

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

MONDAY, JANUARY 09, 2017

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Jacobs – Chair; Michael Keane-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeanne Conner; Jeannie Jenkins; 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; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (8) 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 19, 2016

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

MOTION: Michael Keane motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept and approve the minutes of December 19, 2016 as presented, as well as the warrants as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (Justin Corcoran absent)

3. CITIZENS

Nancy White, resident of Maple Street stepped forward. She has been before the Board multiple times over the last 20+ years requesting assistance with multiple issues, including an unfinished sidewalk on her street. She invited this Board to come on-site to witness the problems. Michael Keane and Jim Carroll stated they would go for the on-site visit tomorrow.

Ms. White also had questions regarding sidewalks on Safford Street. Dan Monks stated there is a comprehensive plan for town-wide sidewalks available at the Town Offices for viewing.

No other citizens spoke this evening.

4. CITIZEN SURVEY RESULTS - INITIAL DISCUSSION

Michael Harrington gave a brief history. He noted that this is the first citizen survey and sets the benchmark. The Town received approximately (530) responses with just over 200 providing “additional comments”.

Mr. Harrington continued by reviewing each subject area and their results. Overall the majority of responses showed citizens who participated found the Town at an “acceptable” level. The largest area of interest was the addition of more youth and elderly programing.

Jeannie Conner stated this gives a clear direction and we can now actually do something. Jim Carroll stated he would like to see more ways like this, where people feel comfortable contacting their government and speaking up. We need to create a dialogue and hear their ideas. Mr. Carroll asked if e-mails were given by citizens. Mr. Harrington stated this was designed to be anonymous. Donald Campbell stated he would like to look at the result more closely.

Rose Halpin stated many seniors at the Senior Center are not very good with computers. They had someone call and ask for assistance but no one ever showed up to help. Tom Jacobs suggested multiple paper copies be made available at the Senior Center for the next one. Mr. Harrington stated several were mailed out from the Town Office but only at citizen’s request. Jeannie Jenkins suggested having High School and/or College Students be more involved by assisting the elderly with the computer version. Mr. Harrington stated these results will be available on-line for the public viewing.

Joey Kulkin asked if the survey and/or results would be different if an outside company conducted the survey. These results are only 0.05% of the population. He questioned if an outside company could have received more results.

Tom Jacobs stated as the first time he felt these results were not bad as a starting point. It certainly is enough to get our attention. Donald Campbell agreed and suggested we work on this for a while to work out the kinks; then see if it is worth spending the money to have an outside organization do it for us.

The Town Manager noted that not only was this the first time but it was also a short turnaround time; only (30) days from launch to close.

5. TAX INCREMENT FINANCING DISTRICT DISCUSSION

Michael Harrington presented alongside Michael Keane. He noted that the purpose of a “TIF” District is an incentive by the State to spur Economic Development. Recently the Town was approached by the consulting firm White & Burke to see if there was interest in joining a consortium to encourage the legislature to lift the cap on TIF Districts in Vermont.

Michael Keane stated this is the perfect example of Public-Private partnership. It is used across the nation in many states. It is private investment that spurs public action.

Mr. Keane continued the presentation by describing how the program is structured and reviewed the criteria for a TIF designation. It requires real municipal commitment and show that the project can improve economic vitality. Approval for the designation relies heavily on voter approval.

Joey Kulkin, resident asked who is responsible for taxes within the designated area. Mr. Keane stated the answer was further in the presentation.

Tom Jacobs stated that many legislatures feel this program is not needed because if a business wants to open it will do it anyway. Mr. Keane stated that businesses are not opening fast enough to keep up with how many are leaving.

Mr. Keane continued by reviewing the pros and cons of this program including if the project fails to generate sufficient increments, the debt would then fall on the taxpayers. He reviewed Vermont Towns who already have the TIF designation and their success. They are all in the northern part of the state and many are smaller (in population) than Bennington.

Questions on whether Bennington should join the consortium to raise the cap or approach it alone was discussed. Dan Monks stated a group of towns together have more power in delegation. Michael Harrington stated it would not hurt us to join the consortium to lift the cap. Further down the road if it is lifted we can advocate for our own application.

Tom Jacobs stated he would need more convincing. Mr. Keane suggested that we simultaneously put our “ducks in a row” to be prepared if the cap is lifted to get our application in. Jeannie Conner stated she respected Dan Monks’ knowledge and would support the alignment.

A consensus was reached by the Board to move forward with joining the consortium to lift the TIF District cap.

6. 2017 LIQUOR LICENSE APPLICATIONS

The Manager circulated applications for signatures.

7. PUBLIC WORKS FACILITY DISCUSSION

The Manager reviewed the history of this plan. In 2010 the Select Board authorized the development of a new facility on what was known as the “Jard” site on Bowen Road. That estimated cost (at that time) was \$5.7 Million. In 2011 Hurricane Irene hit and the Town was forced to borrow \$5 Million for recovery costs. To date we have been reimbursed all but \$1.4 million.

Today’s cost for to build the new facility on Bowen Road (Jard site) would be approximately \$6.7 Million as material costs have gone up. The Town explored a long-term lease option for an existing building but found that to be too costly (over \$14 Million). Currently there is an existing building on Bowen Road available for purchase that could be retro-fitted to meet Public Works needs. There is enough room to add a Salt & Sand Shed and a fuel depot as well. The sale price is \$1.7 million. Costs for internal renovations and the addition of the Salt & Sand shed etc brings the total cost for a new facility to approximately \$3.2 Million; half of the cost to build new.

The first large payment to the Bond Bank would fall within FY’19’s budget and can be easily built in. After five years the payments would reduce. The Water Department would also move into this location. A proportionate payment would come from their budget as well. This proposal should not negatively impact the rate payers.

This is an excellent opportunity to have the Public Works Department under one roof instead of scattered across town (three or more locations). There is sufficient office space, storage space and training/meeting space as well.

Several Select Board members discussed their experiences touring each of the current Highway facilities. Often there is only 2 inches of clearance when moving and parking vehicles and/or equipment.

MOTION: Donald Campbell motioned and Michael Keane seconded to authorize Town Staff to move forward with negotiations for option to purchase 78 Bowen Road as new Public Works Facility. Motion passed unanimously (Justin Corcoran absent)

8. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager was notified there will be a public meeting with VT DEC Health Department at Bennington College on PFOA's. He is however unsure of the date.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

Jeannie Conner asked Mr. Jacobs to review the Charter Review process. Mr. Jacobs stated he would like to have (9) citizens serve on a committee for the review. The citizens will be chosen by the Select Board through an application process. There are no requirements and is an open process. Community members should submit a letter indicating their interest in sitting on the committee. Donald Campbell suggested they work with Bennington Banner to create an article for more community awareness.

Michael Keane noted each Select Board member received a packet from various local hotel owners. They feel the first report on a downtown hotel was unsatisfactory. Mr. Keane agreed and felt the report was more anecdotal than analytical.

Dan Monks stated the first report was just a quick look to see if it was worth it to dig deeper and do further report. He recommends reviewing the second report before making any judgments. The Manager stated that should be ready soon.

Tom Jacobs stated the report is just a potential tool.

Tom Jacobs stated there no longer was need for Executive Session to discuss a real estate matter.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary