

**TOWN OF BENNINGTON
2015 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY
130 RIVER STREET – 3RD Floor
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

MONDAY, MARCH 02, 2015

MINUTES

MODERATOR: Jason Morrissey

ALSO PRESENT: Greg Van Houten – Chair; Sharyn Brush – Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Tom Jacobs; Justin Corcoran; Michael Keane; John McFadden; Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Cassandra Barbeau, Town Clerk; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Joan Pinsonneault, Treasurer; Mike Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Keith Whitcomb, Bennington Banner; (75) Citizens; Linda E. Bermudez – Recording Secretary

Absent: *None*

At 7:00 P.M., **Jason Morrissey** called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Greg Van Houten, recited by all.

At this time Jason Morrissey asked for a moment of silence to recognize the passing of long time Town Clerk, Timothy Corcoran as well as all the other residents of Bennington who passed this last year.

Jason Morrissey accepted and read the Town warning:

-WARNING-

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“The residents of the Town of Bennington qualified by law to vote in Town Meeting are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance) in said Town on Monday, March 2, 2015, at 7:00 p.m., or immediately following the Bennington School District’s Annual meeting should that run over, to transact the business specified to be done from the floor.

If you are a resident of the Town of Bennington, intend to be present at the meeting and are hearing impaired, arrangements will be made for a sign interpreter to be present at this meeting. For necessary arrangements, please contact Stuart A. Hurd, Town Manager at the Bennington Town Offices, 205 South Street, P.O. Box 469, Bennington, VT - (802) 442-1037 no later than Friday, February 20, 2015.

Following the completion of such business, the Meeting will stand adjourned to Tuesday, March 3, 2015, at The Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance). The Polls are

open from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. for the election of officers and voting on all ballot articles specified. However, those on the checklist to vote in the Village of North Bennington shall vote for the election of officers and on all ballot articles at the North Bennington Village Office on Main Street in North Bennington. The Bennington Fire Facility above mentioned, is hereby established as the central polling place for those on the checklist to vote in said Bennington. The deadline for registering to vote is February 25, 2015 at 5:00 P.M. at the Bennington Town Clerk's Office."

Mr. Morrissey then reminded those present that the only binding decisions from the floor this evening are for Article #1 and Article #2.

BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED FROM THE FLOOR

Monday March 02, 2015 7:00 P.M.

ARTICLE 1: TOWN REPORT: *To hear the report of Town Officers and to take appropriate action thereon.*

Motion: **Motion from the floor (verbally) to accept the Town Report as submitted. Motion was seconded by the floor (verbally). Motion passed unanimously (verbally).**

ARTICLE 2: SELECT BOARD MEMBERS COMPENSATION: *To determine what compensation shall be paid to the Town Select Board Members.*

Charles Kozlosky stepped forward and questioned when the last time the Select Board was approved for a raise. The Town Manager stated it had been several years. The current rate of pay for each Select Board member is \$1,400 per year. Mr. Kozlosky stated he felt in order to keep good talent the residents of Bennington should consider increasing this pay. If not approved tonight, then perhaps next year. They provide good service.

Motion: **Justine Scanlon motioned (from the floor) to keep compensation for Town Select Board Members the same as last fiscal year (no change in compensation). Motion was seconded by the floor (verbally).**

Vote: **There was verbal representation for both Approval (Yay) and Disproval (Nay) of this motion.**

Verdict: **Jason Morrissey (Moderator) determined Approval for this motion was dominant (Motion passed).**

ARTICLE 3: OTHER BUSINESS: To transact such other proper business when met.

Mr. Morrissey noted that there are (2) Select Board Seats open and (8) candidates running. There is also (1) Town Clerk running for election as well. On the ballot there are (15) articles including the advisory only for the addition of Fluoride to Bennington's water. Mr. Morrissey then reads that ballot item in its entirety.

Sharyn Brush reads a non-binding resolution presented by the Select Board regarding support for the Vermont Veteran's Home budget to be sent to the State. After reading the resolution in its entirety, she noted Greg Van Houten would sign on behalf of the entire Select Board.

Motion: Tom Jacobs motioned and Justin Corcoran seconded to adopt the resolution in support of the Vermont Veteran's Home Budget and approve Greg Van Houten to sign on behalf of the current Select Board. Motion passed unanimously

At this time Mary Lou Albert stepped forward to speak. She wanted to present both Bennington and North Bennington with the latest study results regarding Fluoride. This study was released on February 23, 2015 and was cited in both Newsweek and the Chicago Times showing a correlation between Fluoride and thyroid disease. Ms. Albert continues by reading a portion of the study. It recommends reducing exposure by ingestion and move to topical application for good dental health. Ms. Albert asked to keep our water pure and our freedom of choice. Please vote NO on Article #15.

Al Ray stated that the community has been inundated with facts from both sides. The Minnesota Department of Health mandated the addition of Fluoride to their water. Rochester Utilities add Fluoride to their water and the world-renowned Mayo Clinic uses Fluoride. If it is good for them, why would it not be good for us?

Jerry Albert stepped forward to give testimony of Fluoride damage to his children's teeth. He went on to say he was not offended by the attempts to discredit his accounts by the Oral Health Coalition. However he was offended by the Bennington Banner's lack of fair coverage. The 'Pro-Fluoride' articles seemed to be cut and paste. No one from the Banner interviewed anyone from the "Anti-Fluoride" side for fair representation. This paper lacks jurisdictional journalism. Please vote NO on article #15.

Dr. Dundas stated, "Life is better with teeth". He went on to state he did not intend to offend anyone and saw many "Anti-Fluoride" letters to the editor in the paper. Dr. Dundas continues by stating Bennington has had deplorable oral health since the 1960's. He noted a different study that followed 13,000 people and found no correlation between slow erupting teeth and Fluoride. They also found no link to Alzheimer's, allergies or a connection to a communist plot. There are many false claims against Fluoride; however many well respected organizations support Fluoride such as American Dental Association (ADA) and Center for Disease Control (CDC).

Jennifer Wells stated she was a resident and her children were born here. Dental Health is an integral part of overall health. As a teacher she sees children with dental problems. Please vote YES on article #15.

Ed Belzer stated he was a resident. He referred to the study Dr. Dundas cited. Mr. Belzer stated it did not address the real issues with Fluoride. It has a marginal effect on a tiny section of people and a negative effect on most people. The larger issue with Fluoride is the salts that attack the glandular systems. These were not addressed.

Ed Letourneau stepped forward to address the communist plot comment. He stated he was in the Air Force many years ago with security clearance. He wanted the public to understand that the first "credible" report for the use of Fluoride came from the Atomic Energy Department. They had large amounts of Fluoride left over and needed to get rid of it. They needed to prove it was not damaging or harmful. I do not trust anything that was introduced in that manner.

Angus McCullough stated he was a North Bennington resident. He had questions regarding the implementation and cost of Fluoride. Mr. McCullough continued by noting that 97% of European countries do not fluoridate their water. It is classified as a drug; he therefore has ethical concerns about its addition. It is not a nutrient or a supplement and can be harmful at even low levels.

At this time Greg Van Houten noted that although North Bennington and Bennington are two separate water systems, both get to vote advisory on this item.

Carl Isselhardt wanted answers to Mr. McCullough's initial two questions regarding implementation and cost. The Manager stated at this time it is only an estimate but we approximate \$14-16,000 per year cost to run the system but this may not be adequate. The cost to install a proper system and equipment could be an additional \$50-100,000. We have not conducted an accurate study because we have not heard if the community as a whole wants this.

Jerry Albert cited Brattleboro's engineering information regarding Fluoride. These costs were considerably higher than the Manager's estimates. They also needed to build a hazardous waste area, a tank for storage and additional personal protective equipment (ppe) for employees.

Dr. Dundas returned with significantly lower estimates than quoted by the Town Manager.

Greg Van Houten noted the numbers quoted by the Town Manager were received by a poll of other water municipalities. Information from different towns of different sizes was gathered and an average cost was determined.

Jason Morrissey asked if there were other issues to be discussed.

Bruce Lee Clark stated he was a resident and asked for support for the Bennington Free Clinic. He reviewed how their organization spent their money in 2014. They had 221 new patients from Bennington alone. They were able to help residents with the Vermont Health Connect finding insurance (approximately 546 consults). Please support Article #7.

Spencer Sweet identified himself as the Executive Director of WBTN. He reviewed its history, and personal memories. Mr. Sweet noted however things have changed. Many people now turn to FM radio, the Internet, U-tube, Pandora etc for music. WBTN however is our only local connection. It is a gathering place where your voice can be heard.

Mr. Sweet continued by reviewing the different events they provide live coverage for as well. WBTN is the only source of local emergency information. This is not your Mom & Dad's WBTN. One-third of our support comes from the community and we need this to keep going. Please support Article #10.

Maryanne St. John stepped forward to represent BROOC. She reviewed all of the programs they have that help the community. These include fuel assistance, budget counseling, daycare providers, business start-ups, home weatherization, health connect etc. The need to help others is greater than ever. Please support Article #8

Mary Garesh stepped forward as a resident and representative for the Coalition for the Homeless. Although she supports all our community organizations, the Homeless shelters are overflowing in this exceptionally cold winter. We are at capacity and there are still some not being served. Please vote Yes for Article #14.

Charlie Murphy stepped forward to represent the Council for Independent Living. He reviewed what this organization does for those with disabilities. Adapting houses with ramps, advocacy, mentoring, supplemental equipment etc are all meant to help those live more independently and successfully. Please support Article #15.

Abby Skidmore stepped forward to bring awareness for a new program called "Let's Grow Kids". This program promotes investing in kids with affordable quality childcare. Many children spend 40+ hours per week out of the home and yet are not prepared for Kindergarten. Ms. Skidmore noted there were pamphlets at the back of the room and asked people to go to the website for more information and support.

Al Ray asked the Manager about the Hunt Street bridge project. He would like to see an additional lane to relieve traffic. The Manager stated that it is not in the design. A three-lane design was considered and reviewed with the State, however it became cost prohibitive. It will remain a two-lane bridge.

Elaine Haytko stepped forward to ask for support on Article #6. This serves the 55 and older community. There are many different programs for their support including education and healthy aging in place. Ms. Haytko would also like to ask for support on Article #9 for Council on Aging. They too provide many great programs for the older community including case management assistance, insurance consultations etc. Please vote Yes on both Article #6 and Article #9.

**BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED BY BALLOT
TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2015
THE POLLS TO BE OPEN FROM 7:00 A.M. TO 7:00 P.M.
AT THE POLLING PLACES SPECIFIED ABOVE**

SELECT BOARD ELECTION. Two Select Board Members residing in the Town shall be elected for terms of three (3) years.

TOWN CLERK ELECTION. A Town Clerk residing in the Town shall be elected for a term of three (3) years.

ARTICLE 1. Shall the Town appropriate for the next fiscal year, July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016, the total sum of \$11,652,340.00 consisting of the following: \$3,818,550.00 for the laying out, maintaining, and repairing of the highways and bridges of the Town; and \$7,833,790.00 for the payment of the following: Any indebtedness not otherwise specifically provided for, interest on indebtedness, legally authorized State and County taxes, the prosecution and defense of the common rights and interests of the inhabitants of the Town, and for other necessary incidental expenses?

The proposed budget includes \$40,000.00 for fire equipment, \$20,000.00 for parking improvements and \$326,240.00 for healthcare reserve and workers compensation insurance, any unexpended portion of which will be reserved to subsequent years for that purpose.

ARTICLE 2. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$2,500.00 for One World Conservation Center?

ARTICLE 3. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$2,500.00 for Turning Point Center of Bennington?

ARTICLE 4. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for Project Against Violent Encounters?

ARTICLE 5. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$7,000.00 for Vermont Center For Independent Living?

ARTICLE 6. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$7,200.00 for Green Mountain Retired and Senior Volunteer Program?

ARTICLE 7. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for Bennington Free Clinic?

ARTICLE 8. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of

\$7,500.00 for BROC - Community Action In Southwestern Vermont?

ARTICLE 9. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging, Inc.?

ARTICLE 10. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for WBTN 1370 AM?

ARTICLE 11. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$10,000.00 for The Tutorial Center?

ARTICLE 12. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$11,000.00 for Bennington Project Independence?

ARTICLE 13. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$21,600.00 for Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice?

ARTICLE 14. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2016 General Fund by the sum of \$25,000.00 for Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless?

ARTICLE 15. Shall the Town of Bennington adjust the natural level of fluoride in the Bennington water system to a level recommended for preventing tooth decay (advisory only)?

Jason Morrissey, Moderator asked to close the meeting.

Motion: Bruce Lee Clark motion (*from the floor*) to close the meeting. Motion was seconded from the floor (*verbally*). Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary