back into the Bennington area and incentives for the disabled and those on welfare. Mike Bethel would like to see something that encourages those to train and work without being penalized. Ms. Morse noted there is a program called "Ticket to Work" that assists with that transition.

Greg Van Houten thanked Ms. Morse for her presentation and summed up by stating if there are employment needs everyone should contact the Department of Labor.

## **7. 2014 GRAND LIST – ERRORS AND OMISSIONS**

The Town Manager noted there was one new Veteran's Exemption status. Tom Jacobs asked how long the resident had lived in the home. The Manager noted that this had been an eligibility issue. To receive the Veteran's Exemption you must be 50% disabled due to service. This resident was finally granted that status.

**MOTION: Michael Keane motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept and approve altering of the Grand List for the property presented. Motion passed unanimously**

## **8. NOTICE OF PROPERTY SALE (TAX SALE PROPERTIES)**

The Manager stated the Town had acquired (3) properties through last year's Property Tax Sale. There are (2) Single Family homes and (1) Multi-family home. He would like approval to set up for proposals to be sent to the Town Manager by November 13<sup>th</sup> by 3:00pm. At the Select Board meeting set for December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 they will be presented to the Board for review. The Board can then either accept the offers or reject them. The minimum bid shall be what is owed to the Town.

**MOTION: Tom Jacobs motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to approve public notice of sale for the three properties presented. Motion passed unanimously**

John McFadden asked if there were other loans owed. The Manager explained that all but State and/or Federal liens are cleaned at the tax sale.

Greg Van Houten asked if they had been abandoned. The Manager explained that most were, however a person who was later arrested on other charges was living in one of them. Jim Carroll asked if they were habitable. The Manger stated they all need a lot of work, but they are habitable. The locations are 209 Maple Street (single family), 207 Silver Street (single family) and 206-208 Branch Street (multi-unit).

## **9. MORGAN STREET WETLANDS – ADDITIONAL LAND ACCEPTANCE**

Dan Monks stepped forward with Donald Campbell of Vermont Land Trust to present. They summarized the project as a whole and noted they were seeking a consensus to obtain an additional 25-acre parcel. The total goal in fundraising would now be \$100,000. A closing date would be hopefully early winter perhaps January 2015.

Mr. Campbell continued by noting the next step after the closing would be developing a Management Plan. There will be public meetings held and this would be where the public can get more involved. It takes typically one year to develop a proper Management Plan. He also noted that at this time they already have ½ of the goal amount in "soft pledges". If fundraising were very successful any overage would be set aside to offset any town usages (ie. information kiosks, boardwalks etc).

**A consensus was reached by the Board to continue to move forward in obtaining an additional 25 acres for this project as presented.**

Several Board members agreed this is one the best project in recent years.

## **10. MANAGER'S REPORT**

The Manager noted that the Benmont Avenue/Hunt Street Bridge project has received and awarded the project bid. The contractor is pursuing an aggressive schedule and looks to begin in November. The first pre-construction meeting was held last week. There will be one-lane traffic through the winter. This may speed up the completion date to the winter of 2015 instead of into 2016. The Town of Bennington already has their required 5% set aside.

The Manager also noted he met today with several other communities and the BCRC regarding the Solid Waste Implementation Plan. All agree to move forward with a model alliance structure and work together to share facilities alongside a private or public contractor.

Greg Van Houten asked about funding regarding the Governor's press conference. The Manager stated the details are not clear yet.

Jim Carroll questioned the timing of notice and was disappointed that no one from the Select Board could be there to support. The Manager noted he was not informed until ½ hour before the actual conference. Greg Van Houten agreed it was extremely short notice and hopes for better communication in the future. It is hard to get behind ideas if we are not informed. It is an election year and politicians are making many "whistle stops". Dick Sears sent apologies for the lack of notice.

## **11. OTHER BUSINESS**

Tom Jacobs, Michael Keane, Sharyn Brush, Jim Carroll and Justin Corcoran all reminded the public that Voting Day is November 4<sup>th</sup>. Get out and Vote!

John McFadden questioned why there was a notice that the Recreation Center Pool was closed today. The Manager stated he was not advised of this and will look into it.

Greg Van Houten also reminded the public to go out and vote. The polls will be open from 7:00am – 7:00pm at the Bennington Firehouse. Registered voters can also absentee vote at the Town Office 8:00am – 5:00pm up until November 3, 2014.

Mr. Van Houten then noted there was need for Executive Session.

**Motion: Justin Corcoran motioned to close the meeting and move into Executive Session. Sharyn Brush seconds the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

## **12. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

A. Contract (4)

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez  
Secretary