

**BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING  
BENNINGTON TOWN OFFICES – CONFERENCE ROOM  
205 SOUTH STREET  
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

***MONDAY, JUNE 29, 2015***

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tom Jacobs – Chair; John McFadden -Vice Chair; Michael Keane; Jim Carroll; Donald Campbell; Justin Corcoran (*Late*)

*Absent: Sharyn Brush*

**ALSO PRESENT:** Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michele Johnson, Human Resources & Contracts Administrator; Keith Whitcomb - Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (16) Citizens

At 5:30 P.M., **Tom Jacobs** called the meeting to order.

**1. BENN HI PROJECT ED FUND REQUEST**

Tom Jacobs noted this is the second reading of this request. There have been some concerns regarding the “Open Meeting Law”. Town Counsel has been consulted. Counsel’s clear opinion is that all the processes and proceedings to this point regarding this issue have been within the law.

Donald Campbell stated he fully supports this request. He believes it could revitalize downtown, further growth and addresses a blight property. We cannot afford to sit on our hands for another five years.

John McFadden stated the project as a whole could be on the upwards of \$5-7 Million dollars. This would be a great economic stimulus in many ways including reducing real estate taxes for all property owners in Bennington.

Michael Keane stated he has studied this many times. This amount is a limit risk. The Town’s money as first in shows great support and example of public and private investment. This also supports the Town Plan. Mr. Keane read several direct quotes from the Plan to support this statement.

Tom Jacobs stated he did not want the Select Board to conduct “business as usual”. This is the beginning of “not as usual”. He invited the Town to make investments in itself. This is a great way to move forward.

Jon Hale stepped forward to briefly summarize the vision he has for this property. He hopes the feasibility study will support the idea of 40-50 mid to high-end apartments. There would also be both indoor and outdoor parking available and added green space. He is not an accountant, which is why this study is important.

Mr. Hale stated as a property owner already in the upper Pleasant Street area he has attended the Catalyst meetings. He believes this redevelopment could stimulate this program further.

Michael Keane asked how long it would take. Mr. Hale stated he could have some tenants in as early as (10) months; however it would take two years for the entire project to be complete.

At this time Mr. Jacobs opened discussion up to the public. Loyal Wescott asked if he would mandate background checks. Mr. Hale stated he could not make a commitment to that right now. However, these types of apartments would require several types of background checks including credit. He wants good solid tenants for these units.

Brian Dempsey asked why all this information was not spoken at the first meeting. Tom Jacobs stated the Board is always looking to improve the process. This is why they set the policy of two meetings in place. This right now however is only about the feasibility study not what will happen after the meeting.

Sam Restino asked why a special meeting had to be held. Tom Jacobs noted the next scheduled meeting would have been 3 weeks away. He wants to keep the momentum going on this. He then asked the attending Board if they would like to postpone the vote to the next regularly scheduled meeting. All members present agreed to vote this evening.

John McFadden stated he originally had concerns about a special meeting and people not knowing when and where. However, because there were so many complaints that there was a special meeting, he now knows that the word got around.

Mr. Restino asked in the future if the agendas could be written in more clear language so that common people could understand the subject matter. Mr. Jacobs understood his request and stated they will try to make improvements.

Chris Wright asked where the money came from that would be used for the study. Dan Monks stated that it is not taxpayer money. It was a Community Block Fund Grant (Federal Money) that had been wholly paid back by the recipient. In turn this money can only be used for economic development projects. Bill Colvin, former Economic Development Director for the Town spoke of the details when this Block Grant originated.

Jonah Spivak had questions regarding using the money or conducting a study for other empty properties in Town. Dan Monks noted it was important to recognize the opportunity for this property. The other properties mentioned do not have anything aligned at this time. If/when they do we can review them as well.

Jeff Grimshaw asked if the report would be made public once completed before making any further moves. Donald Campbell and Tom Jacobs confirmed this. The Town is “buying” this report therefore it will be public.

**Motion: Donald Campbell motioned and Justin Corcoran seconded to move forward with the Benn Hi Project ED Fund grant of \$18,000 for a Feasibility Study.**

*Discussion:*

Justin Corcoran noted he often hears people speak about building the Grand List, Quality Housing, & Economic Development. This project will do all three of these things. He is excited and 100% behind this.

**Vote: Motion passed unanimously (Sharyn Brush absent)**

Tom Jacobs noted this is just the beginning. There will be broader discussions if this continues to move forward.

Dan Monks asked if anyone had additional questions to please feel free to contact him at the Town Offices.

## **2. COMBINED WORKING AGREEMENT SIGNING**

Tom Jacobs asked if all the members were comfortable with the agreement presented. He noted this was a two-year contract approved by the Union.

**Motion: Donald Campbell motioned and John McFadden seconded to accept and sign the Combined Working Agreement as presented.**

### *Discussion:*

Michael Keane had some questions regarding terms that he feels should now be gender-neutral as well as some “nit-pick” items (ie. commas, semi-colon use). Michele Johnson asked that he e-mail these “nit-picks” for consideration. The gender-neutral terms however may have to be approved by the Union. They have ratified it “as-is-as presented”. She will contact them.

**Vote: Motion passed unanimously (Sharyn Brush absent)**

## **3. OTHER BUSINESS**

Michael Keane noted the final copy of the Employer Survey had been submitted to the Board for their approval. On July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015 it will be distributed to 30-35 of the largest employers via e-mail. On July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 additional distribution shall be made to other members. July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 a reminder will be sent to those who had not returned it as of yet. The close date shall be July 24, 2015.

John McFadden stated they would look at the privacy aspect as part of the feedback and adjust in future if needed.

Jonah Spivak noted that on River Road at 67A intersection the “Wastewater Treatment Plant” sign is quite larger than the sign for the Covered Bridge. He asked if something can be done regarding this as tourists often are confused or misguided. It’s more important to show the covered bridge. Mr. Spivak also requested better signage for the Lower Willow Park area. Often this area is overlooked or underutilized because it cannot be found.

Loyal Wescott discussed the “1000-foot Law”. John McFadden asked if some type of report and mapping could be done to show how the 1,000 feet looks and how many offenders this would actually apply to. There would be no action taken but a better understanding of how this would look.

Tom Jacobs wished everyone a Happy & Safe Fourth of July.

Tom Jacobs noted there was NO need to go into Executive Session.

**Motion: Jim Carroll motioned and Justin Corcoran seconded to close the meeting. Motion passed unanimously (*Sharyn Brush absent*)**

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez  
Secretary