

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

MONDAY, JANUARY 12, 2015

MINUTES

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

Absent: None

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Mike Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Keith Witcomb - Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (25) 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.

At this time Greg Van Houten introduced each member of the Board, the Town Manager and the Recording Secretary.

Mr. Van Houten also announced that on February 12, 2015 a Fluoride forum will be held at the Bennington Firehouse on River Street from 6:30-8:30pm. This is a forum for all to speak. There will also be a question and answer period. CAT-TV will be broadcasting the meeting. For any of those with questions that cannot make this forum, please feel free to submit your question in writing or via-email.

2. MINUTES – DECEMBER 22, 2014

Spelling corrections were submitted for the names of those who spoke on behalf of the Oral Health Committee. No prior written presentation had been submitted listing speakers for the presentation at the December 22, 2014 meeting. There were no other corrections for the minutes of December 22, 2014

Motion: Sharyn Brush motioned and Michael Keane seconded to approve the Minutes of December 22, 2014 as submitted with spelling corrections noted. Motion passed unanimously.

3. WARRANTS

The next warrants of FY'15 were reviewed. There were no questions. Warrants were then circulated for signatures.

4. CITIZENS

Joanne Erenhouse, Chamber of Commerce stepped forward. She invited all those present and the public to join the Chamber of Commerce for their Legislative Breakfast on Monday January 19th, 2015 from 7:30am – 9:00am at the Hampton Inn. The cost is \$5.00 at the door. This is a great opportunity to ask questions to our local delegation.

Dr. Alex Tenentes stepped forward. He wanted to submit information to the Select Board regarding fluoridation of water. Dr. Tenentes handed out a packet to each Select Board member and began reviewing the information. He broke down numbers such as the total cost to provide fluoride, the population of Bennington, average gallons per day used, how much is actually consumed (not used in laundry, showers etc) and the target community for which fluoride is supposed to target. He continued by citing USDA data. He strongly believes to fluoridate Bennington's water is fiscally irresponsible and illogical. Topical application continues to be the most effective use of fluoride, not consumption.

Dick Bower stepped forward and noted that science trumps mis-information. Public health is at stake.

Abby Shapiro stepped forward to state that adding an additional cost after approving a very expensive water bond is unconscionable. Only the ratepayers would bear this cost. This would be on top of the \$3.1 million dollar bond that was just approved, and not yet began to pay on. Ms. Shapiro stated this is not cost effective and read a statement from the EPA.

Greg Van Houten noted that the upcoming forum is the place for this discussion. This evening Town business must be conducted.

Sue Andrews introduced herself as an employee of the Interfaith Council. She stated that the cost is an emotional subject. However, the cost for this is a fraction of what it costs to provide relief for dental pain. There will be a lot of policy fuss including determining if only the ratepayers would pay. A few dollars upfront saves a major amount on the other side.

Dr. Dundas stated he was taken aback by the poor oral health in Bennington. He noted that 70 years ago Fluoride started in Michigan. If this were that harmful wouldn't we have heard about it by now?

Mary Lou Albert asked more about the upcoming forum. Greg Van Houten explained it is not a Select Board meeting. It will be a public forum with experts available to answer questions. Ms. Albert noted that this issue had been brought up several times before in Bennington and failed. The most recent was 14 years ago. A committee was formed and studied the issue for 9 months. In the end they did not recommend it. They provided a report with their findings and made multiple suggestions for other options. What happened to those options? Ms. Albert continued by noting they would like to conduct their own forum on February 19th, 2015. More details will follow.

Mike Harrington noted that the Select Board's email system was down for almost two weeks. Anyone who had submitted an e-mail in that timeframe and feels they did not receive an answer, please feel free to resend. The Select Board's email is: selectboard@benningtonvt.org.

Mr. Harrington also noted that there will be a meeting on Tuesday January 13, 2015 (tomorrow) from 4:00-6:00pm regarding Housing and Community Development as well as HUD funding.

Steven Smith stepped forward to ask about the Senior Citizen bus and why it was being taken away. The Manager stated that the Senior Citizen bus is NOT being taken away. This is a rumor that has been circulating. Greg Van Houten noted that the Senior Citizen budget meeting is being held this Saturday, January 17, 2015 at the Town Office beginning at 8:00am. He invited anyone interested to sit in on the meeting.

The Manager continued by noting that the bus is over 15 years old. The Town is keeping the bus and will use it on shorter distances. However, for longer trips the Town will be partnering up with the Green Mountain Community Network.

5. BENNINGTON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS PRESENTATION

Michael Harrington summarized and reviewed the Annual Reprioritization and Work Plan submitted by the Economic Development Partners. He noted they have been meeting once a month for the last 5-years. The partners oversee different strategies for development in Bennington.

Mr. Harrington continued by identifying some of the members of the partnership in the audience. He then identified the 6 priorities that the group will focus on in 2015. The group has (4) sub-committees/working groups. They are Workforce and Education, Recruitment, Retention and Expansion, Transportation and Other Infrastructure and the last group is Culture Recreation and Entertainment.

These groups have been recognized across the State for their communication level and participation levels. Funding at some point will be necessary to move forward on some of the goals. Identifying some of the sources for funding will be discussed at a later time.

Tom Jacobs asked what they believe have been their most significant accomplishments so far. He also asked them to identify what they see will be their biggest challenges looking forward. Where may the Select Board help with those?

Mr. Harrington noted that downtown Wi-Fi and significant progress with the Ninja Bike Path were some of the biggest accomplishments so far. Greg Van Houten noted that the Cultural Planning Committee has been working on a Cultural Town Plan. They are excited to do an Arts and Cultural launch come Spring this year (tentative date of April 15th, 2015).

Jeanie Jenkins stated she was on the Workforce & Education Committee. She is proud of the connections/ladders that were built between businesses and education. Businesses came into classrooms to discuss career paths and Teachers were able to conduct tours in businesses.

Joanne Erenhouse stated she was on the Cultural Committee and introduced many of the volunteers for the Ninja Bike Path. Bruce Lehman discussed how this came to be and how it has evolved over 30 years. Volunteers for physical labor are not hard to find. Grant writers however are much more difficult to find.

Michael Keane noted there is a lot more traffic now between Bennington and Montpelier. They are recognizing the faces of Bennington and that we are trying to get things done here.

John McFadden noted that in the report there were (18) strategies identified. Twelve (12) have now been completed. He would like to hear from businesses if these have improved their business and how. He would also like to know if the completion of any of these strategies was a deterrent for a business to start in Bennington.

Michael Harrington stated that the main reasons a businesses is deterred are difficulty finding work talent and land ownership/lease agreements at a reasonable rate. That is not anything the Economic Development Partners have control over. Mr. McFadden then requested to hear from businesses that are actually hiring. He would like to hear detail from them.

Tom Jacobs stated he would like to start putting faces on businesses. He too would like to hear from them directly, specifically how the Select Board is doing and how they could help.

6. DELINQUENT TAX PENALTY DISCUSSION

Tom Jacobs noted that when previously discussed, he thought the 8% penalty was too stringent. He now has second thoughts after doing further research. Majority of towns in Vermont still hold 8% penalty. With budget considerations, the reduction in penalty would dilute a significant portion of the budget. This then would be put back on the taxpayers to rejuvenate. There is only a small amount of voters/taxpayers the reduction in penalty would benefit. It is too responsive to far too few people.

The Manager then reviewed the tax delinquencies and how they are handled. Over the last 22 years the delinquency starts at 6% and within 8 months generally drops to 4%. The “new” delinquencies (first timers etc) make up only approximately 1-2%. He continued by discussing the “long term” delinquencies such as the Jard site and abandoned Mobile Homes or traditional built homes. Reducing the penalty therefore does not change the delinquencies or the numbers. It simply asks the rest of the taxpayers who pay on time to pick up the cost.

Tom Jacobs agreed and stated that the majority of taxpayers would then have to support the difference in money raised.

Greg Van Houten asked what the impact would be on the tax rate. The Manager stated it would approximately ½ cent on the tax rate to make the difference up (each year may be different).

John McFadden stated he was glad this was brought back for discussion. Greg Van Houten stated this is an economic versus philosophical question.

Motion: Tom Jacobs motioned to remove the question of reducing the penalty for late real estate tax payments from the March 2015 ballot. John McFadden seconds the motion.

Discussion:

Justin Corcoran stated he thought it was dangerous to count on this as a revenue stream. However this is a budget meeting discussion regardless of the position on this subject.

Jim Carroll stated he felt if you remove or even reduce the penalty, it only penalizes everyone else.

The Manager reminded everyone that the tax bills are sent out more than (2) months in advance. The Town also accepts postmarks. If someone has waited till the last minute to pay and somehow can't make it in, if it is postmarked by the Post Office that day the Town would accept it as on time.

***VOTE: 6 voted For vs. 1 Against (Greg Van Houten
The motion passed.
(The penalty reduction question shall be removed from the ballot).***

7. TOWN MANAGER'S EVALUATION PROCESS DISCUSSION

Michael Keane noted that there would be no actual evaluation this evening. This is simply a review of the documents. He reviewed how the Select Board and the sub-committee got to this point. The job description was updated from the 1995 version. Mr. Keane suggested that the job description be reviewed/updated every 3 years.

Justin Corcoran asked to see the original from 1995 so he may see what was changed.

Michael Keane asked the Board to further review the drafts and submit any questions or comments they may have to him by the end of the day Monday January 19, 2015. He would like to further discuss this at the next scheduled meeting.

Greg Van Houten noted it was great framework and had good new additions. Michael Keane noted those who were involved including the Manager and the Human Resources Administrator. He would like this to be put to work for a year and then review again to see where improvements can be made.

8. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager presented the Certificate of Highway Mileage by the State that must be signed by the Select Board every year. There are no changes this year and no additions. The Town of Bennington currently maintains 127 miles of roadway. The document was circulated for signatures.

Next the Manager noted that the Steering Committee for the Downtown Area Wide Plan is seeking (2) Select Board members to serve. Tom Jacobs and Michael Keane volunteered to serve on this committee.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Sharyn Brush asked how the roads were being handled today with the weather. The Manager noted that this evening might be an issue as much of it will ice over.

Ms. Brush then asked if there were any scheduled "shred days" coming up. The Manager noted that the last two were sponsored by outside organizations (VSECU and Heritage Credit Union). The Town has not scheduled one.

Michael Keane noted at the beginning of the meeting he gave an economic development document to John McFadden regarding Virginia and their progress. He will pass on a copy to the other Select Board members for their review as well.

Greg Van Houten wanted to thank the local Police Department, Fire Department and Rescue Squad for their assistance with a car accident that his very dear friend was involved in. They were all very professional and were able to keep her calm as well.

Greg Van Houten noted there was NO need for Executive Session.

Motion: Tom Jacobs motioned to close the meeting. John McFadden seconds the motion. Motion passed unanimously

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary