

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **JANUARY 5, 2019**

6 **MINUTES**

7 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Thomas Jacobs-Chair; 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
11 Town Manager; Michele Johnson-Human Resources and Contracts Administrator; Melissa
12 Currier-Finance Director; Jeff Vickers-Fire Chief; Steve Crawford-Assistant Fire Chief; Paul
13 Doucette-Police Chief; Cam Grande-Police Lieutenant; R.J. Joly-Public Works Director; Larry
14 Gates-Assistant Public Works Director; 1 citizen; John Therrien-Bennington Banner; CAT-TV and
15 Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

16 At 8:04am, Thomas Jacobs called the meeting to order.

17 **1. F.Y. 20 BUDGET WORK SESSION**

18 **A. FIRE BUDGET**

19 Mr. Hurd stated that the combined FY20 General, Highway and Fire Fund budgets
20 presented show an increase of 3.45%. The General Fund increase includes level funded
21 agencies at 3.9%; the Highway Fund an increase of 2.77%; and the Fire Fund an increase of
22 0.57%. Overall, the taxes are expected to be increased by 4.41%. The current Grand List in the
23 General Fund is an increase of 4.21% with no major increases in revenues; the Highway Fund an
24 increase of 5.22% with anticipated lower revenues; and the Fire Fund increase of 0.03%.

25 *Fire Chief Jeff Vickers and Police Chief Paul Doucette did the following presentation:*

- 26 • *Uniform Equipment* - plan to replace 6 sets of turn out gear with a cost increase of 4%.
27 The gear ages out at 10 years and the fire fighters that go into the live fires get the
28 newest gear with the new members getting the "hand me down gear" until they
29 complete the Fire Fighter One and Two, 225 hour, 6 month, trainings. Our intent is to
30 annually replace 6 sets of gear.
31 • *Small Tools/Equipment* - update kitchen cabinets (\$4,100), purchase a new electric
32 hand dryer (\$2,000) and replace damaged tables.

- 33 • *Building Improvements* - the apron repair in front of the facility was budgeted in FY19
- 34 but is now planned to combine with the River Street upgrade and be done by the Town
- 35 employees.
- 36 • *Machinery and Equipment* - begin a phased upgrade of the 20-year old HVAC system
- 37 based on an engineering study will start on the 3rd floor (\$6,400) and improve the
- 38 dispatch area (\$2,400).
- 39 • *Lease Payments* - includes the payments for the new SCBA system (25 units) at \$24,000
- 40 and the new rescue pumper truck at \$49,910.
- 41 • *Transfer to Reserve Fund* - continue with the increased amount of \$60,000 approved
- 42 last year.
- 43 • *Ladder Truck Replacement* - currently the maximum estimated cost is \$1.2M, the
- 44 process will be a year or more with the first bond payment to be in FY21. This will
- 45 require a bond vote in March 2019 to begin the bid process.
- 46 • The current 1997 truck has had an outrigger malfunction during a drill plus outrigger
- 47 corrosion, cable replacement, and pump replacement.
- 48 • The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) considers it a 20-year truck and
- 49 recommends putting all trucks in reserve at 15 years to refurbish them - which we can't
- 50 do - and replacing them at 25 years.
- 51 • We go out on 200-250 calls/year with the ladder truck going to ~10% of those calls, or
- 52 166/5 years. 8.4% of the 166 were for mutual aid.
- 53 • We have an agreement with the Bennington County Mutual Aid Association. The
- 54 generalization is that Bennington Rural Fire Department's specialty is vehicle extraction
- 55 and North Bennington's is water rescue. Manchester also has a new ladder truck and
- 56 Hoosick Falls has an aged one.
- 57 • It would cost \$250,000-\$300,000 to refurbish the existing ladder truck to potentially
- 58 only have its cash value be ~\$50,000 should it be involved in a roll over - if it can be sold
- 59 at all.
- 60 • The taxpayers have a substantial savings by having a volunteer fire department and not
- 61 one that would have to be paid. Having good operating equipment is a huge factor in
- 62 maintaining a volunteer department.
- 63 • There are currently 60 members of the fire department with 20-25 very active, and 30-
- 64 35 active for a major fire.
- 65 • *Overall Budget* - increase of .57%.

66 *Board questions/comments:*

67 Ms. Jenkins: Do the other departments in the Association have equally priced
 68 equipment, and Chief Vickers stated, no, because the smaller towns have smaller budgets.

69 Ms. Jenkins: Is cost sharing possible, and Chief Vickers answered that they have taken
 70 the ladder truck on 14 mutual aid calls in the last 5 years so he isn't sure how that would cost
 71 out.

72 Mr. Jacobs: What are the insurance implications, and Chief Vickers responded that the
73 Department is rated in all areas with vehicle condition being a significant part of it. Also, the
74 improved safety features of a new truck would be significant from one built in 1997.

75 Mr. Gordon: Would we save money if we ordered more than 6 sets of gear at a time,
76 and Chief Vickers answered that we usually include our purchases within an order from a larger
77 city, as well as, purchasing gear that has been displayed at a show.

78 Mr. Campbell: Noted that the proposed budget is less than the two previous year's
79 actuals, and wanted to make sure that all areas have been considered. Chief Doucette stated
80 that this is because our building is paid for.

81 Mr. Campbell: What capital expenses will be coming after the ladder truck, and Chief
82 Vickers answered that there are two trucks that should be replaced within 5 years at \$400,000-
83 \$500,000 each that we will continue to pay for from reserves. We would expect to replace one
84 of those in 5 years. Mr. Campbell added that we should have a plan over the next 15-20 years
85 to put monies into reserve to pay for these large expenditures so the taxpayers are not
86 presented with a bond vote to cover the expense.

87 Mr. Hurd: We currently have \$360,000 in reserve with ~\$60,000 potentially going for
88 radios and ~\$60,000-\$70,000 added to the reserve each year.

89 Mr. Thurber: Questioned the \$757 expenditure of the Uniform-Equipment Maintenance
90 line item budget of \$24,900, and Chief Vickers stated that that would be spent by June 30th - if
91 not on full gear replacement, on the replacement of individual worn pieces.

92 Ms. Conner: Verified that the Rural Fire Department budget is not part of this budget
93 and that the \$60,000 in the budget for Transfer to Reserve Fund never shows in the Actual
94 expense column. Ms. Currier noted that the \$60,000 is a balance sheet transfer and "not an
95 expense you would write a check for".

96 Ms. Conner: Asked how recruitment was going, and Chief Vickers answered that they
97 have had some success with open houses and social media, but it is a national problem to
98 maintain volunteer fire departments. It is a time commitment to individuals that are required
99 to train 225 hours while they may be working multiple jobs. We have women in the
100 department, interested people can sign up for the course at 18 and drive the apparatus at 21.
101 Chief Doucette added that the State has recognized this problem and has created a 60 hour
102 training for exterior fires only.

103 Chief Doucette stated that we will be installing radios from Rensselaer to be paid for by
104 a grant and still need to replace the console. The system will mirror what the Police
105 Department has. We have \$74,000 in reserve specifically for this and have an invoice from
106 Wells Communication for no more than \$87,434. Since the Board didn't have any
107 documentation for this, it will be an agenda item for the January 14th meeting.

108 The Board thanked the Fire Department for all that they do.

109

110 **B. POLICE BUDGET**

111 *Chief Doucette did the following presentation:*

- 112 • *Salaries and Wages* - anticipated increase due to a new union contract.
- 113 • *Small Tools and Equipment* - stable except to replace storage units and desks in the
- 114 *detectives' division* at an estimated cost of \$4,340.
- 115 • *Insurance - Workers Comp* - our injuries have decreased primarily due to the
- 116 *implementation of Tasers and less physical contact*, however, there is a 3.72% increase
- 117 *in premium* because we are in a pool with the entire State of Vermont.
- 118 • *Lease Payments* - increase of \$2,220 because we need to replace our computers every 3
- 119 *years* to remain compliant with the State.
- 120 • *Machinery and Equipment* - \$10,800 to upgrade the phone system to gain individual
- 121 *voice mail* for every officer.
- 122 • *Machinery and Equipment* - \$49,670 to replace one 3-year old plus vehicle with 130,000
- 123 *miles plus on it* with a new Interceptor Ford SUV with all ancillary equipment installed.
- 124 • *Overall Budget* - increase of 2.19%.
- 125 • The Police Department responded to over 10,000 calls in 2018 - an increase of over
- 126 *1,000 calls* from 2017 - and is currently fully staffed.
- 127 • We have a 1-year agreement with the Vermont Army National Guard for an unarmed
- 128 *analyst not in uniform* for surveillance and documentation to help with any type of issue
- 129 *that we have*, including the opiate problem.
- 130 • At some point the Board will be approached to get approval for the Police Department
- 131 *to hold a fundraiser* to get a second dog for the Canine Unit.

132 *Board questions/comments:*

133 Mr. Jacobs: Anyone close to retirement, and Chief Doucette answered that there are 2

134 *officers that are just starting to talk about it with their actual retirement out 1-2 years.*

135 Mr. Jacobs: Are the Special Services line items pass through, and Mr. Hurd answered

136 *yes.*

137 Mr. Jacobs: What is the reason there is no reserve for the Police Department, and Mr.

138 *Hurd responded that their major purchases would be their vehicles which are incorporated*

139 *within the budget.*

140 Mr. Carroll: What are the fines for texting, and Chief Doucette stated that cell phones

141 *must be in a cradle or stowed with fines of \$162-\$392 and 2 points against your license - texting*

142 *is 11 points against your license.*

143 Mr. Gordon: How will the officers be notified of their voice mail messages, and Chief
144 Doucette responded that they will be sent a message and will be able to check the voice mail
145 24/7.

146 Ms. Jenkins: Why are overtime wages always so significant, and Chief Doucette stated
147 that we are as prudent as we can be with schedules but it is due to doing follow ups on calls
148 that took place during their shift, paperwork, and a 3-hour minimum for court appearances.

149 Mr. Campbell: Is concerned that the budget reductions in Building Repair and
150 Maintenance and Machinery and Equipment is too low just to make the budget come in with a
151 lower increase, and Chief Doucette said that the replacement of the HVAC system is helping to
152 reduce the Building Maintenance line item and only asking to replace one vehicle instead of
153 two is lowering the Machinery and Equipment line item.

154 Mr. Hurd: Added that the Building Repair and Maintenance line item may be further
155 reduced because of the HVAC system, and Chief Doucette requested that, if that was possible,
156 to reallocate it to Equipment Repair and Maintenance Supplies.

157 Mr. Campbell: Kudos to the department for the improvements to non-lethal force and presence
158 in the schools that is not evident in a line item budget. Chief Doucette added that many of the
159 materials used in the schools are provided from the Police Association which is a fund that
160 comes from officer payroll deductions and not from the taxpayers.

161 The Board thanked the Police Department for all that they do.

162

163 **C. HIGHWAY BUDGET**

164 *R.J. Joly and Larry Gates did the following presentation:*

- 165 • *Construction & Maintenance-Bridges-Other Purchased Services* - to sandblast, prime and
166 paint the Brooklyn Bridge will be \$187,000 and the Orchard Road Bridge will be \$56,000.
167 We have budgeted \$87,400 for those plus we have \$156,000 in reserve available to us.
- 168 • *Vehicles & Equipment-Equipment* - purchase of a 1-ton pickup w/tipper body with plow
169 and sander for \$53,000 to replace a 2011 vehicle.
- 170 • *Projects-Other Purchased Services* - level funded again this year to offset the new bond
171 payments with paving to include River Street, Hillside Street, Fox Hill Road, Airport Road,
172 Whipstock Road and Shields Drive unless other needs develop.
- 173 • *Construction & Maintenance-Sidewalks* - we did 2,600' of sidewalks this year and have
174 budgeted for 4,000' in FY20 to include River Street, Lincoln Street, and Washington
175 Avenue from Elm Street to Observatory.
- 176 • *Vehicles & Equipment-Communications* - reception is difficult in certain areas of the
177 community and we propose to purchase a repeater system for DPW radios at \$12,000.

178 We looked into digital systems which “are amazing” but too expensive at \$50,000 plus a
179 \$20/month charge per radio.

- 180 • *Principal and Interest Payments* - we propose acquiring a new tandem axle dump truck
181 via the State’s Highway Equipment Fund to replace a 2013 model and to replace a 2009
182 John Deere bucket loader adding \$48,440 to existing budget principal and interest. We
183 are now on a 3% payback over 7-years through the Highway Equipment Fund which still
184 has us covered for warranty work on very expensive parts. The current principal and
185 interest payments are \$298,600 and we are proposing to add \$26,040 to that in FY20.
186 The new facility has enabled us to take better care of the trucks so that last year we
187 received \$64,000 for a trade in.
- 188 • *Construction and Maintenance-Winter Maintenance Supplies* - salt costs have decreased
189 slightly and we are proposing to purchase 3,000 tons once again anticipating another
190 warm, wet (icing) winter.
- 191 • *Overall Budget* - increase of 2.77%

192 *Board questions/comments:*

193 Mr. Jacobs: Have we considered leasing vehicles, and Mr. Joly answered that we have so
194 much add on equipment that it isn’t worth it.

195 Mr. Jacobs: Do we get bids on the vehicles, and Mr. Joly responded that we get 3-5 or 6
196 bids on the big equipment and no response from local vendors on the smaller trucks. We have
197 had good service in the past from Greenwich, New York.

198 Mr. Jacobs: We were expecting efficiencies in the electric and heating fuel costs for the
199 new building, however, there are substantial increases. Mr. Joly stated that we still don’t know
200 what those costs will be long term. We replaced some lighting based on Efficiency Vermont’s
201 suggestions and we haven’t turned on the solar heaters in the roof yet. We’ve added insulation
202 in areas that needed it and we keep the garage at 62°.

203 Mr. Jacobs: Has the increased cost of concrete been anticipated in the budget, and Mr.
204 Joly answered yes.

205 Ms. Conner: Reiterated the unexpected increased cost of utilities and stated “I keep my
206 house at 62°. Don’t the guys wear coats in the garage?” Mr. Joly noted that they are working
207 on adjusting the heat because of the condensation in the building.

208 Ms. Conner: When constructing a new sidewalk, is it possible to put in the pedestrian
209 preferred grass buffered sidewalk, and Mr. Joly answered that it is a huge maintenance issue.
210 Mr. Hurd added that we don’t always have enough of a right-of-way to do those. Mr. Monks
211 noted that the Kocher Drive project will be done, as well, this construction season.

212 Mr. Carroll: Agreed that the garage could be kept much cooler since the office area is
213 enclosed separate from the garage.

214 Mr. Campbell: We should revisit this next year when we have more complete data.

215 Mr. Gordon: Will the money we get when we sell the old garages go toward the
216 Highway Budget, and Mr. Hurd answered that it will probably go into the Capital Reserve
217 Account.

218 Ms. Jenkins: At what point does it make sense to go to electric heat instead of propane,
219 and Mr. Hurd stated that it is "cyclical". Propane is the least expensive of the liquid fuels and
220 what the building is set up for. To retrofit it to electric heat would be very costly.

221 Mr. Campbell: Is the decrease in Federal/State Grants of \$87,500 due to lack of time,
222 and Mr. Hurd answered that the grants aren't available until the spring. Mr. Joly will be
223 applying for a \$175,000 grant in April that we feel we have a good chance of getting.

224 Mr. Campbell: The School Street/Pleasant Street Enhancement project costs have
225 increased given the first bid round was rejected yet the budget for that line item has decreased,
226 and Mr. Hurd answered that there are other things in that line item.

227 Mr. Gordon: Have we given anymore thought to hiring a full time mechanic for the
228 Highway Department and Police Department, and Mr. Joly stated that "he would love a full
229 time mechanic". Mr. Hurd added that we will revisit this now that we have one facility where
230 the work can be done.

231 The Board thanked the Highway Department for all that they do.

232

233 Mr. Jacobs asked about the increase in the Life and Disability Insurance, and Ms.
234 Johnson explained that we were out of our 3-year rate lock, had several disability claims, and
235 had to negotiate another 3-year rate lock premium. This was done at about half of their
236 original proposal. We have been with this company for several years and they are more
237 professional than any others that we have tried. We also offer Wellness Programs but most of
238 our claims are due to injury rather than illness.

239 Ms. Jenkins asked if the agency information was available to the public, and Mr. Hurd
240 answered that anyone interested can contact the Town Office and we can also put it on our
241 website.

242 The Bennington Free Library, the Park McCullough Library, and the Bennington Rescue
243 Squad will be invited to present at the January 12th budget meeting.

244

245 ***At 11:27am, Donald Campbell moved and Jim Carroll seconded the adjournment of the***
246 ***meeting. The motion carried unanimously.***

247

248

249

250 Respectfully submitted,

251 Nancy H. Lively

252 Secretary