

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

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 08, 2016

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Jacobs – Chair; Sharyn Brush; Jim Carroll; Justin Corcoran; Donald Campbell

Absent: John McFadden; Michael Keane

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michael Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; Keith Whitcomb, Bennington Banner; (27) Citizens

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

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

A) Minutes – January 25, 2016

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

MOTION: Sharyn Brush motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept and approve the minutes of January 25, 2016, as well as the warrant as submitted. **Motion passed** (*Donald Campbell abstained from Minutes 1/25/16 ONLY; John McFadden & Michael Keane absent*)

3. CITIZENS

Joey Kulkin stepped forward to speak. He asked if there were any members of the Select Board who also serve on the Better Bennington Corporation's Board (BBC). Mr. Kulkin named Tom Jacobs, Sharyn Brush and Michael Keane as current seated members of both. He feels this is a "conflict of interest" as defined by the Vermont Leagues of Cities and Town's (VLCT). Mr. Kulkin then read the definition.

Ms. Brush asked that it be noted for the record that she is not a voting member of the BBC. She serves as merely a liaison between the Select Board and the BBC with no voting power.

Christopher Wright asked if the Select Board or the Town Manager knew how many heroin overdoses and/or deaths have occurred in Bennington in 2014, 2015 and 2016 to date. The Manager stated he did not have the exact numbers at this time but he knows there have been multiple. Tom Jacobs suggested contacting the local hospital for the most accurate numbers. He then suggested this subject be put on a future agenda for discussion. Mr. Jacobs would like to invite the Rescue Squad to be a part of that discussion as well.

Jeff Grimshaw stepped forward to invite the public to the Old Castle Theatre on Tuesday February 9th, 2016 at 7:00pm. There will be a debate between candidates running for Select Board in March 2016.

There were no further citizens.

4. BUDGET PRESENTATION

Jim Culkeen, Donna Leep and Rick Pembroke presented the Education budget for Bennington. Mr. Culkeen noted that this has been a collaborative effort between the Town and the School System for the last 3-4 years. Each month representatives from each side meet in efforts work together.

Mr. Culkeen discussed the birth trends effecting enrollment. Bennington is not seeing the dramatic differences that other towns in Vermont are experiencing. High School enrollment is down since 2014 however Pre-K and Free/Reduced Lunch enrollments are up (mostly due to State requirements).

Donna Leep discussed the Education Initiatives for the coming year and read the new "vision statement" they have adopted. They have been working on improving communication between families and the school and energizing students to think about their future.

Rick Pembroke stated they are working on a large energy improvement project for all three elementary schools in Bennington. There will be no impact on the coming year's budget, however they will be looking for a bond in the future to pay the costs associated. When completed, the improvements are anticipated to save approximately \$90,000 per year in energy costs.

Mr. Pembroke continued by discussing the school's proposed budget. The Bennington School Districts budget is 100% financed by Bennington. Mount Anthony (Middle and High School) as well as the Career Development Center (CDC)'s budget are a shared cost for Bennington (pay only a portion) because other attending towns contribute. Revenue to fund the budgets comes from many areas such as real estate taxes and the State. Bennington is considered a "receiving town" and therefore receives approximately 55% of budget monies from State.

Mr. Pembroke finished by stating that if all three budgets are approved the educational tax rate will go down this year by \$0.0461.

Tom Jacobs asked if this is just a one-year blip or can we see this again in the future. Mr. Culkeen stated he would hope so but each year it depends on Act 46 caps, special educational needs/requirements and the CLA.

Jim Carroll stated he asked last year for statistics on our schools i.e. how many graduate High School, College placement, job placement etc. He did not receive that information and would like to ask it again. Mr. Culkeen stated he did not have those numbers in front of him. He discusses them often in other meetings but did not know them at this time. Ms. Leep stated they were on the website. Jim Carroll stated he thought the public would like to know those answers. He asked Mr. Culkeen to return to a Select Board meeting and provide them publicly.

Stuart Hurd, Town Manager then presented the Town's budget. He presented a three-year comparison. The Town's proposed budget is approximately \$12 Million dollars and is up 3.06% from last year. He noted the greatest portions of the budget are used by the Police Department at 28%, the Highway Department at 31% and Administrative costs at 28%. The remaining 13% of the budget is divided up between things as the Recreation Department and Agencies funding (ie. Public Library, North Bennington Recreation etc). There are also additional agencies that request funding and are individually voted upon such as PAVE, Visiting Nurses etc. These must petition to be on the ballot and are voted upon by the people of Bennington.

The Manager continued by highlighting some of the projects the Highway Department will be working on in the coming Fiscal Year (if approved). This includes paving 11 miles of roadway, rebuilding/repairing 4,500 linear feet of sidewalk and furthering the improvements on Pleasant Street and School Street area as noted in the State's Grant project.

The Four Corners signal will also be upgraded. The pressure conduit under the pavement is over 20 years old and warrants replacement. The Town will move to a camera system similar to the Route 7 / Northside Drive intersection. Traffic flows will become more efficient and flow freely according to demands. These cameras will be for traffic control only; they are not for recording.

The Manager then noted that based on last year's Grand List this budget would require a \$.025 increase in the tax rate. However, with several developments including the new Cumberland Farms, new Stewarts and the Wal-Mart construction he believes there will be a 1% growth in the Grand List. This will therefore lower the amount the Town's tax rate would need to increase. The Town Staff and the Board both worked hard to present a responsible budget this year. In summary although the Town's tax rate shall go up slightly it should be offset by the School's tax rate decrease. The overall tax rate therefore should still be lower this year.

Rick Pembroke asked about the progress for the Applegate/Willowbrook path. Dan Monks stated they ran into a delay with the Wetland permit. It is still moving forward; hopefully Spring of 2018. Mr. Pembroke stated that would save a significant amount of transportation costs as they bus many kids to Molly Stark from those developments. Although it is only around the corner the roadways are unsafe for pedestrian traffic therefore the children must be bussed to school.

Final slide in the presentation showed Town Floor meeting is scheduled for Monday February 29th, 2016 at the Bennington Fire House on River Street. The following are meeting times:

MAU	6:15pm
CDC	6:30pm
BSD	6:45pm
Town (TOB)	7:00pm

At this time Tom Jacobs asked Matt Harrington to step forward. Mr. Harrington introduced himself as the new Chamber of Commerce Executive Director. He has been in this position for (1) month now. Mr. Harrington discussed some of his challenges, as memberships have decreased for several reasons. Moving forward he would like to see this organization become an umbrella entity crossing boundary lines, political lines, industrial lines and municipality lines. In short Mr. Harrington feels the best is yet to come and looks forward to the future.

Tom Jacobs suggested combining resources with BCIC and BBC. Mr. Harrington stated he has been working with those organizations, as well as the Shires and Manchester.

Jim Carroll stated he would like to see the Chamber in Downtown Bennington. Perhaps the BBC and the Chamber in the same building downtown. That could foster a lot of good ideas.

Sharyn Brush welcomed Matt Harrington aboard.

5. BETTER BENNINGTON CORPORATION – 336 MAIN STREET

Mike McDonough stepped forward to present “The Park at 336”. He listed the project team members including Centerline Architects, Cutler Construction, Prue Electric, Tatro Concrete, Bennington Pool and Health, and Pembroke Landscaping. Mr. McDonough then stated he hoped that the Town of Bennington could be included in that list with the utilization of “in-kind” services for excavating and backfilling.

The actual site plan was then presented. The estimated cost at this time is \$95,000 plus a contingency of \$20,000 bringing the total estimated cost to \$115,000. An alternate plan has been developed at an additional cost of \$5,000. This will be a product of community effort and financing this project will be done solely through fundraising. They will focus on target donors, corporate support and do general community fundraising.

Mr. McDonough then asked if the Town would be the “banker” for all funds raised. They asked as money is raised if it could be deposited with the Town and then dispersed to them accordingly (when needed).

The timeline presented stated fundraising would run January through May 2016. They would like to break ground as early as possible in 2016 with hopes of a completion date late in 2016. Mr. McDonough recognized this as aggressive and stated they understood if a 2017 completion date needed to be considered.

Jim Carroll thanked Heather Maneely for her generous donation of this parcel. He then asked how it would be lighted. Lighting was described as basic safety lighting all along the benching (constant). There will also be additional switch lighting available (from a utility shed) for special events.

Sharyn Brush asked if they would be selling pavers as part of their fundraising. Mr. McDonough discussed the pros and cons of pavers versus stamped concrete and stated it is a consideration.

The Manager stated with the very mild winter we have had the Highway Department is able to take on a small project such as this. It is a small lot and could be done quickly. He also noted that the Town has already collected \$1,100 in donations for this park.

Jim Carroll suggested other fundraising ideas. Tom Jacobs asked it would be a problem for the Town to act as the “bank” for donations. The Manager stated there would be no problem.

Chris Wright discussed the work volunteers have done at the William H. Morse Airport for many events they have hosted. He encouraged using more volunteers and people to get

involved. The discussion continued with some of the issues regarding insurance and liabilities working with volunteers on a construction project versus an event.

A citizen (who did not identify himself) asked if there would be an outlet for bands to plug into and play. Mr. McDonough stated it was not in the original plan but is a good idea and can easily be added.

MOTION: Jim Carroll moved and Sharyn Brush seconded a motion to accept the Park at 336 presentation and move forward as presented this evening. This will include the Town of Bennington acting as the bank for all funds raised to complete this project.

Motion passed Unanimously (*John McFadden & Michael Keane absent*)

6. HEADWATERS PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN – 2nd READING

Dan Monks noted this was the second reading and no changes had taken place. The Vermont Land Trust has approved this plan as presented. He also noted that although this is set as a (5) year plan, the Select Board can re-visit or changed/add items as deemed necessary.

Chris Bates stepped forward with concerns. He is an outdoor enthusiast and is concerned with the prohibition of hunting. He would like to see it more defined and allow archery (bow/arrow) hunting. He feels hunting is a rich part of Vermont History. Looking around the area with the leaves down he understands why rifle hunting would not be allowed but asks that there be a compromise and allow archery hunting.

Dan Monks noted the plan presented this evening only specifically addresses rifle hunting. This plan can be approved this evening and then work can begin on the specific issues such as other types of hunting and mountain biking etc. Changes can be made at any time to address these more specific items.

Sharyn Brush stated she would like to see the Town go through a full year assessment before changes are considered. She would like to see how popular it is with hikers, fishermen, kayakers etc and then address any changes.

Donald Campbell stated that if the Town wanted to issue a one-week “PILOT” program to allow bow hunting they would not need to notify the Land Trust.

Chris Wright asked if any wildlife experts had been there to take an inventory and assess what wildlife is there. He is concerned about overpopulation. Mr. Monks stated wildlife experts have been there and have done an assessment.

MOTION: Sharyn Brush moved and Justin Corcoran seconded a motion to approve the Headwaters Park Management Plan as presented this evening.
Motion passed Unanimously (*John McFadden & Michael Keane absent*)

7. 2016 LIQUOR LICENSE APPLICATIONS

The Manager stated there were no new applications this evening. Both first class and second-class renewals were circulated for signatures.

8. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager announced the Sno-cross event at Willow Park on February 27th & 28th, 2016. Large amounts of people are expected. Normally alcohol is prohibited on Town Property. The organizers have requested to waive the prohibition temporarily for this event. Ramuntos has partnered with them and has requested a transfer of their liquor license.

MOTION: Justin Corcoran moved and Sharyn Brush seconded a motion to temporarily waive alcohol prohibition at Willow Park for the Sno-Cross event February 27 & 28, 2016 as presented this evening.

Motion passed Unanimously (*John McFadden and Michael Keane absent*)

The event coordinators will be base-lining the track in the coming weeks and then truck in additional snow just before the event. It is expected to bring between 3,500-7,000 people to the area. Tom Jacobs asked if all insurances are in place. The Manager stated they bring their own insurance to the event.

It was asked how this event came to Bennington. The Manager stated two Town employees have attended the event in North Adams and suggested the organizers come look at Willow Park Bennington, as this is a traveling event. The organizers loved lower Willow Park and decided to move forward.

The Manager continued by noting all Grand List appeals are now closed for the 2014 and 2015 year. The closure needs to be signed off on by the Select Board and will be recorded with the Town Clerk.

The Manager updated the Select Board regarding the land east of Kocher Drive (former landfill area). He recently spoke with Agency of Natural Resources (ANR). Conservation easements are being put in place with no development allowed for "eternity". The area will be fenced in and thereby extending Town property. Once easements and fencing are complete they will issue the "Sites Management Action Completed" (SMAC) letter of completion.

The sloped area in question has not been touched for over (45) years and is heavily vegetated (very thick brush/grass etc). The Town will be responsible for maintaining the fence.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Sharyn Brush asked if the Hunt Street Bridge was ahead of schedule as she has seen work begin again. The Manager stated they were not. They had planned for a winter/holiday break and have started again as planned. They will now demolish and rebuild the right lane. The bridge is expected to be fully open by July 2016 although final paving may not have been done.

Donald Campbell asked if the BMX track had completed all their repairs from the vandalism event few months ago. The Manager stated he has not had much contact with them lately. The Town has received donations to assist in the repairs but they have not contacted us for those funds. Volunteers did many of the repairs needed. The money is waiting for them; they just need to send us a response for disbursement.

Tom Jacobs noted there will be a regularly scheduled meeting on Monday February 22, 2016 and the Annual Floor Meeting will be the following Monday February 29, 2016.

Tom Jacobs noted there was no need for Executive Session

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

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary