

**BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING  
SPECIAL MEETING – BUDGET SESSION  
BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY  
130 RIVER STREET  
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

***SATURDAY, JANUARY 07, 2017***

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tom Jacobs – Chair; Michael Keane-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeanne Conner; Jeannie Jenkins; Donald Campbell; Justin Corcoran

*Absent: None*

**ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michael Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Paul Doucette, Police Chief; Jeff Vickers, Fire Chief; RJ Joly, Highway Superintendent; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (5) Citizens

At 8:00 A.M., **Tom Jacobs** called the meeting to order.

**1. FY' 18 BUDGET WORK SESSION (A-C)**

The Manager gave an overview of the overall proposed FY'18 Town budget. Including the agency requests the combined increase is anticipated to be 3.4%. The biggest increase is due to increase in Worker's Compensation costs and the first Irene payment. Overall the Manager believes this is a good budget.

***A) Fire Budget***

Fire Chief Jeff Vickers, supported by Police Chief Paul Doucette made the presentation. There is nothing unusual in this proposed budget. The Fire Facility is now paid off; however the first payment for the Rescue Pumper is now due. SCBA equipment is typically replaced on a rotating basis, varying the technology amidst the fleet as technology advances. Two new units are purchased every year to replace two oldest ones (25 total stock). Issues have been experienced with current manufacturer's newest models. Looking at a different manufacturer there's an opportunity to lease the equipment and replace the entire fleet at the same time (all same technology). This would be at approximately the same cost of purchasing the equipment.

Justin Corcoran asked how many of the present models need to be replaced. Chief Vickers stated approximately (12) are really in need of replacing. Discussion continued looking at future budgets and additional equipment that will need to be replaced in coming years. Transfers to the Reserve Fund are made each budget year to help cushion those costs.

Tom Jacobs asked about volunteer status. Chief Vickers stated a full department would have 100 members. Currently membership is at half that. There is difficulty nationwide recruiting and in the retention of volunteers. Chief Vickers stated he would like to have a future conversation with the Select Board for ideas and possible incentives to encourage both the recruitment and retention of volunteers. As current membership ages (current average age is mid-40's) there are very few younger members to replace those who look to retire. Membership therefore will continue to decline.

***B) Police Department***

Chief Doucette stated that all but one officer are now Level 3 Certified Police Officers. His staff are highly professional and have been extremely productive this past calendar year. Each year Chief Doucette applies for multiple grants and receives many for the purchase of equipment. Homeland Security and other grant monies however are drying up and becoming more competitive.

This proposed budget is a good one. In this budget, we are looking to replace one police vehicle as well as purchase an in-car and body camera system. The camera system is linked to each other and is the same that many other agencies within Vermont including State Police are purchasing. This is for the protection of not only the community but for the officers as well.

To purchase this system the upfront cost would be \$96,000. However due to the increase in Worker's Compensation costs the camera system would be financed over five years in order to minimize budget impact. The Manager stated that this is a proactive move as it is expected that body cameras may be mandatory in the near future. Purchasing this now could also benefit insurance costs.

Discussion continued regarding Worker's Compensation costs. They are determined by using rolling three-year average. Although the Town has multiple procedures in place and continue to work to reduce injuries, in recent year there were multiple injuries during apprehensions.

The last above normal increase is in Salaries and Wages. Southern Vermont Supervisory Union (SVSU) has requested an additional Resource Officer. Currently there is one located at the Middle School four days a week. The fifth day is spent on patrol in order to keep in touch with happenings in the field. SVSU has requested Resource Officer be added to the Elementary Schools. This officer would have similar schedule spending four days per week divided among the elementary schools and one in the field. SVSU has budgeted to reimburse the Town for this service. During summer vacations and other in-service days etc. the officer would be utilized on other police projects. This could be considered a "pilot" program as we will only commit to one year right now. Progress will be tracked to see how much of a difference is made. Tom Jacobs stated he would like to have further discussion on this. He will look to add this as an agenda item on a future regularly scheduled meeting.

Chief Doucette noted that previously the department purchased new vehicles every two years. These vehicles are run 24 hours per day/7days per week/365 days per year. The schedule now is every three years (on a rotating basis). The new vehicle (also referred to as an interceptor) is definitely needed. As many of the light bars and internal equipment will be transferred as possible to conserve costs. However, some may need to be purchased new as the designs of cars change and cannot always be retrofitted.

Jeannie Conner asked about the Buildings improvement costs. The Chief noted the locker rooms are extremely cold and the building overall has had heating and cooling issues for several years. In order to keep costs down and assist in heat retention for the locker rooms, carpet and drop ceilings will be added to that area.

Discussion continued regarding future purchases of a new dispatch console for the Fire Department. Reserve money is added each year to cushion those costs when time come.

Chief Doucette thanked the Board for their continued support. The drug problem is a national issue not just Bennington. He and his staff work very hard to do what they can. The community raised a generous amount of money to allow Bennington to have a canine unit for our Department and the Sheriff's Department. They are working with the State now for training.

***C) Highway Department***

The Manager noted there had been one mistaken omission of \$12,500 for a new trailer. The trailer is in the budget but the number didn't transfer. This will take the increase from the Highway Budget from 2.1% to 2.4% (an addition of \$0.014 to the tax rate).

RJ Joly, Highway Superintendent presented this budget. The proposed budget is uneventful. We had a great year so far as we were able to blacktop (15) miles this year. In years past only 3-4 miles were done per year. Last year we were able to pave (10) miles. The increase over last year is mostly due to the "Best Roads First" approach and the cost of oil going down. At this point we do still bid out the larger blacktop jobs. It costs us less money to purchase it "in-place" than if we were to buy just the material ourselves.

FY'18 paving projects will focus more on the downtown/village area streets as the PFOA plans move forward. We are looking to do approximately 8-9 miles this next coming year. In addition the State of Vermont has contacted us stating they are considering paving Route 7 and Route 9 this coming year. As these are State roads, the Town is only responsible for their maintenance, the State is responsible for rehabilitation and paving.

Tom Jacobs asked if any money is being used for the NINJA Path in FY'18. The Manager stated some Reserve monies will be used towards some NINJA improvements. The pathway project focus for FY'18 will be the Kocher Drive pedestrian pathway.

Discussion continued regarding two seasonal employees. These are hired to assist mostly in garbage collection and smaller projects such as in-town landscaping and weeding that are difficult to get to when larger projects are in place. Mr. Joly continued by stating incredible amounts of garbage is now being generated in the downtown area. In addition to the now daily pick-up that is necessary, more work will be coming as the addition of recyclable receptacles will be added this year.

Mr. Jacobs asked about vehicle replacement. This year, Mr. Joly stated we are looking to replace two 1-Ton Pick Up's. Once a truck warrantee expires (approximately 10 years) repairs become extremely expensive and there is less trade-in value. The two trucks that we wish to replace are both 2009 models with 8-9 years of service in harsh environments (plowing etc). Mr. Jacobs asked if this is a bid process. Mr. Joly stated it was. He has sent bid requests to 3-4 dealerships. Only one (Carbone Bennington) responded.

Donald Campbell asked if the trailer is really in need of replacing. Mr. Joly stated yes as it is no longer safe to use. It is a 1996 model and is used to haul large equipment such as the paver, the roller and the small excavator used in summer months.

Lastly Mr. Joly stated there is an increase in "crushing" costs. As the amount of projects has increased there is more material needed to be crushed (old blacktop, cement underlay etc). Those materials are brought to the Transfer Station and crushed and then recycled/re-used on digs in town as fill etc.

Justin Corcoran stated he feels the Town has received a good return on the investments that the small increases in the Highway fund have been over just the last few years.

Tom Jacobs stated he has been fortunate to witness the vision change and great leadership under RJ Joly's position as Highway Superintendent. Michael Keane stated he's shown great financial and resource management. RJ Joly stated it has all been possible because of his crew. They work very hard and are a great team.

Tom Jacobs asked if there was time to review any additional department budgets. The Manager stated there was.

***Recreation Center / Buildings & Grounds***

The Manager stated the largest difference to be noted is in Salaries and Wages for the Recreation Department and Buildings & Grounds. The General Fund bottom line will not change however the Department totals will be significantly different. This is because two

Recreation Department employees (Maintenance Personnel) have been moved into the Buildings and Grounds budget. Therefore, it increased Buildings & Grounds Salaries and Wages line dramatically including scheduled overtime hours for clean-up after events etc, however reduced Recreation Department's dramatically. Again, bottom line number is the same it is just a movement from one to the other. Otherwise there was a small increase in Recreation Department's Wages and Salaries to accommodate the new Minimum Wage increase for seasonal employees. Most of the Recreation Department's major projects are done and users feel it is well maintained. We are in good shape.

### *Senior Center*

Justin Corcoran asked about hiring a driver for the Senior Center van. The Manager stated it is not proposed in this budget. However, Council on Aging has approached the Town stating they have funding available for "Senior Trips". We are now working with Green Mountain Community Network, Council on Aging and the Senior Center to organize (1) day trip per month. This would also include connections with other senior orientated housing locations such as Brookside etc. Discussion continued regarding the many opportunities and transportation options Green Mountain Community Network offers (medical appointment transportation, grocery store trips etc).

Jeannie Jenkins asked for continued updates on the day trip/transportation agreement. This is very important.

Tom Jacobs concluded this budget session by noting next budget session is scheduled for Saturday January 14, 2017. The Manager stated the discussion will focus on the Bennington Free Library, BBC and Administrative budgets. An Executive session will be required to determine salaries for the Town Manager, Town Clerk and the Treasurer. At that point the board may come out of Executive Session and vote to accept the Budgets or can wait until the next regularly scheduled Select Board meeting on January 23, 2017.

Donald Campbell asked about discussion regarding contribution to the Bennington Rescue Squad. Mr. Jacobs stated they are currently petitioning to be on the March 2017 ballot for their full requested amount.

Forrest Weyen stepped forward to continue. Mr. Campbell was concerned that if the Rescue Squad were able to get on the ballot for full amount but were voted down the Rescue Squad would remain in the difficult position they are in. He asked if they would be open to a discussion of receiving a smaller contribution now and perhaps incremental increases over next few years. Mr. Weyen stated they would certainly be open for discussions on any additional funding.

Mr. Jacobs stated this should be added as an agenda item to the next Select Board meeting. The Manager suggested it be added to the next Budget Session discussion to keep in time with proper acceptance and warning requirements.

Tom Jacobs stated there was an unexpected need for Executive Session to discuss a real estate matter.

**Motion: Donald Campbell moved and Michael Keane seconded a motion finding that an Executive Session be held on a real estate matter and that premature general public knowledge of this matter would place person(s) involved at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed unanimously**

- 2) *EXECUTIVE SESSION*
  - A) *Real Estate*

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez  
Secretary