

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

MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2015

MINUTES

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

Absent: Justin Corcoran; Jim Carroll

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; (9) 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 due to the impending storm both the Recreation Center and the Senior Center will be closed tomorrow (Tuesday January 27, 2015).

2. MINUTES – JANUARY 10, 2015, JANUARY 12, 2015, JANUARY 17, 2015

It was noted that the meetings held on January 10th & January 17 were Budget Meetings. There were no corrections for the minutes of January 10th, 12th, or 17th, 2015.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to approve the Minutes of all three meetings (January 10, 2015, January 12, 2015 & January 17, 2015) as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran, Jim Carroll absent*)

3. WARRANTS

The next warrants of FY'15 were reviewed. Tom Jacobs had no specific questions for this budget, however questioned the general bidding policy of the Town. The Manager explained that the Town's policy is any amount over \$1,000 is required to receive (3)

comparable bids. Large project bids are publicly opened. Any amount under \$1,000 typically has a search conducted for a cost-effective and efficient contractor. The Town tries to spread the business around locally.

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

4. CITIZENS

Mary Lou Albert stepped forward to invite the Select Board and the public to the Firehouse on February 19th, 2015 between 6:00pm-8:00pm for an informational meeting on the harmfulness of adding Fluoride in water.

Greg Van Houten reminded everyone to register to vote, as this will be an advisory question on the ballot in March 2015.

Gerry Albert asked up till when people can register to vote. Mr. Van Houten noted that often it is up until the Saturday before voting day. However he urged the public to call their Town Clerk's office to verify.

Mr. Albert then also asked if North Bennington would be voting on the advisory question even though they are on a separate water system. Mr. Van Houten confirmed this. Mr. Albert's last question was approximately how much money is taken in each year from the sale of Morgan Springs Water. The Town Manager stated that this year sales have increased but are still not at capacity. Sales totals are at approximately \$40,000

Dr. Alex Tennentes stepped forward. He wanted to submit some additional information to the Select Board regarding fluoridation of water. Dr. Tennentes handed out a packet to each Select Board member and began reviewing the information. Mr. Van Houten reminded Dr. Tennentes that there is an established forum for his information. Now is not the time to make a presentation. It should be saved for the forum. Dr. Tennentes continued. Tom Jacobs noted a point of order that the citizen was continuing with a presentation after he has been advised not to do so. Dr. Tennentes thanked the Board for their time.

5. SISTER CITY PRESENTATION – TAGUM CITY, MINDANNAO, PHILIPPINES

Gregory Powers stepped forward to present. He noted his affiliation with Bennington College and the sister city collaboration. This is a National program recognized by many cities. Currently Bennington has (1) existing sister city in Nicaragua. Many U.S. cities have multiple. Pittsfield, MA for example has four.

This would be for the purpose of cultural and social exchange, inspire development and educational opportunities among many other benefits. Bennington College if approved would like to host a festival in the Spring introducing the public to the Pilipino culture, heritage, food etc. They would also like to establish pen-pals through the schools both in Bennington and in Tagum City to open up communication.

Mr. Powers noted that the National program requires the Select Board to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in order to be recognized.

Several Select Board members agreed this was a wonderful program and would like to see where it will bring both sides in a year.

Motion: Tom Jacobs motioned to authorize the Town Manager to sign the Memorandum of Understanding for the Sister City Program with Tagum City, Philippines. Michael Keane seconds the motion.

Discussion:

Sharyn Brush reads the memorandum in full

VOTE: **Motion passed unanimously** (*Justin Corcoran, Jim Carroll absent*)

6. WETLANDS PURCHASE AUTHORIZATION

Dan Monks provided an update on the Wetlands purchase. He was happy to report that through very generous donations, they have been able to raise all the money needed to make the purchase without any taxpayer funds. They would like however to continue to do some fundraising to provide some upgrades to the area. Mr. Monks thanked everyone for their very generous donations.

Mr. Monks stated that at this time he needs the Select Board to authorize the transfer of the 160 acres of land to the Town of Bennington and to approve the conveyance of conservation easement to the Land Trust. They may approve the Town Manager to sign all documents necessary for these events.

Motion: **Tom Jacobs motioned to approve the acquisition of lands as outlined in the January 15, 2015 memorandum provided and to approve the Town Manager to sign all documents necessary for that acquisition. Michael Keane seconds the motion.**

Discussion:

John McFadden had questions regarding the conservation restrictions. Mr. Monks noted that the development of the Management Plan for this property would be very public. It will take place over approximately (1) year's time. Once it is developed it will be presented to the Land Trust for approval and then presented to the Select Board as well to ensure it meets the needs of community.

VOTE: **Motion passed unanimously** (*Justin Corcoran, Jim Carroll absent*)

7. MICROLOAN PROGRAM RE-DESIGNATION

Michael Harrington made reference to last meeting's presentation on the Economic Development Plan for 2015. Frequent conversations focus on funding sources for many of the projects. The Micro-loan program began in 2006 but stalled due to some bad loans. Mr. Harrington would like to re-designate the existing funds in this program to foster and/or launch a re-investment into Bennington. He provided a draft of the changes to the Select Board for review.

John McFadden asked about annual contributions from the Town and how this fund would be replenished. Mr. Harrington noted that they are still working on how to effectively replenish these funds. Mr. McFadden stated he thought this was a great idea but we just need to be careful because money could run out fast.

Sharyn Brushed asked about the current outstanding loans. Michael Keane asked about reconciling those bad loans. Mr. Harrington stated that a good percentage could be reconciled. Approximately 75-80% of the existing micro-loans are active and replenishing the account.

Tom Jacobs suggested that in the future an annual amount should be a budget line item. We should invest in our own community.

The Manager noted that there is opportunity for this. The last two years the Town has budgeted \$50,000 to address the Kocher Drive/Landfill cleanup. Once this is finished we could keep that amount in the budget to invest without raising taxes. Mr. Harrington stated the Town then becomes a mutually benefitting party. Michael Keane reinforced this by noting if we don't want to invest in our own town, why would anyone else?

Bill Colvin noted he was involved in the Economic Development Plan and endorses this idea for re-designation. It is an excellent start for Bennington moving forward. He suggested however that when projects are being considered for investment they be weighed based on impact rather than dollar amount requested.

John McFadden noted that this is still a draft and a lot more work needs to be done before completed. He suggested the money be moved now somewhere that may still be utilized but only by unanimous vote of all members of the Select Board. This way Mr. Harrington has what he needs available to him but still strictly controlled until this program has been finalized.

Greg Van Houten stated he would look for a presentation at the next meeting so that this can move forward.

8. TOWN MANAGER'S EVALUATION PROCESS ADOPTION

Michael Keane noted that the Town Manager's Job Description was updated and a Performance Appraisal tool developed. All Select Board Members seem to be satisfied with these updates.

Motion: Sharyn Brush motioned to accept the Town Manager's job description as updated and the newly developed appraisal tool as presented. Tom Jacobs seconds the motion.

Discussion:

John McFadden thanked everyone for their hard work on this item

***VOTE:* Motion passed unanimously (Justin Corcoran, Jim Carroll absent)**

9. APPROVE 2015 ANNUAL TOWN WARNING

The Manager noted that on the Town Warning it states the last day to register to vote is February 25, 2015 at 5:00pm. This year there are (2) Select Board seats open. Both are 3-year terms. The Town Clerk is also a 3-year term. There are (13) agencies on the ballot requesting funding. The ballot also contains the request for approval of the Town's budget of \$11,650,000. Lastly there is the advisory only question regarding Fluoridating the Town's water.

The Manger then circulated the Town Warning for the Select Board's approval and signatures. Greg Van Houten noted that the School's budget is not on this warning because they are separate. The Manager then noted that this year again there would be a combined presentation however for the Town's Budget and the School's budget on February 23, 2015.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned to adopt the March 2015 Town Warning as presented. Sharyn Brush seconds the motion.

Discussion:

Tom Jacobs asked if there was an estimated tax rate yet based on this budget. The Manager noted that there are still many revenue variables at this point in the year. However the tax rate may go up approximately \$0.035.

VOTE: Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran, Jim Carroll absent*)

Greg Van Houten at this time again reminded the public there will a Fluoride forum on February 12th, 2015. Michael Keane stated in fairness he wanted to note that there would be an Anti-Fluoride forum held on February 19th, 2015 as well.

10. 2015 LIQUOR LICENSE APPLICATIONS

The Manager presented renewal applications for signatures.

11. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager had no formal report this evening. He reminded the public that the Recreational Center and the Senior Center would be closed tomorrow due to the impending storm. He asked those who park on the street to please move their car as soon as possible. Overnight is expected to be blizzard conditions. Visibility will be low and we would like to avoid any mishaps between plow trucks and those parked on the street (which is illegal).

The Manager then reminded those who often walk especially in the morning to use extra caution. There are over 40 miles of sidewalks and only (2) sidewalk plows. This takes a considerable amount of time. Please delay your early morning walk if you can.

Greg Van Houten asked the Manager to discuss the Rutland memo received. The Manager stated this was an "FYI" memorandum from Rutland requesting other communities to set up solar site standards. Rutland is currently in a long-standing battle with a particular solar farm and their chosen location. They have had no success with the Public Service Board. The Manager stated this could be put on a future agenda for discussion. Greg Van Houten stated he would like to know more about this and hear some recommendations.

12. OTHER BUSINESS

Sharyn Brush urged the public to stay safe during the storm

Greg Van Houten asked that if you do not have to go out, please stay home

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

Motion: Michael Keane motioned to close the meeting. Sharyn Brush seconds the motion. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran, Jim Carroll absent*)

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary