

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **JANUARY 6, 2018**

6 **MINUTES**

7 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Thomas Jacobs-Chair (left at 10:30am); Donald Campbell-Vice Chair; Jim
8 Carroll; Jeannie Jenkins; Chad Gordon; Carson Thurber and Jeanne Conner.

9 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** None.

10 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan Monks-Zoning Administrator and Assistant Town Manager;
11 Michele Johnson-Human Resources and Contracts Administrator; Melissa Currier-Finance Director; Forest
12 Weyen-Bennington Rescue Squad Executive Director; Brian Peat-Bennington Rescue Squad Board of Directors
13 Chair; William LaTour-Asst. Fire Chief; Steve Crawford-Bennington Fire Department Chief; Paul Doucette-Chief
14 of Police; R.J. Joly-Highway Superintendent; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

15 At 8:06am, Thomas Jacobs called the meeting to order.

16 **1. F.Y. 19 BUDGET WORK SESSION**

17 **A. FIRE BUDGET**

18 The overall Fire Budget increased by 5% from last year and Fire Chief Steve Crawford, with occasional
19 input from Police Chief Paul Doucette, presented the following highlights on those increases:

- 20 • Fire fighters gear - helmets, gloves, coats, pants and boots - have a useful life of 10 years. To outfit all
21 firefighters with safe gear has increased that line item to \$24,620. This amount may decrease
22 somewhat next year since we are now tracking the gear by each person. There are 64 total members
23 with 40 active members.
- 24 • Fire Building - the building is 20 years old and the kitchen cabinets are sagging and need to be
25 supported. The purchase of 2 hand dryers for the rest rooms to help "go green" and cut back on
26 janitorial supplies due to the increased use of the multi-purpose room are requested. There is a fee
27 for the use of the room but it is free for any event open to the public. The hand dryers are
28 \$1,000/each which is an increase of \$2,100 to this line item.
- 29 • Building Improvements - The 20-year old apron where the fire trucks leave the building is heaving
30 and unsafe to walk on. This will be replaced - half this year and half next year - at \$11,500 each year.
31 The apron is 70' from the road, and Mr. Hurd added that the hope is to tie it into the repaving of
32 River Street this year and to do more than half if we get a good price from the paving contractor.
- 33 • Lease Payment - this is the first year of our lease payment for the new fire truck when we replaced
34 two trucks with one. This is the only truck payment in the amount of \$45,910.
- 35 • Lease Payment - the lease payment for upgrading the air packs is increased by \$7,000 to \$24,000.
36 The lease agreement is for 20 air packs for 6 years instead of 10 years. The useful life for an air pack
37 is 10 years so, by purchasing them all at once, everyone is using the same grade of air pack that are
38 within the NFPA standards even though they will all need to be replaced in 10 years instead of
39 staggering the replacement of them.

- Tire Purchase - tires are purchased from a Goodyear distributor in Albany for savings of “hundreds of dollars per tire” if bought from local vendors. Mr. Wassick stores and mounts the tires for us and has stated that he can’t buy them for the price that we are getting them for. “We have been doing this for years.”
- Transfer to Reserve - if we stay within budget, these are dollars that are set aside to purchase future fire trucks and radio communication. Ms. Currier explained that it isn’t visible on the information that the Board is looking at but there were balance sheet journal entries done each year to the fund balance which is now at \$300,000. A better presentation will be given to the Board in the future.

Board questions:

- Ms. Conner asked: What had to be cut from your wish list, and Chief Crawford answered really nothing from a ‘Wish List’ but there were reductions of 1 set of gear, 2 pagers and operational supplies. Ms. Conner would like to tour the fire facility, and Chief Doucette suggested coming when they are doing their New Experience Camp.
- Mr. Carson asked: What year are they planning on purchasing the new ladder truck for \$1.2M, and Chief Crawford answered “the ballot in March” because it takes a year to build the truck and payment doesn’t start until after delivery which would make the first payment due in FY21. The Board will discuss this at a later date as they were unaware of this intent.
- Mr. Carroll asked: Does the fire department apply for grants, and Chief Doucette answered that the last successful application was three years ago, however, grant dollars are not as available as they used to be for what we would be qualified for. Mr. Carroll reiterated his hope that tax dollars are being spent locally whenever possible.
- Mr. Campbell asked: What makes up the two \$5,000 decreases in the building budget, and Chief Crawford answered that one was for the floor machine purchased last year, and the other was to upgrade the air compressor.
- Mr. Campbell asked: What was the \$2,000 increase in communications, and Chief Crawford responded that that was for the improved radio communications. The cost will fluctuate year-to-year between the radio communication line item and the pager line item. Mr. Campbell stated his appreciation that even at a 5% budget increase, the actual dollar increase is only \$17,000, and the Town reaps a substantial benefit for these monies.
- Mr. Jacobs asked: About the workers compensation insurance, and Mr. Hurd explained that those dollars reflect that purchase of insurance for volunteers and we have had a “good run” of no injuries. Mr. Jacobs thanked the fire department for all that they do.
- Ms. Jenkins and Mr. Gordon: Had no questions but thanked Chief Crawford for a well thought out budget and the work that they do.

B. POLICE BUDGET

The overall Police Budget increased by 1.8% from last year and Police Chief Paul Doucette presented the following highlights on those increases:

- Salaries - decreased \$10,000 due to younger officers having the “step system in the Union”, two officers going to the Vermont State Police, and the cutting of the SRO position.
- Benefits - increased \$13,000 due to ad hoc court scheduling, Union driven overtime plus increasing holiday hours to 88 (Martin Luther King Day) instead of 80. This has made us not allowed us to keep the SRO position and remain fiscally responsible. We may be asking to reinstate it in another

82 year. 4120 details are now being run at the CDC, the high school, and one of the elementary
83 schools.

- 84 • Worker Compensation - increased by \$42,180 because we belong to the League of Cities and
85 Towns insurance fund pool and we have had a few injuries over the last couple of years that are
86 not major but have required an “injury buyout” because the individual - even though they are able
87 to continue to work for us - will never be the same. Workers comp looks at a three-year window so
88 we will eventually cycle out of this higher rate. Now that the police have begun carrying electronic
89 control devices - Tasers, there has been a decrease in physical confrontations. The Tasers have
90 never been discharged.
- 91 • Line Item 210 - the bicycle helmet program is no longer so this line item has increased from \$1,000
92 to \$2,000 to help add to the weekly donations made by the officers to fund the ‘Bicycle Rodeo’ at
93 the Walmart parking lot this spring, as well as, other community events that they participate in.
- 94 • Canine Unit - \$4,000 to fund the canine unit that is up and running. We have also received a
95 \$2,000 grant to get our German Shepard, Gracie, her own vest.
- 96 • Tracking Maintenance - increase of \$1,740 for maintenance agreement on our electronic finger
97 printing unit that was purchased with Homeland Security funds.
- 98 • Electricity and Fuel - the increase in electricity is offset by the decrease in fuel.
- 99 • Building Security - increase of \$6,500 to increase the security on the front of the building.
- 100 • Machinery and Equipment - increase of \$19,000 to replace two vehicles with 115,000 miles on
101 them and ancillary equipment. We will purchase Ford all-wheel drive sedans from Carbone as it is
102 not cost effective to buy in Burlington. The next two years one vehicle will be purchased with a
103 request for two vehicles in three years.
- 104 • Heat and Air Conditioning - Mr. Hurd explained that the roof system on the police building is
105 intended to push warm air down in the winter and cool air down in the summer. The unit has
106 never functioned as well as expected and an upgrade is being considered. We are currently
107 discussing the two-phase project with a consultant and it is expected to cost ~\$350,000 from our
108 capital reserve funds. Mr. Hurd will present this to the Board at a future meeting as it would be a
109 capital expenditure and not part of the annual budget review. A geo-thermal system had been
110 looked into years ago for the police facility and town office, and Mr. Carroll requested that Mr.
111 Hurd look into it again for all town facilities.

112 Chief Doucette stated that the Vermont State Police are looking to get out of the dispatch business. It
113 costs us \$395,268 to run the 24/7 dispatch service with the capability to serve other towns. Some money
114 comes in from the Bennington Rescue Squad (BRS) and Pownal. For example, the BRS pays \$18,000/year
115 when they are 35% of the dispatch use, or \$138,000 of the cost, and occasionally, if they are not available, we
116 are potentially dispatching for other towns including some in New York. It is not feasible to outsource
117 dispatching because we have too many obligations here.

118 Board questions:

- 119 • Mr. Thurber asked: How often do other ambulances need to be called in, and Chief Doucette did
120 not have an actual number. Mr. Thurber would also like to further consider to outsource
121 dispatching in the future, and if are going to be taking on more towns, this could be a revenue
122 driver.
- 123 • Ms. Conner asked: When is the State Police going to stop dispatching for others, and Chief Doucette
124 said that a date has not been given.

- 125 • Mr. Jacobs noted: This is good information going forward in considering that the Bennington
126 taxpayers would be supporting these services to other towns and how to financially remedy that.
- 127 • Mr. Jacobs asked: Do the police have a fitness program, and Chief Doucette answered that all town
128 staff have free access to the Rec Center and several officers also frequent the private workout
129 businesses in town. It would be convenient if the town could have an arrangement with the local
130 fitness centers since it is often not convenient for the officers to go to the Rec Center when it is
131 open.
- 132 • Ms. Conner asked: Is the workers comp premium age related, and Chief Doucette responded that it
133 is not.
- 134 • Ms. Jenkins asked: How can the department be down two officers and not increase overtime
135 because of it, and Chief Doucette answered that they are just not as proactive as he would like to
136 be. We move people around and always maintain the minimum of three officers on each shift.
- 137 • Mr. Campbell asked: What the decrease of \$25,000 was, and Mr. Hurd stated that there were two
138 bonds when the Police Department went into the building. One has been paid off that had a
139 \$25,000 payment, and the other one with a payment of \$20,000 will be paid off on 6/30/19.
- 140 • Ms. Jenkins thanked Chief Doucette for a good budget and good presentation.
- 141 • Mr. Gordon has concerns about cutting the SRO in the school stating that the presence of the same
142 officer all the time is beneficial. Chief Doucette spoke to the importance of the police presence in
143 the schools, and Mr. Hurd added that the SRO position will be requested in next year's budget "if
144 not sooner".

145 **C. HIGHWAY BUDGET**

146 Superintendent Joly noted the improvements of having the Highway and Water Departments under
147 one roof. Mr. Hurd added that the first bond payment of \$252,000 is part of this year's budget with the offset
148 being a reduction in project costs. The bond payment will decrease each year for 20 years with the first five
149 years having the highest interest amounts. After 5 years, the payment will decrease enough so we can include
150 projects within those budgets. Also, any revenue generated from the two previous facilities will go into the
151 Highway Fund.

152 Mr. Joly stated that the PFOA project has been beneficial this year because it has enabled us to put a
153 hold on much of our paving projects. The end result will be the same amount of work being done without
154 affecting the budget.

155 Board questions:

- 156 • Ms. Jenkins remembers that the savings from consolidating into one building was enough to cover the
157 new building, and was surprised to hear that there may be services that are not provided to cover the
158 cost. She would like to hear more on this at a later time.
- 159 • Ms. Conner asked if other areas could be cut beside the projects, and Mr. Joly answered no.
- 160 • Mr. Campbell noted the decrease in the sidewalk budget, and agreed with Ms. Jenkins that this needs
161 to be discussed again. Mr. Hurd added that the sidewalk projects have not been decreased. The lower
162 amount is a better understanding of the actual costs to do them.

163 The overall Highway Budget increased by 2.25% from last year and Superintendent Joly presented the
164 following highlights on those increases:

- 165 • Salaries and Benefits - increase of \$42,000 due to changes of responsibility will be more than offset
166 with \$50,000 from the Water and Sewer Department.
- 167 • Workers Compensation - Mr. Hurd stated that this has increased due to a rate increase in the
168 League of Cities and Towns pool. We can go to a private insurer where the premiums may be lower
169 to begin with, but the pool rate will eventually level out. There are other benefits to belonging to it
170 such as the return of a portion of premium to us annually whereas a private insurer would not do
171 that. Mr. Campbell recommended that we do a cost comparison in the future.
- 172 • Health Insurance - increase of 24%. There will be a cost analysis done next year comparing Blue
173 Cross Blue Shield, MVP and/or fewer benefits with each.
- 174 • School Street/Pleasant Street Enhancement Project - our portion of the grant is \$67,000 with
175 construction hopefully starting this summer. The project is new pavement, new sidewalks, new
176 street lighting, pole relocation and some landscaping. The State is also now requiring that a Clerk of
177 the Works be present during the project.
- 178 • Traffic Control - level funded and will be upgrading the crosswalk signals as needed.
- 179 • Buildings - increase of \$15,600 is to hire a part time cleaning person for the new and larger building.
- 180 • Electricity - an estimated amount for a building that is an acre large that will house all of our
181 equipment.
- 182 • Covered Bridges - the roof will be replaced on the Silk Road Bridge bringing all of the covered
183 bridges up to par in FY19. Mr. Hurd recommends that this same amount of money be put into a
184 bridge reserve account after FY19. Mr. Joly added that the Peppermill Bridge and the bridge by Rite
185 Aid are on "the radar".
- 186 • Truck Replacements - to replace one 2008 1-ton dump truck, a 25-30 year old 20-ton trailer that
187 can be sold for \$3,000, and an 8-year old tandem axle dump truck that can be traded for \$40,000-
188 \$60,000.

189 Board questions:

- 190 • Mr. Thurber asked: Do we currently employ a mechanic, and Mr. Joly answered that we do not. We
191 also need to purchase a lift and will eventually have all departments fuel up at the one location. "I've
192 been told this will save us thousands." Mr. Hurd added that now that we have the one facility, we will
193 take another look at the cost of employing a mechanic to include working on the police vehicles, as
194 well.
- 195 • Mr. Carroll asked: Where do you buy your vehicles, and Mr. Joly stated that we buy all of our smaller
196 vehicles locally and our larger tires from a Vermont vendor an hour away who delivers, mounts and
197 services the tires. This saves us 50%, or \$1,800 on one bucket loader tire.
- 198 • Ms. Conner asked: Is it a State Law that every road be striped, and Mr. Joly responded that the State
199 requires that all roads be striped. They provide the equipment and paint to stripe the Class 2 roads.
200 Shoulder striping only has to be done every 4 or 5 years due to less traffic on them. We will be striping
201 in the spring this year instead of the fall.
- 202 • Mr. Campbell asked: If the DPW line item would remain at \$0.00, and Mr. Hurd answered that this
203 amount is not ever budgeted but comes from the reserves.
- 204 • Mr. Campbell asked Mr. Joly to explain the logic in choosing the roads to pave. Mr. Joly stated that it is
205 recommended to pave your best roads first (uses less pavement - $\frac{3}{4}$ " - and lasts longer - 15 years) and
206 then the worst ones or gravel roads because they use much more pavement - 4" - and don't last as

207 long - 3-4 years. Even though the State paves Class 1 roads, such as South Street, we are still required
208 to do work on the manhole cover depths, etc.

209 **D. IF TIME ALLOWS - RECREATION BUDGET AND REMAINDER OF ADMINISTRATIVE BUDGETS**

210 These will be discussed at the January 13, 2018 meeting.

211 **2. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

212 **A. Personnel**

213 *At 11:07am, Jim Carroll moved and Chad Gordon seconded finding that an Executive Session be held*
214 *on Personnel as premature general public knowledge would place a person involved in the subject matter at*
215 *a substantial disadvantage. The motion carried unanimously.*

216

217

218

219 Respectfully submitted,

220 Nancy H. Lively

221 Secretary

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