

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

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2015

MINUTES

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

Absent: Justin Corcoran

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michael Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Keith Whitcomb, Bennington Banner; BNN News; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (11) Citizens

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

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIENCE

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

A) Minutes – SEPTEMBER 14, 2015

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

Motion: Sharyn Brush motioned and Michael Keane seconded to accept and approve the minutes of September 14, 2015 as well as the warrant as submitted.

Motion passed (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

3. CITIZENS

Mary Garesh identified herself as Pleasant Street resident. She thanked the Board for the Pleasant Street survey work. Ms. Garesh also questioned whether all Select Board members should have been at a recent meeting/briefing. She understands it was not a violation of meeting laws but thinks all the members should have been there. Ms. Garesh ended with thanking the Board for all their good work. She knows it is not an easy job at times.

Tom Jacobs apologized to his colleagues and the public. This was an oversight on his part. He felt it was just a briefing (no details). The Select Board is a continually learning process.

Justin Woodie stepped forward and expressed concern about the September 9th “meeting”. He feels the apology should be towards the public not just colleagues. He felt this was a big deal

Loyal Wescott stated arrests in Bennington are getting worse not better. The information he received stated Bennington is averaging 692 arrests per month.

Tom Jacobs stated the Chief of Police has been scheduled for an upcoming agenda. The exact date has not been set yet but he will be here for an update.

Jim Carroll questioned that number. The Manager stated he was not sure. It could include citations not just arrests. Good police work however is making arrests.

Mr. Jacobs then thanked all who spoke this evening.

4. FOUR CORNERS NORTH PRESENTATION

Jonah Spivak and Sheila Harden stepped forward along with Alaine Kairyo to present. They are all small business owners in the area of North Street and County Street. They started the organization approximately one year ago. It was developed by way of “Fallapalooza” for a way to connect their businesses to the events downtown. They organized & promoted shuttles between the two locations, advertised refreshments and parking. All the while cross-promoting the other locations/businesses as well.

Ms. Harden stated this was such a great success they continued similarly on Small Business Saturday and around Christmas time. This lead to developing a logo and a “hook”. She continued by describing how the “Homebrew Fest” developed. This too turned out to be a great success. She named and thanked all the supporters and partnerships that brought the event together. Some of those were the Town Manager, Bennington Police Department, Michael Harrington, William Gardner (Madison’s Brewery), Green Mountain Bus and Chamber of Commerce. They again organized shuttles during the Homebrew event to coordinate with the Arts & Crafts Festival occurring simultaneously on the west end of town.

The presentation continued by discussing how to move forward and start “branding” ourselves to promote Bennington as a whole. People want a connection to a place; we need a story to tell and market it.

5. BENN HI UPDATE

Dan Monks reviewed the background to this feasibility study. Jeff Glassberg, the hired consultant continued. His work began back in July. It had been determined the most feasible option for this location (based on initial market research) was housing units. He then worked on the details (and costs) of what this would take. Things such as most efficient use of space, floor plans, range of rental rates, ability to acquire outside resources (historic tax credits) and the ability to phase the work (this would allow rental income on some portions of the building while others were being contracted) were all considered. The financial analysis (cost of work and maintenance vs. actual income) showed a substantial gap (approximately \$5 Million Dollars). This therefore determines the project “not feasible”.

Mr. Glassberg stated there are other options available. Jon Hale, Hale Resources, stepped forward. He noted the goal of the study was to see if this vision for the location was good; it has

been determined not to be. He is however not done yet. Mr. Hale is looking at other ideas. He has the option to buy the property until August 2016. He will continue to look for ways to develop this property.

Discussions continued with some of the other options were for the property. One of these was an assisted living facility. This was a plan started several years ago. The plans are already designed, the Act 250 permits in place and an Environmental Report completed.

Michael Keane asked what now. Jon Hale stated he is continuing to look into all of options. Mr. Keane asked about the state of the building. Mr. Hale noted that it is in better shape now than 10 years ago. A new roof has been put on which has stopped any further moisture (water damage) and deterioration.

John McFadden stated he thought the "feasibility study" was to determine the best use for the property (overall). Mr. Glassberg wanted it known that he was hired for the (Jon) Hale Resources study; not an overall assessment study. Mr. McFadden stated had he realized this was to research only one idea he would not approved this.

Discussion continued with the cost of tearing down the building and starting new (residential or commercial). Jim Carroll brought up the lack of green space in downtown and asked if this would be an option. Mr. McFadden noted that would be nice, but green space does not make money.

Michael Keane stated this was a well-done profession report. We may not have liked the answer but it was well done. Jon Hale stated there is a large appetite for investing in Bennington. We just need the right project. Jim Carroll stated he would like to help all he can.

Dan Monks noted the Select Board authorized \$18,000. The final cost of this study was only \$11,000. This was Federal Grant money (not tax money) and therefore can only be used for economic development. The unused portion will go back into the fund.

Due to some technical difficulties with the presentation for the Business Survey, the agenda was altered slightly. The agenda continued as such:

**** 7. TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVE GRANT – BENMONT AVENUE**

Dan Monks noted this was the second time before the Board regarding this grant application. He reviewed some previous information presented regarding the Benmont Avenue Improvement Area. The total anticipated cost of the project would be \$250-300,000. The Grant is an 80/20 meaning the Town is required to match 20% of the project. Up to ½ of the required match can be in "in-kind" goods and services (donations, in-house work etc). This would leave the final cost to the Town at \$25,000. Funding for the project will be 2-3 years, however the application is due in early October. The Board would need to authorize the application this evening if they would like to move forward.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to authorize the application for the Transportation Alternative Grant for Benmont Avenue.

Discussion:

Tom Jacobs asked if we have to wait to do the “in-kind” services. Mr. Monks noted only until the grant is awarded and the grant agreement is signed. That is the minimum requirement.

VOTE: **Motion passed** (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

**** 8. BIKE/PED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE**

Dan Monks noted this was just an update but that this will be very extensive when completed. It will be the largest in most of Vermont. The Town was recently awarded \$1.1 million dollars for the Ninja Path. We are now actively designing the Bennington College crossing (the most challenging portion). Permits are also being obtained to open the path under Route 279. We hope for it’s opening in 6-8 months. The path should be cleared and roughed out in approximately one year.

Mr. Monks continued by updating the status on other pathways.

- Kocher Drive’s scope has been approved by the State and is in contract for a formal design now.
- Rail Trail is already funded and in the design phase. We have finally obtained both VTrans and the Railroad’s approval for the “run-around”. The trail would run from the Bennington Station Restaurant to the North Fence of Applegate. We need to continue to push forward and hope for 2017 construction.
- White Rocks hiking trail parking lot has a prepared plan and has been presented to the (4) property owners. Green Mountain Club is working with them to obtain the proper easements.

Bruce Lierhman stepped forward and thanked the Board for their letter of support for the Western Vermont Green Way (biking). On October 8th, 2015 there will be a press release regarding the US Bikeway System.

Dan Monks stated there would be a need for volunteers to help clear the pathway under Rte 279 (as well as other areas). Anyone interested should contact Mr. Monks at the Town Offices. He has been compiling a list of those willing to help. Mr. Monks may be reached at the Town Offices at (802) 442-1037 or via e-mail at dmonks@benningtonvt.org.

Jim Carroll asked about obtaining sponsors. Mr. Monks stated we could do an “Adopt a Path” however we must obtain all permits first.

**** 6. BUSINESS SURVEY**

Michael Harrington presented. He stated there was a massive amount of information received. This is just a summary. The details will be posted on-line. Hard copies will also be made available.

Mr. Harrington continued by reviewing the purpose of the survey. He noted there were (45) completed surveys. There were several more but they were not completed in their entirety.

Many of the questions within the survey were review. He showed some of the replies without revealing who gave them and reviewed both good comments and bad comments made. According to the responses, the overall score for the performance of the Town was 5.5/10.

Tom Jacobs thanked Mr. Harrington and his committee partners for this information. He understands it was not easy. Mr. Harrington stated he would send the details of the report to the Board when they are ready.

Michael Keane noted that the economic analysis is the same all over the state, with exception to Chittenden County.

Mr. Jacobs stated this is just the first review. He would like the Board to review this information further and come back with ideas and a vision on how to respond to all of the information. Mr. Jacobs noted he would like to develop a forum with (15) local business people and discuss many things including their vision.

9. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager noted it was time for the Annual VLCT (Vermont Leagues of Cities and Town's) meeting. Each year a delegate from each Town/City must be nominated and sent to represent the Town. In the past, the Manager has done this.

Sharyn Brush nominated Stuart Hurd, Town Manager as the delegate for the VLCT Annual meeting. Jim Carroll seconded this nomination. The Board approved by consensus.

The Manager continued noting the two most recent issues with the train trestle. The Rail Agency approved the removal of the bridge, however the State Highway Agency believes it is the only thing holding up the abutments. They do not want the removal of the bridge.

In both recent events, the drivers were using GPS and ignored all signs and flashing lights. Until AOT (Agency of Transportation) finds a solution, this will continue to be an issue.

Michael Harrington stepped forward to note that the Pleasant Street curbing and sidewalk is scheduled to be poured this week. There was a delay due to a private contractor issue. He thanked all local residents for their patience.

Jim Carroll asked if the old marble from the sidewalk had been saved. Mr. Harrington stated that was the hope/plan. He will get an update on that.

10. OTHER BUSINESS

Michael Keane stated the "4Corners North" presentation was great. He wishes good luck to them. Mr. Keane continued by announcing that National Hanger received final approval from the Vermont Economic Council on their application. This means they will be adding (69) Full-Time jobs between 2015 and 2019. Congratulations to them.

Mr. Keane mentioned Laura Meehan a North Bennington resident. She has been a volunteer for the Garlicfest, Carshow, Penguin Plunge and now the Octoberfest next weekend. She is a great asset.

John McFadden questioned why the Octoberfest signs are allowed all over town. Dan Monks noted that because it is an event. The signs can only go out and then must be taken down within a very short period of time.

Mr. McFadden would like to see more bussing for events around town. He would like to look into the costs for the future. He would also like to revisit costs/estimates for solar power for Town buildings. We need to update these quotes. It was determined the last quote was done (8) years ago for the Recreation Building. At that time it was determined the Recreation building was not a viable location. The roof was not designed to hold that heavy of a load. The Manager stated we could look into this again.

Tom Jacobs asked about using the capped landfill location. The Manager stated the access to the power grid from that location was the issue. It would be very expensive to run it. Also, the regulatory side was problematic. The Manager stated Encore was still in the area. They are not giving up on us. Mr. Monks stated the Town expects a new proposal soon.

Donald Campbell stated that BCRC (Bennington County Regional Commission) was conducting an open meeting for the public on renewable energy on September 30th, 2015.

Tom Jacobs asked about the Oral Health Commission applications. The Manager stated he had received only (6) applications so far. They are not very diverse. He would like to keep this open longer so that more applications can be made. Mr. Jacobs agreed.

Mr. Jacobs continued by noting there were new and more crossing signs around town. The Manager stated we have been putting them out where speed has been found to be a problem.

Jim Carroll congratulated Dan Monks and the Town Office Staff on receiving the \$1.1 Million Dollar grant for the Ninja Path. They deserve all the credit.

Sharyn Brush announced an invitation for the Select Board from Brian Maroney of Creative Workforce Solutions. It is for an event on Friday October 9, 2015 from 12:00pm-1:15pm regarding employment and disabilities. They are recognizing Bill Botzow. Whoever would like to attend please R.S.V.P. Ms. Brush circulated the invitation.

Motion: Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to close the meeting. Motion passed unanimously (Justin Corcoran absent).

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary