

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

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2015

MINUTES

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

Absent: Jim Carroll

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michael Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Keith Whitcomb, Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (12) Citizens

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

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

A) Minutes – NOVEMBER 23, 2015

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

Motion: Sharyn Brush motioned and John McFadden seconded to accept and approve the minutes of November 23, 2015 as well as the warrant as submitted.

Motion passed Unanimously (*Jim Carroll absent; Michael Keane & Donald Campbell abstained*)

3. CITIZENS

‘ There were no citizens who wish to speak this evening.

4. MAPLE LEAF SOLAR PROJECT – MANEELY CORPORATE PARK

Charles Grant stepped forward to present. He introduced himself as a representative of Essex Capital Partners, contractor for this project. Mr. Grant continued by briefly describing this solar project. His organization is in an agreement to purchase approximately 4.4 acres of land

from Bennington County Industrial Corporation (BCIC) on Shield's Drive (across from NSK Steering) for the purpose of a "net metering" solar project. Mr. Grant noted this would be his fourth project in the State of Vermont.

Dan Monks stated that the applicant has met with the Planning Commission. They have stated this land is approved for a solar array. The Planning Commission asked however that the arrays be ground mounted and all vegetation be maintained for coverage and screening purposes. All invasive species found must be removed and replaced with native species. Lastly the Planning Commission required the "glare" not be visible from the Monument.

Tom Jacobs asked Mr. Monks if he believes that this project will be consistent with the new renewable energy ordinance being developed. Mr. Monks stated he believed it would be.

Justin Corcoran asked about the industrial zoning for this area. Mr. Monks stated that this is an industrial zone and this is an industrial use. Peter Odierna, President of BCIC stepped forward and stated that the parcel(s) being purchased for this project are the "least desirable" and the least likely to be developed in the industrial park due to the nature of the slope etc.

John McFadden asked who the partner was in the "net metering agreement". Mr. Grant explained it was a group in Quechee, VT. Attempts were made within the industrial park to partner with established businesses. However the output of energy (size of the array) did not match with the consumption of energy used. At this time it simply was not a good fit. It is very important to have the right fit in order to make the administrative costs viable.

Mr. McFadden then asked what would happen after 20 years. Mr. Grant stated that the structures were not permanent. They may move forward for another term or it could be removed.

Donald Campbell stated he liked the location and the aspect. Mr. Campbell then questioned the staging area. Mr. Grant stated they would manage the vegetation for screening but also as to not shade the arrays. There may be a small storage shed installed. A fence would also be maintained to enclose the arrays. Lastly the entrance to the site would have some type of block (gate, chain etc) to discourage anyone from entering.

Justin Corcoran asked how this might affect the Grand List. Mr. Grant explained these are taxed (locally) but on a different formula recommended by the State. He assured the Board they do pay both local and school taxes.

Mary Morrissey asked if there was a decommissioning plan in place. Mr. Grant stated for the larger arrays a decommissioning plan is required by the Public Service Board (PSB). For a smaller project like this he is not sure if it would be required. Mr. Grant shall look into this and submit his findings.

Mr. Grant continued by asking the Select Board to submit a statement of acknowledgement to the PSB that they have reviewed the project and a presentation was witnessed.

John McFadden informed Mr. Grant that the Select Board has a policy in place to wait for a second meeting to take any action. This is to allow the public to hear about a subject and submit any questions or concerns they may have. Justin Corcoran seconded this by stating he would like to hear the answers regarding a decommissioning plan. The next scheduled Select Board meeting is within the 45-day pre-trial (PSB) window.

5. BOARD DISCUSSION: BUSINESS FORUM & SOUTHERN VERMONT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

Tom Jacobs stated this would be a two-part discussion. First is the Business Forum. Mr. Jacobs reviewed how this forum came about and its purpose. It was a dynamic discussion

between a small cross-section of local business leaders. A candid discussion of where Bennington is now and where it can be taken occurred. It is not the local government's job to lead the private sector. They are there to help with whatever limited resources they have and support them.

The outcome was a small committee of the private sector leaders to develop their own priorities. The designated Chair was named as Peter Stromgren. They have already stated they are open to ideas etc. Mr. Stromgren may be reached at plstrom24@comcast.net. Tom Jacobs asked that this contact information be added to the Town of Bennington website.

Donald Campbell stated he was pleasantly surprised by the "pearls of wisdom" at the forum. At the meeting it was stated that people should stop whining about the bypass; it's not going anywhere. It now needs to be referred to as the connector and begin moving on. Business leaders also noted that the Select Board and/or the Town was not going to do this for them. The private sector needs to take charge themselves, with the support of the Select Board. The Town Manager agreed he was equally pleased. The Town can be helpful and supportive in many ways such as grants, tax credits etc.

Michael Keane introduced the second section of this Board discussion regarding Southern Vermont Economic Development Task Force (SoVt EDTF). He believes the forum was a good direction and dovetails the task force. He noted there are four representatives from Bennington including Bill Colvin of the Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC) and himself. They focused on four recommendations that included recruitment and retention, diversify the population, and lowering the average age of residence. Mr. Keane sees that developing a comprehensive plan for SoVt Economic Development and strategies can open doors to Federal Funding.

Bill Colvin of BCRC stepped forward to continue the discussion. He noted that they would build upon what Windham County has already developed. It serves as a model on how Regional Commissions can come together. The statistics for Windham County are very similar to Bennington.

Mr. Colvin and Mr. Keane continued by discussing some campaign strategies, partnerships for workplace development and internships for all ages. Mr. Keane also discussed the possibilities of partnering outside the state to our other neighbors such as New York or Williamstown, MA. We must acknowledge what is around us. Mr. Colvin gave the example of Bennington Museum partnering with the Clark Museum.

Select Board members discussed the possibilities of tension or competition for jobs if an employer was scouting the area. Mr. Colvin stated that the benefits could be shared over more than one town. He continued by noting if Bennington budgets \$10,000 for marketing, Manchester \$20,000 and Dover \$10,000 each town does not receive much of a campaign for their money separately. However if they were to pool the money together for a greater marketing strategy, they are stronger as a region than as individuals.

Donald Campbell asked why partner with Windham. Wouldn't it made more sense to partner with Rutland? Kiah Morris stepped forward and stated she had co-sponsored this bill.

Attempts were made to collaborate with Rutland, however they are just not ready yet. Southern Vermont overall is being ignored the time is now to stop this.

Tom Jacobs thanked everyone for their hard work and information.

Mike Bethel asked to speak. He feels this has all been heard before. Mr. Bethel believes the Select Board is obligated to do something locally. He suggested hiring a recruiter that may

also serve as a liaison between the private sector and Town Administration etc. This person could be part-time, full-time or even work on commission. Mr. Bethel thinks this option should be put before the voters.

6. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager announced that there would be a Holiday Fly-in at the Bennington Airport Saturday December 19, 2015. Skydiving Santa is expected to drop in. The event is from 11:00am – 1:00pm. There is no fee except it is asked that attendees bring a “potluck” dish or non-perishable item(s) for donation to the food pantry.

Annual budget meetings are fast approaching. The Manager stated a calendar had been included in the Board's packet for consideration. Typically these meetings are held on a Saturday Morning beginning at 8:00am.

By consensus the Board chose Saturday January 9th and Saturday January 16, 2015 for their Annual Budget meetings.

The Oral Health Commission is required to have an “ex-officio” member. Tom Jacobs suggested that this be an annual rotating participation.

By consensus the Board decided Jim Carroll would be the first year's seated member.

The Manager announced the Legislature has passed the naming of the Bennington Welcome Center as the *Senator James M. Jeffords Welcome Center*. Examples were shown on how/where the naming shall be presented.

By consensus the Board decided the name should be placed above the Bennington name.

Donald Campbell asked if we could have both the name and a plaque placed on the kiosk. The Manager stated he would look into that.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Sharyn Brush wished everyone a Merry Christmas. Justin Corcoran did the same.

Donald Campbell stated that the Two Brews Café looked great and the crosswalk at the corner of Adams Street (and North Street) is in the works.

Michael Keane again discussed aspects of Economic Development. We need to be actively recruiting from outside the state. Discussion continued then regarding recruiting outside the state and home-grown businesses.

John McFadden announced he has been offered an opportunity he cannot turn down. This would require him to move from Bennington. Therefore as of late January 2016 he will be stepping down from the Select Board.

Sharyn Brush then announced she would not be running for re-election in the spring.

Tom Jacobs noted that both members would be missed. He also cited a recent Rutland Herald article that stated there is lack of gender diversity on most Vermont Boards. Women members are in very low numbers. Mr. Jacobs continued by stating the deadline for application to sit on the Select Board are fast approaching (approximately January 24th, 2016). He encouraged anyone interested to apply.

Mr. Jacobs especially encouraged any woman interested. This is not a “boys/man’s” club.

Tom Jacobs noted there was no need for Executive Session

Motion: Sharyn Brush moved and Michael Keane seconded a motion to close the meeting. Motion passed Unanimously (*Jim Carroll absent*)

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary