

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

MONDAY, JUNE 08, 2015

MINUTES

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

Absent: None

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; (15) Citizens

1.EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. INTERVIEWS

At 6:10 P.M., **Tom Jacobs** called the meeting to order. Jim Carroll led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

A) Minutes – May 16, 201 & May 18, 2015

There were no corrections for the minutes of May 16th & 18th, 2015.

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to accept and approve the minutes of May 16th & May 18th, 2015 and the warrant as submitted. Motion passed unanimously

3. CITIZENS

Loyal Wescott stepped forward. He questioned what the Town was doing about the crime rate on upper Pleasant Street. Mr. Wescott also wanted to know about instating the “1,000 Foot Law” in Bennington. He stated a local offender went to Lake Paran and re-offended this past weekend.

Mr. Wescott also asked about the speed limit on South Street be addressed. There have been many accidents around the crest of the hill. The Manager noted that the Town has set a (3) stage speed reduction (40 mph to 30 mph to 25 mph) but understand some people still speed through. If the Select Board would like to change any part of this an engineering study must be conducted to determine the change. Tom Jacobs and the Manager stated they would look into the cost of this and get back to Mr. Wescott.

Jim Carroll asked about the “1,000 Foot Law”. The Manager stated that the Chief of Police had been consulted previously and spoke with the Board. He feels it is unenforceable because we are a tight, urban core. The Manager stated he feels the Police Department does a good job of arrests etc.

John McFadden stated he remembered the Police Chief’s discussion on how it was unenforceable. He would like to still be open to citizen’s suggestions.

Catrina Hollis and Erica Prowess of United Counseling Service (UCS) and Caitlin Harrington of Sunrise Family Center stepped forward. They spoke of the first Youth Summit held in February 2015. It was well attended. From this, the Youth Community Action Team has been formed. These youths have decided to take on different issues in our community. The first issue they want to address is Substance Abuse Awareness.

Ms. Hollis, Ms. Prowess and Mrs. Harrington then invited the public to attend a Substance Abuse Awareness Forum. It will take place at the Bennington Firehouse on June 25, 2015 between 4:00pm and 6:00pm. The Forum will have representatives from the Education System, UCS, Medical Field and Department of Corrections (to name just a few). There will also be a question and answer period afterwards as well.

These representatives noted that this is an ongoing project. These youths want to make their community better and will address one issue at a time. Anyone who would like to join they meet each week on Tuesdays from 2:30pm-3:30pm at the 314 Dewey Street (UCS) location.

Michael Harrington noted the new VSECU (Vermont State Employees Credit Union) Bank would be having their grand opening on Wednesday June 9, 2015. They will also be conducting an “open house” for the “Lightening Jar Co-working Space” they have designed within this new facility on North Street.

4. BIKE / PEDESTRIAN PATH PROJECTS PRESENTATION

Dan Monks stepped forward with Mark Anders of BCRC (Bennington County Regional Commission) and Jason Dolmetsch of MSK Engineering. Mr. Monks stated that he believes all the projects presented tonight can be finished within the next (5) years. Tonight will be simply a status update on each of these projects. Town Staff and BCRC will be before the Board shortly to look for approval of the Kocher Drive Conceptual Plan as well as for the Grant application for the Ninja Path.

Mr. Monks noted that all of these projects are already in or compliant with the Town Plan. Jason Dolmetsch stepped forward to review the Kocher Drive Multi-Use Path project as a whole and its design. This is a heavily used corridor with no safe pedestrian or bike access. The State of Vermont is fully funding (100%) of the portion from Aldi’s (crossing Route 7) to Performance Drive. The Town will then fund the last small portion from Performance Drive to East Road.

Tom Jacobs asked what the next steps to move forward were. Mr. Dolmetsch stated they would return with a more detail presentation of the Conceptual Design. Once the Board approves it, the design is sent to the State for their approval. After the State has approved the design, the environmental permits can be applied for. The Board asked Mr. Dolmetsch if he

anticipates any environmental issues. He did not because they designed it to have the least amount of environmental conflict. Dan Monks stated the biggest hurdle for this project would be VTrans responding and approving to the pedestrian signals. They are a very busy organization.

Discussion continued about how long this project had been going on. Mr. Monks noted that it had been tabled for almost (8) years but no funds had been expended in that time. Actively, this has been in the works for now almost (1) year.

Dan Monks then moved on to the Ninja Path. It is a 2.21-mile path that runs from Hicks Avenue to the Bennington College entrance at the intersection of Silk Road and North Bennington Road. Mr. Monks stated that this project has made the most headway in the least amount of time with least amount of money expended. Mark Anders agreed this is the most bang for the buck.

Mr. Anders, Transportation Planner for BCRC reviewed the design of the path. The biggest obstacle will be the crossing of the Furnace Brook but two options have been designed. This path will be approximately 8-12 feet wide and run along the river behind major shopping areas (Wal-mart, Price Chopper and Hannaford's). It will continue behind the industrial Morse Road area and connect to Bennington College. The College is enthusiastic about this project as they have no safe passage for their pedestrian students to shop etc. Almost all of the property owners along the path have been very willing to be a part of such a project.

Tom Jacobs noted that this would also create access to several covered bridges. As an additional enticement for tourists, he suggested they work with the private sector as well such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club. Mr. Anders noted the Joanne Erenhouse has been a big fan of this project and helped whenever she can.

Sharyn Brush stated this was great project and looks forward to using it herself. Justin Corcoran also thought this was a great project. Discussion continued with different options for the brook crossing and the material options the path would be made of (paved, graveled etc) as well as costs for these items. Dan Monks stated he believed he would have an estimate for those sometime in the near future.

Tom Jacobs stated there were reserve funds for a path in the budget. He asked if it could be used for part of this path. The Manager stated that the vote was specifically worded to use those funds for the bike path from the Bennington Station north to Molly Stark. The Board could put that back out to vote to see if the public is willing to use a portion of the funds for another path project.

Donald Campbell stated the first project (Kocher Drive) was critical for safety. This project is great for Bennington's identity and connection between two communities.

Dan Monks continued with reviewing the Benmont Avenue project. This is a heavily used corridor for vehicles, pedestrians and bikes. He presented a brief concept design for the improvements. To be cost effective, this could be funded locally over 2-3 years. The basic design would be to have (9)-foot wide path, a (5) foot green space buffer, a (2) foot shoulder and shift the centerline to have (2) 11-foot vehicle lanes.

Jim Carroll stated this was long overdue.

Mr. Monks continued with the review of the Rail Trail. This is a fully funded project with the Town's required match portion already in reserve. Money is not the reason this has had little progress. The State of Vermont and the Railway are having conflicts. The Town staff continues to work on this. When it is time to push harder, we will need the Select Board's support. We now need to be aggressive with VTrans.

The Applegate-Willowbrook path is fully funded. We are just working through the grant process hoops.

Pleasant Street-School Street project is waiting for the State to sign off on the Right-Of-Ways.

Franklin Lane conceptual design was reviewed. Grant funds will be applied and believed to be easily accessible.

The Greenberg Headwater Park's management plan is currently being developed. Justin Corcoran asked what the best access areas were to this park. Dan Monks stated from Belvedere Street or from the ball field on Beech Street. Crews are working on cleaning that area up, signage is coming and a kiosk is also being designed.

Mr. Monks also noted that a Sidewalk Plan is being developed. This will have a current inventory of sidewalks and a 20-year build out plan. This will be revisited in the future so that it can be incorporated into a policy.

John McFadden asked about night access and lighting on some of the pathways. Mr. Monks stated that could be addressed when discussing each project individually.

Donald Campbell thanked Mr. Monks and the others for all their hard work so far on these projects.

6. APPOINTMENT TO HOUSING AUTHORITY BOARD

(Item #5 Business Survey was accidentally skipped, please see next entry)

Tom Jacobs noted that the Board met in Executive Session with the applicant.

MOTION: Michael Keane motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to approve and appoint Sally Mangan to the Housing Authority Board. Motion passed unanimously
(Justin Corcoran abstained due to missing the interview)

Jim Carroll noted he had a friend who was interested in applying for any of the remaining open seats on any of the Boards or Commissions. The Manager stated the only remaining seat open was for the Board of Listers.

5. BUSINESS SURVEY REPORT

John McFadden stated these would be going out at the end of the month to employers. Michael Harrington reviewed the document stating the first section was about demographics then followed by perceptions of Bennington, ways to improve, ways to connect etc. By conducting these each year we could not only track how businesses are doing but we can learn how to keep businesses here, how to grow and learn better recruitment tactics.

Mr. Harrington noted that the individual responses will be anonymous but a list of businesses that responded will be kept. Jim Carroll and Justin Corcoran were concerned that not having complete anonymity would hinder honest responses. Mr. Harrington stated that these surveys are also about building relationships with each employer.

Jim Carroll asked if an additional question could be added such as "would you be more honest if this were completely anonymous". Donald Campbell noted that some questions almost

seemed repetitive, only slightly different. He asked if a participant were “bored” with questions could they skip a question and still be able to move on to other questions. This was confirmed.

Tom Jacobs asked when the first survey would be wrapped up. Mr. Harrington stated that they would keep it open for (2) weeks to a month due to the proximity to the holiday and summer being a popular vacation time.

7. MANAGER’S REPORT

The Manager noted that the FY’2016 Water & Sewer Budgets were in the Board’s packet for their review. He suggested a work session be scheduled for any questions. After that the board can place on the agenda to set the rates. A lot of work went into keeping the budgets on target. The Budgets are up less than 2% and therefore the rates shall remain at the 3% as proposed.

Tom Jacobs suggested a short work session before a regularly scheduled Select Board meeting. Sharyn Brush asked when the rates had to be approved. The Manager stated they must be approved by July 1, 2015. Tom Jacobs asked the work session be placed on the next agenda for 5:30pm.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

John McFadden wants the Town to now consider renewable energy as a public venture. There have been many big improvements in the solar energy field for example. He would like to look at the Town’s energy costs over the last year. If energy audits have been conducted on any of the Town’s buildings he would like to review those as well. We can look into grants for money to install solar panels and help save the Town some money.

The Manager stated that just last year the Wastewater Treatment Plant had an Energy Audit and they are implementing some of the suggestions now. He also reminded the Board that we have partnered with Bill Scully’s energy project and the smaller solar farms that will both be saving the Town money as well. The Manager will provide the requested reports.

Michael Keane stated he attended the Lung Association Climb the Monument this past weekend. It was a great turnout from Bennington, the Tri-State area and even from Quebec City. The participants from Quebec want to return next year with a busload of people. Their city has the biggest Stair Climbing Club and many want to be here next year.

Mr. Keane also thanked the local Bennington Fire Department as well as several surrounding Fire Departments, SVMC, Rescue Squad and the local banks all who participated and many in full rescue uniform.

Lastly, Mr. Keane noted that on June 15th, the Board would meet at the Police Department Conference Room for the scorecard work session.

Donald Campbell thanked RJ Joly, Highway Superintendent for giving him a tour of both Highway Garages. He met several of the guys who stuck around after work to show him how equipment works etc. These garages are clearly old. They are a great crew who work hard under some hard conditions.

Mr. Campbell again thanked Dan Monks and the others for their work on the multiple trails. It's great to see private citizens, bikers, hikers etc getting together to work as advocates for these trails. Tom Jacobs agreed it has been a total team effort.

Mr. Jacobs continued by reminding the community that the Board wants to keep the communication table open with local businesses. There is opportunity on the July agenda to meet with another business. If any business is interested, large or small, please contact us to come and speak.

John McFadden asked that in the last meeting in June the Board look at some type of evaluation process or goals for the staff. Tom Jacobs and other Board members discussed how this would be discussed (Executive Session or other). This will have to be considered.

Tom Jacobs noted there was need to go back into Executive Session.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to close the meeting and move into Executive Session. Motion passed unanimously

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. Real Estate

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary