

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

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 09, 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; John Broderick, Shires Housing; Keith Witcomb - Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (11) 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.

2. MINUTES – JANUARY 26, 2015

There were no corrections for the minutes of January 26th, 2015.

Motion: Sharyn Brush motioned and Michael Keane seconded to approve the Minutes of January 26, 2015 as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran, Jim Carroll abstained*)

3. WARRANTS

The next warrants of FY'15 were reviewed. There were no questions regarding the warrants; however Greg Van Houten asked for an update on the Highway Sand/Salt status. The Manager stated we are now through 2/3rd's of our salt budget. We currently are out of salt as are many other places across the northeast. We are expecting a delivery shortly but it is slow due to the high demand in our region.

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

4. CITIZENS

Jeff Grimshaw stepped forward and introduced himself as a new resident of Bennington. He stated he is a media consultant and would like to report on all the “Good News” that is happening in Bennington. There is too much focus on the bad news and is easy to get lost in it. After a low point more than a year ago there have been many good things happening in Bennington. Mr. Grimshaw began citing several different ratings by multiple organizations such as Wall Street Journal, Foodie.com, NBC, CNN and Yankee Magazine for different recognitions. The Bennington Museum was cited as being one of the best historic museums in country. Blue Benn Diner was cited as one of the best in the nation, Bennington Farmer’s Market rated in top 100 in nation and Garlic Fest as one of the best in the nation as well. He ended his presentation with reading a quote from Yankee Magazine’s article that stated Bennington is rich in History and had an artsy buzz.

Tom Jacob thanked Mr. Grimshaw for his timely presentation. Mr. Jacobs hopes Mr. Grimshaw would consider coming back to share these kinds of things often. They too often get overlooked. Greg Van Houten thanked Mr. Grimshaw for his work with the Quantum Leap kids. He is doing a great job.

5. PUBLIC HEARING – VCDP IMPLEMENTATION GRANT – SHIRES HOUSING

John Broderick stepped forward to present. He noted this is a historic rehabilitation project. It consists of (6) buildings that Shires Housing already owns. There will be a complete rehabilitation of all (26) units within these buildings that were built before 1900. These buildings will become highly energy efficient. Some of the items will include all new boilers for each building, new windows, full insulation, new kitchens, and new bathrooms. They will be done under the agreement that they will remain “perpetually affordable” and serve those people in a vulnerable market. Shires Housing will cover all relocating expenses including storage (if needed) and actual moving costs. There was further discussion regarding the income restrictions for these units.

Mr. Broderick continued by noting the total cost of the project will be \$4.5 million dollars. He further broke down the investors and how much each would be contributing to the total cost. The Block Grant Fund amount would be \$510,000. This project is consistent with the Town Plan.

The (26) units within (6) buildings are over (3) properties. Mr. Broderick identified these as:

- Carrigan Lane (off of Division Street) that has (17) units total
- 119 Pleasant Street (next to the municipal parking lot) that has (4) units
- 233 School Street that has (5) units total. These are mostly inhabited by elderly residents.

Michael Keane asked a question that a citizen had presented to him. Charlie Murphy wanted to know how many of these units are “accessible”. Mr. Broderick noted that they are only required to have two ADA accessible units, however there will be (3) fully ADA accessible units. Most of the remaining units are ADA “visitable” units and can be adaptable if needed.

Mr. Keane then asked about timeframes for this project. Mr. Broderick stated they would like to close and “break ground” by the end of 2015. Mr. Keane then asked where the current residents would go. Mr. Broderick noted that this would be a phased project so not all will need

to be out at the same time. They are still working on finding locations, however some will go to other available Shires units and some will need to go to private landlord locations.

Tom Jacobs noted that the breakdown per unit rehabilitation costs averages \$176,000 per unit and asked why so much. Mr. Broderick noted that recent policy decision and standards set by both Federal and State agencies for these types of units are very strict. Most of the work is for energy efficiency and the retrofits can be very expensive.

Discussion continued regarding construction costs, bidding process and construction management. Justin Corcoran stated he still felt this amount of money was ridiculous. Greg Van Houten noted that the standards that Shires Housing must meet are set much higher than private landlords.

Jim Carroll had several questions regarding the last time these buildings may have been rehabilitated and what those costs were. Mr. Broderick noted that some were done approximately 15 years ago. He was not working for the organization back then and does not have that information right now. At that time, when the buildings were acquired they were in great disrepair. They were simply brought up to code and made "livable". This project however will be a deeper more complete renovation and designed to last at least 20 years.

Justin Corcoran asked what liability there might be for the Town. It was noted that this was a grant so there would be no payment due back. The Manager noted that there is also an "indemnification" clause for the Town in the agreement.

There was discussion on the scope of local contractors used on prior projects and potential for this project as well. Mr. Broderick noted that on the Roaring Branch project 75-80% of the contractors used were local. This meant within Bennington County.

The timing of the project was further discussed. The Board would not be voting this evening. Mr. Broderick would be before the Board for the 2nd Hearing as required at the next scheduled Select Board meeting.

John McFadden had further questions about grant monies and incentives set by State and Federal government. He also asked if they were available to private landlords as well. Mr. Broderick noted if the landlords wished to abide by the income restriction guidelines they too could apply. Mr. McFadden finished up by stating he thought this was a good project and would like to see how it also affects the Town's Grand List when complete.

Greg Van Houten stated the next hearing is scheduled for February 23, 2015. If anyone would like to weigh in on this they may contact the Select Board via e-mail or regular mail. Mr. Van Houten also noted that at that next meeting the School Board and the Select Board would both be presenting their budgets.

A short recess was then called by Greg Van Houten.

6. WHITE ROCKS TRAILHEAD PARKING (GRANT)

Michael Harrington overviewed the background. He noted that the Green Mountain Club did the preliminary scope on parking for the trailhead for Bald Mountain/White Rocks trail. There is grant money available to enhance the limited parking area; however the municipality must be the applicant. There will be "match funds" needed for the project. The Green Mountain Club has already committed to raising whatever funds necessary. "In-kind" work can also be counted towards any match funds needed. Mr. Harrington stated he felt this was a good project and easy to maintain. This will better develop one of Bennington's natural resources and clarify the trailhead.

Bill Lyons stepped forward to present further detail surrounding this project. He described the trail, its popularity and its relation to the Long Trail. It is the only part of the Long Trail that starts/ends in an urban area and is very unique. The Town had already worked hard to protect this trail when Rte 279 was being developed and required the state to provide an underpass for travelers.

Parking currently is in a small right-of-way that on a good day may fit (3) cars and is a safety issue. The landowner is supportive of the project and participated in the study for better parking. Mr. Lyons noted that the grant deadline is a tight one and due by February 16, 2015. If awarded the grant, the Town would then need to agree to accept it and oversee the construction and maintenance of the parking lot. The easement would be jointly held by the Green Mountain Club and the Town of Bennington.

Mr. Harrington noted that tonight all that is needed is the “Ok” to move forward with the application. RJ Joly, Highway Superintendent has been consulted regarding maintaining this area if completed. He feels the Town has the ability to maintain this with no large impact on resources.

Greg Van Houten noted that typically this would have to wait another two weeks to be approved. However, the Board can waive that time if agreed.

Motion: Tom Jacobs motioned to waive the second meeting approval process and agree to move forward with White Rocks Trailhead Parking Grant application with the Green Mountain Club. Michael Keane seconds the motion.

Discussion:

Sharyn Brush stated this was a worthwhile project and in favor of it.

***VOTE:* Motion passed unanimously**

7. MICROLOAN PROGRAM RE-DESIGNATION

Michael Harrington reviewed the information discussed at the last meeting. There is more work to be done however tonight approval is needed to move forward with this. There was much discussion between Board members on how to move forward. Freezing the money was debated. There were concerns that if the money were “frozen” then there would not be access to it if needed. It was noted that an application process would need to be developed as well as a policy and plan.

Greg Van Houten stated that if the money were “frozen” by order of the Select Board, they could then also order it to be “un-frozen”.

The Manager suggested that the Board inactivate the Micro-Loan Program and freeze all funds related.

Motion: Tom Jacobs motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to inactivate the Micro-Loan Program and freeze all monies associated. Motion passed unanimously

8. FORMATION OF TOWN MANAGER'S PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Greg Van Houten stated this should be a committee of peers. John McFadden volunteered to serve on this committee. Discussion continued with questions if the Select Board Chair should serve. It was noted that this position would change shortly with the election year. Mr. McFadden also noted that all votes weigh the same therefore having a Chair serve has no higher value.

It was agreed John McFadden, Michael Keane and Sharyn Brush shall serve on this year's committee.

9. 2015 LIQUOR LICENSE APPLICATIONS

The Manager presented a renewal application and a new application for signatures.

At this time Greg Van Houten noted Michael Keane would be doing a short presentation on the trip he and other members of the Economic Development group recently took to St. Alban's, VT

Michael Keane reviewed how this trip came about. The trip was organized to find out what St. Alban's did to reinvent themselves and how they did it. They previously had a 60% vacancy in their downtown area. Crime was up and the Grand List was down. They took multiple steps to change all of this. Some included changing City Council members. Many were not previously risk takers. They also felt that public investment triggered private investment. They worked closely with tax incentives, developed a master plan and used a Walmart settlement to invest back into their own town. They began large-scale rehabilitations and a Main Street makeover.

Mr. Keane stated the next step would be bringing some Development Team members here on March 16, 2015 to meet with the Bennington Economic Development Partners. Identifying the first project is essential. Tom Jacobs noted that this was not a quick easy process. It took St. Alban's almost 5 years to reinvent a (2) mile stretch in their town.

10. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager noted he spoke earlier on the sand/salt status. He continued by discussing the (2) remaining properties attained by the Town at Tax Sale. They were put out for bid again. Although there was much interest only (1) bid was received for each property. The Manager is reviewing them and discussing what the long-term plans are by those bidders. These bids were much lower than had hoped. The Manager hopes to have a recommendation ready for the next meeting.

All (13) towns involved in the Solid Waste Alliance have signed the agreement. Next will be developing an ordinance that all haulers will need to abide by.

The Manager noted that although FEMA is required to provide a response to our final appeal within 90 days after the appeal was filed, they took (6) extra weeks. They have now

responded and stated they need still more information. Dan Monks noted that we began the process at approximately \$6 million dollars. This final appeal is for the last \$1.3 million. We will not be happy until we receive that money. John McFadden asked if this same impact is felt elsewhere for IRENE appeals. Mr. Monks stated he found that most other locations simply gave up because of the intensive process. We will not give up.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

Sharyn Brush asked commercial snow plows to NOT push the snow back into the roadways.

Michael Keane granted “Kudos” to the Highway Department. It is a thankless job and they are doing great.

Greg Van Houten stated that the sidewalks are challenging. The Town only has (2) sidewalk plows and many, many miles to maintain. Please do not be afraid to pitch in.

Sharyn Brush stated that help shoveling out fire hydrants is also greatly appreciated.

Greg Van Houten reminded the public of the Fluoride Forum on February 12, 2015 at the Firehouse from 6:30-8:30pm. It will be broadcast live by CAT-TV

He also noted the Arts Program Launch on April 18, 2015. They need sponsors and stated he would be before the Board in the near future to request the Town to be a sponsor.

Tom Jacobs noted that there would be a counter-forum against Fluoride on February 19, 2015 at the Firehouse discussing the negative effects of Fluoride

Greg Van Houten noted there was need for Executive Session.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned to close the meeting. Sharyn Brush seconds the motion. Motion passed unanimously

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- A. Contract Negotiations
- B. Contracts

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary