

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

MONDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2015

MINUTES

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

Absent: Sharyn Brush; Justin Corcoran;

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michael Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (9) Citizens

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

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

A) Minutes – DECEMBER 14, 2015

B) Warrants

Tom Jacobs reminded the Board that although the warrants are distributed in advance, it is always open for discussion and questions.

There were no questions.

C) Resolution – Southwestern Vermont Medical Center (SVMC)

John McFadden read the resolution aloud.

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and John McFadden seconded to accept and approve the minutes of December 14, 2015 as well as the warrant as submitted and the resolution for SVMC as presented.

Discussion:

Michael Keane congratulated SVMC on their accomplishment. This is not only a reflection of their hard work but also of this community.

Donald Campbell requested a change in the Minutes of December 14, 2015. Mr. Campbell stated that although he may have used the term “whine” when describing what was discussed at the business leaders forum (December minutes 12/14/15 page 3 paragraph 3) he believed it was too harsh of a term. He would like it known that those who spoke at the forum more complained about the bypass rather than “whined”. He would also like it noted that it was “suggested” that the bypass now be referred to as “the connector” so that everyone may move forward.

All Select Board members present agreed to have tonight’s minutes reflect the changes requested.

VOTE: Minutes December 14, 2015 - Motion passed
(Jim Carroll abstained; Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent)

Warrants & Resolution - Motion passed Unanimously
(Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent)

Tom Jacobs recognized SVMC as a very important employer in Bennington. It is not easy to earn the “Magnet Designation” the first time, but to have now earned it a fourth time is an incredible honor and accomplishment. Much of this is due to the incredible nursing staff. Our community is extremely fortunate to have them.

3. CITIZENS

Chris Wright stepped forward to thank the Town Manager and the Select Board for announcing and supporting the Santa Fly-in at the Bennington airport. It was a great success and a lot of food was collected for the food pantry. It was a very good turnout.

Mike Stern stepped forward to speak about Downtown’s (free) Wi-Fi connection. He feels it is very slow and can be spotty. He asked the Board look into what can be done to upgrade it.

Mike Harrington stepped forward to note that the Town only operates the “Bennington Connection”, which is pulled from donated bandwidths from local merchants. All other connections in the Downtown area are private. It was designed so that tourists could pull up the basics (Yelp etc) when in the area. Not to do business or stream movies. An upgrade to the Bennington Connection to accommodate that type of activity would be costly.

Mr. Harrington stated that the original monies to start Bennington Connection was a grant and the donated bandwidths that keep it moving are all paid for by the participating businesses/donators (i.e. South Street Café and other area businesses).

Mr. Stern stated it was useless. Tom Jacobs asked Mr. Harrington to create an analysis of costs etc and return at a future meeting with that information.

There were no further citizens.

4. MAPLE LEAF SOLAR PROJECT – MANEELY CORPORATE PARK

Bob Grant stepped forward to present. He stated his son Charles Grant was present at the last meeting and conducted the presentation. He is here to follow-up and answer any further questions.

Donald Campbell stated he is always suspicious of the aesthetics of such a project. However he drove the area and feels this is sighted well. He feels good about this project.

Mr. Grant stated that last meeting there was a question regarding a decommissioning plan. He read a statement from Public Service Board (PSB) stating that they must restore the site above ground and up to 24” inches below ground when decommissioning. Mr. Grant continues by stating they are buying the property and therefore making a long-term investment. They try to build infrastructure to last.

Michael Keane had questions regarding the “REC” credits and on-site security. Mr. Grant stated the REC credits go into the “NE-pool”. Anyone in that agency/pool can purchase them including Massachusetts and Connecticut.

As far as on-site security Mr. Grant stated they follow the National Electrical Code for a 1,000-volt site. This requires a seven-foot fence around the site (not the entire parcel). There will be one standard access point with a double gate. There will also be lighting and cameras on site.

John McFadden stated he thought this was a good project; however he has an issue with the REC credits going out of state, and out of Bennington in general. It was discussed that Vermont is trying to develop their own “pool”. Mr. Grant however can’t control at this time where those credits end up. This project promotes grid stability by freeing up more power in Bennington’s circuit allowing for more growth. Mr. Grant’s project is a substantial investment of almost \$2 Million dollars.

Mr. McFadden stated again he believes this is a very good project, however he would like more information before he can support it. He questioned the sale price of the property. It was noted that at this time, it is not public information. Mr. McFadden would like to know the sale price, what it is assessed for now, how much it would sell for to someone else, and what the taxes would be before he can support this.

Donald Campbell stated this project hits Bennington’s Solar Ordinance and it also matches the proposed changes to the Town Plan regarding renewable energy.

Tom Jacobs thought this would be a good “case study” and could be used by other Town and Boards on what could be done when played by the rules.

Mr. Jacobs then opened the discussion to the public.

Richard Carroll had questions regarding how many acres were being purchased and how many would be occupied by the project. Mr. Grant noted they were purchasing 8.2 acres but only 4.5 would be developed with the solar array.

Mary Morrissey asked about any potential “glare”. Dan Monks stated that Mr. Charlie Grant (from last meeting) has since sent detailed information regarding any concern for glare. It does not seem like there will be an issue.

Jim Carroll asked the manufacturer was a Vermont Company. Mr. Grant stated there are none in the State of Vermont. He is however using a Vermont based contractor, Civil and Electrical Engineers.

Michael Stern asked questions regarding federal tax advantages. He stated if this is a good project perhaps Bennington should be doing more.

Donald Campbell stated this needs to be thought of on more of a statewide level not just town by town. We have written an aggressive Town Plan to look for appropriate places for such things.

Joe Kulkin asked the board to look in the mirror. Bennington gets no credits from this project only some tax revenue. Mr. Kulkin then compared it to the Encore project and stated that we could do better with this one

Mr. Jacobs reminded Mr. Kulkin that those are two different projects. The Encore project would be on Town owned property and leased out to Encore. This is a property owned by the BCIC (Bennington County Industrial Corporation) and would be sold outright.

MOTION: Donald Campbell motioned and Michael Keane seconded to write a letter of support for the Maple Leaf Solar Project – Maneely Corporate Park that it is consistent with Bennington’s existing Town Plan and Solar Ordinance as well as the Regional Commission Report and Planning & Zoning for Bennington.

VOTE: Motion Passed
(4) Approve vs. (1) Against (*John McFadden*)
(*Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent*)

5. MANAGER’S REPORT

The Manager announced the Town’s Common Level Appraisal (CLA) was received from the state. It has again gone up. The Town went from 91.5% to now 92.4%. This means re-sale values are even closer to the assessed values. We are therefore further away from having to do a town wide re-assessment and lessens the education penalty from the State of Vermont.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Donald Campbell stated the Manager did some nice work regarding the Jeffords Visitor Center.

Michael Keane wanted to read a statement he wrote regarding John McFadden stepping down from the Select Board. Some of the comments included were that Mr. McFadden was a strong energetic member and it was a pleasure to serve alongside him.

Jim Carroll wanted to acknowledge the passing of Donna Antognioni. She is the mother of the Town’s Chief Assessor John Antognioni and worked at the Bennington Banner for many, many years. She was a wonderful human being.

John McFadden had additional questions regarding the Public Service Board, Green Mountain Power, and solar projects. He questioned who does the negotiations for rates etc. He wants to find a way to make this work for Bennington. The Manager stated it is very difficult to get to that table. They look for long-term stable users. He will look into anyway we may be able to get to that table.

Tom Jacobs asked the Manager to give a preview of two issues the Manager has brought to our delegation. The Manager briefly described the history of the 1% local sales tax. It is a program typically run in “gold towns”. It is collected by the State and then 70% goes back to the Town it originated in. The Manager would like to see Bennington eligible to vote on this (we are not a gold town). If we were able to vote and pass it, this could bring on the upwards of \$700,000 per year to town. It would reduce taxes and allow us to set aside money for project.

The other issue the Manager has brought to the attention of our delegation is greater local control of the siting of solar and other renewable energy sites. Previously local communities and some boards were removed from the process to prevent the stalling of the projects. Legislation now needs to take a stand and let local governments have a say.

The Manager has been asked to testify on January 20, 2016 on behalf of these items.
Tom Jacobs wished everyone a Happy New Year!

Tom Jacobs noted there was no need for Executive Session

Motion: Michael Keane moved and Donald Campbel seconded a motion to close the meeting. Motion passed Unanimously (*Sharyn Brush & Justin Corcoran absent*)

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary