

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

MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2015

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Jacobs – Chair; John McFadden -Vice Chair; Michael Keane; Jim Carroll; Donald Campbell

Absent: Sharyn Brush; Justin Corcoran

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Mike Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Keith Whitcomb - Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (3) Citizens.

At 6:00 P.M., **Tom Jacobs** called the meeting to order.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Tom Jacobs, recited by all.

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-D)

A) Minutes – April 13, 2015

There were no corrections for the minutes of March 23, 2015.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to approve the Minutes of April 13, 2015 as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*John McFadden abstained; Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent*)

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

Motion: Donald Campbell motioned and Justin Corcoran seconded to accept and approve the warrant as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent*)

C) 2015 Liquor License Applications

It was noted that a late arrival application was added for approval. Applications were circulated for signatures.

D) Resolution – Women’s Lung Health Week

Michael Keane read the resolution as presented.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and John McFadden seconded to adopt the resolution as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent*)

3. CITIZENS

Loyal Westcott stepped forward. He stated he used the “Freedom of Information” Act to obtain information from the Police Department regarding two properties on Pleasant Street. Records show that the Police Department has been to 308 Pleasant Street and 326 Pleasant Street a combined 60 times since January 2015. Mr. Westcott suggested cracking down on slumlords and mandating background checks for tenants. If the Town is not willing to mandate the background check perhaps the ordinance can be changed to charge the landlord for each visit. These landlords put our residents, children and Police Department in danger.

Tom Jacobs asked if Mr. Westcott had spoken with Erica Marthage about his concerns. He stated he had but did not make much progress. Mr. Westcott continued by citing some changes Burlington recently put into effect for their landlords.

The Manager noted that the “Catalyst” program will begin shortly and the upper part of Pleasant Street is their primary focus right now. The landlords have been cooperative. Unfortunately people still act out from time to time. Jim Carroll asked if we could implement some of the changes that Burlington has. The Manager noted that Burlington licenses their landlords. We currently do not. We would have to look into their changes more closely.

Dave Crowley stepped forward. He wanted to thank the Town for their prompt response to the crosswalk issue at Dewey Street and Weeks Street. There are now (2) “warning” signs.

4. MICHELE PILCHER, NATIONAL HANGER

Michele Pilcher was introduced as the President of National Hanger Company (NaHanCo). She was invited to share her business experience in Bennington and present any concerns. Michael Keane noted he would like to invite, periodically, business leaders and owners to come and speak so we all may become familiar with each other and hear concerns.

Ms. Pilcher gave a brief history of National Hanger and her tenor there. The company has been in business 90 years and was started in Brooklyn, NY. They moved to Bennington 35 years ago. Ms. Pilcher has been with the company 29 years. They are not “just a hanger company”. They are a complete retailer supply company. They offer steamers, shelving, tags, guns, hangers, size dividers etc. National Hanger is the supplier and distributor for many of the large national retailers (ie. Macy’s etc).

National Hanger realized that they are a great wholesaler but was not great at retailing themselves. They want to be a “complete” retail source. They have applied for a VEGI (Vermont Economic Growth Incentive) grant with the State of Vermont to help grow the company further. This will allow them to expand their web capabilities and provide new and additional jobs. Many of these will be related to but limited to web development, I.T., and data analysis.

Ms. Pilcher felt it important for all to know that they have weathered all the storms and are still here in Bennington. They are not just a hanger company. They offer competitive wages, complete benefit packages, a 401K with a 5% match and have a great retention rate. The average employee has worked there for 12 years. National Hanger is the only hanger manufacturer in the U.S.

John McFadden stated he also felt that people have underestimated the value that this company brings to our area. He also is very pleased they too are looking for a connection to the Town for whatever needs or resources we can provide.

Donald Campbell asked what else the Town could do. Ms. Pilcher simply asked that the Town help get the word out about this company. Help break the barriers down and let people know we are an asset to this town. In almost (30) years with the company only (2) representatives from the State have ever made a visit to our company. Neither of which were from Bennington.

Michael Keane gave a brief background on what the VEGI grant was about. Its primary goal is to “Bring business to Vermont, Help business to Grow in Vermont, and Help businesses Stay in Vermont”.

Donald Campbell asked if they offer an “open house”. Ms. Pilcher noted they are not open to the public; however they will provide tours to organizations. For example, they previously invited the Department of Labor for a tour they however, *declined*.

John McFadden suggested a folder of resources be developed for the many different businesses in town that provides a listing of different financial assistance programs (including the VEGI grant).

The Board thanked Ms. Pilcher for a great informational meeting.

Tom Jacobs then called a short break.

After the break Mr. Jacobs again stated that was a very good informational session. It is very helpful to identify the different businesses, large or small in our town. We would like them to come and share their experiences.

5. SELECT BOARD RULES OF PROCEDURE

Tom Jacobs stated a draft was included in the Select Board’s packet for their review. If/when this is adopted it will be a guide for both the Board and the public of what is expected and how to conduct business in a business atmosphere as equals. Mr. Jacobs welcomes comments from the other board members. He would like to see them by next meeting.

Mr. Jacobs noted this will be weighed over several meetings not just one or two.

Donald Campbell stated he thought it was well written. John McFadden thought it provided good structure. Everyone wants to be heard but it does not have to be contentious.

6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FUND PROGRAM / 1ST READING

Michael Harrington reviewed how this change came about and a brief history of the former “Micro-Loan” program. This is the first draft to the board of a new way to reinvest and impact our community in a positive way. It could be considered a “catalyst capital fund” for economic development.

Michael Keane asked how much was currently in the fund. Mr. Harrington stated there was \$150,000 currently. The Board would decide how much to invest in each application.

Donald Campbell had more specific questions related to terminology within the document; for example the term “ancillary initiatives”. Mr. Harrington explained this allows investment into any project as long as it directly impacts Bennington. So as long as it directly affects Bennington, the Board could decide to invest in a regional project or even a State project.

John McFadden thought it important to read the (7) basic goals of the new program. He read them in no particular order.

Sustaining the program was identified as an additional important goal. There needs to be a dedicated resource developed to help sustain this fund.

Tom Jacobs noted that he would like to see a routine report generated once this is adopted to show what is happening.

Michael Keane wanted to remind everyone that there is always an element of risk involved in investing.

7. AMENDMENT TO ARTICLE 25. BENNINGTON WATER/SEWER REGULATORY CODE ORDINANCE / 1ST READING

The Manager explained Town Counsel recommended this after discussing the agreement for repayment by SVC (Southern Vermont College) for their portion of the borrowing for the South End Water Project. They shall be paying on an annual basis along with their water and sewer fees usage. The amendment shall make the annual payment an underlying lien on the property as with all real estate taxes and water and sewer fees.

Tom Jacobs stated this would make it much easier to enforce if they should ever fail to pay. The Manager furthered by saying that smaller projects would not apply to this section.

8. MANAGER’S REPORT

The Manager stated he had a “Quit Claim Deed” question. Mr. Gauthier owns a property on Short Street. Easements and “Right-of-Ways” to the Town were laid out years ago because a connector road was supposed to be built to Booth Terrace. This was never completed and the easements were never turned over. Mr. Gauthier’s property is cut in half by these easements. It is not a public “Right of Way”. He is asking if the Town can “Quit Claim” any interest in this easement back to him. If the Board approves this, the Manager can sign on their behalf.

Discussion continued by stating the Town does not have any interest in completing this connector. The area is too steep to be maintained or useful. By Quit Claiming the easement back to Mr. Gauthier it would not damage nor affect the neighbor’s right of way. It simply provides clear title for Mr. Gauthier.

Tom Jacobs stated he would like this to be on a future agenda for further discussion.

The Manager then made the public announcement that Townwide Hydrant Flushing has been scheduled for May 11th – 15th, 2015 and May 18th – 22nd, 2015. If at that time your water becomes discolored, please flush the Cold Water ONLY until it runs clear. The crews will be flushing from East to West in that timeframe.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Donald Campbell wanted to extend his condolences to the families of Kelly Bow and Richard Tom. They are two cyclists who were recently hit and killed while cycling. Vermont roads are narrow and dangerous. If you notice a road that seems particularly dangerous please report it to the Manager for review.

Mr. Campbell continued my announcing the first outdoor Farmer's Market of the year would be Saturday May 2nd, 2015 along the river walk in Bennington.

Michael Keane explained a little further the VEGI grant plan. There was an article in today's Bennington Banner noting some new changes to the program. They would like to allow for more areas where high unemployment is an issue to apply.

John McFadden again stated he looks forward to hearing from more businesses in town. He would like to move forward with the development of a packet for businesses with information regarding the different financial programs out there such as VEGI.

Mr. McFadden continued by stating a "due date" should be established for the surveys sent to Bennington employers. Tom Jacobs suggested a "sub-committee" be developed to work with the surveys and information gathered. Once it has all been analyzed, they can report back to the Board their findings. John McFadden asked to be on that committee and suggested Michael Harrington also be a part of it. Mr. Harrington agreed. Michael Keane volunteered to join the sub-committee and Dan Monks suggested they contact Bill Colvin to join as well.

Mr. McFadden then stated he felt there was a disconnect between citizens and Town procedures. There needs to be a clear set of procedures available so that everyone understands how to move forward properly when a citizen wants to be involved and/or host an event.

Tom Jacobs agreed. He felt a clear policy and checklist should be developed. There are many things that must be considered and in place for an event to move forward, for example proper insurance, security measures, parking etc. The Manager stated Town personnel are already working on this. A request form to use Town property and the additional procedures will all be available to the public soon via the Town's website. In the past it was usually the same organizations each year, they were very familiar with procedures. Now we have more citizens getting involved on their own. We will make those procedures more visible.

Jim Carroll wanted to extend condolences to the family of Bob Matteson, former Town Manager. Mr. Carroll then began to discuss a recent event involving a citizen and crosswalks. Tom Jacobs advised because this incident is in the court that Mr. Carroll refrain from speaking further specifics. Mr. Carroll then asked about why crosswalks have not been repainted yet. The Manager explained we must wait for the temperature of the roadway to reach a certain degree so that the paint will stick. For the area of North Street at the Veteran's Home and at Tastee Freeze we are considering changing the color to a more visible red and white combination. The Manager stated the Town is also looking into solar powered yellow flashing lights for several areas of town where drivers need to slow for pedestrian crossings.

Mr. Carroll asked where the dividing line is for Town Road and where State Highway begins (on North Street/Rte 7). The Manager stated it was just beyond Tastee Freeze. Mr. Carroll stated that's where most of the potholes are. The Manager agreed.

Lastly, Mr. Carroll wanted to congratulate the owners of the Crazy Russian Bakery on winning Yankee Magazines' "Best Bakery Lunch" in Vermont.

Tom Jacobs stated that the agendas are not just the Chair's job. It is the Board's agenda as a whole. He would like each member to share their ideas for agenda items. Mr. Jacobs stated he would like to see in the near future updates on the pathways and ideas for our community parks on agendas.

Tom Jacobs noted there was need for Executive Session.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to close the meeting and move into Executive Session. Motion passed unanimously (Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent)

10. EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. Contracts

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary