

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **MARCH 25, 2019**

6 **MINUTES**

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

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

10 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Daniel Monks-Assistant Town Manager and Planning
11 Director; Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director; David Evans-Southern Vermont College
12 President; Catherine Bryars-BCRC; Peter Odierna; James Salerno; Bob Poblocki; Terry Beach; Tim Payne;
13 Brooke Remington; Chris Mayer; Rose Talbot; Matt Whitman; Zach Garafalo; Norina Gilarde; Rose Talbot;
14 20 citizens; Bennington Banner; Mike Cutler-CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

15 At 6:03pm, Chair Thomas Jacobs called the meeting to order.

16 **1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

17 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

18 **2. CONSENT AGENDA**

19 **A. MINUTES - MARCH 11, 2019**

20 **B. WARRANTS**

21 *Donald Campbell moved and Carson Thurber seconded to approve the Consent Agenda as*
22 *submitted. The motion carried unanimously.*

23 **3. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

24 Peter Odierna and James Salerno noted the success that they have had over the past year
25 with several local businesses in a training program for the purpose of training their future
26 employees. They now want to role the program out to the public in Bennington County, as well as,
27 across state lines, at a Public Forum at the Bennington Fire Facility on April 3, 2019 from 4:00-
28 6:00pm. For every \$1.00 generated in manufacturing, an estimated \$1.89 is generated in other
29 economic activities and for every manufacturing job, four jobs are generated in other areas. High
30 school students are the primary group targeted, however, anyone may participate in this "career
31 pipeline".

32 The Board was very supportive of this manufacturing initiative.

33
34 Bob Poblocki and Terry Beach stated that, on March 4, 2019, there was in intruder at their
35 house. "It was scary and he was out of control yelling 'we're all gonna die'." They made an
36 emergency call to the police department, there was no response for 55 minutes, and the intruder

37 returned. They then called 911, an officer showed up 15 minutes later, and the intruder was taken
38 into custody. Mr. Poblocki tried to contact the Chief of Police to express his dissatisfaction with
39 how the incident had been handled without success. He then contacted Mr. Hurd who set up a
40 meeting with the Chief, Mr. Poblocki and himself.

41 Mr. Hurd added that the situation with the dispatcher has been addressed, and when the
42 police officer found the intruder, he was calm so he was sent home with his parents.

43

44 Tim Payne, a resident on Elm Street, thanked the Town for removing a dead tree on his
45 property, and wanted to know the Town's plan with taking down the trees that have removed his
46 screening from his neighbors. Mr. Hurd answered that the Town is responding to neighbors'
47 concerns by putting in a drainage way for the Dewey Brook with no other plans for the property.

48 Mr. Payne is also concerned with the number of accidents and speed that take place at the
49 Elm Street/Dewey Street intersection. Mr. Hurd stated that the next best step would be to install
50 a suspended 4-way flashing red light that is more visible to traffic.

51

52 Chris Mayer and Matt Whitman, high school students at Mt. Anthony, spoke to the parking
53 and speed on Park Street. Their concerns are that cars are going faster than 25mph, there is only
54 one crosswalk, and it's difficult to see crossing the road because so many cars are parked on the
55 street. Some suggestions by the students are to add more crosswalks, widen the parking areas on
56 the street, or adding traffic lights.

57 Mr. Hurd stated that the Town could come up with some suggestions - some of which will
58 not be popular with the students - such as, not allowing any parking on Park Street, ask Mt.
59 Anthony to install a sidewalk on the west side of Park Street and more crosswalks, restrict the
60 number of people that drive cars to school, see if additional parking could be available on the
61 Veterans Home property, or see if the high school could create more parking on site.

62

63 Rose Talbot reiterated her feelings that the Town doesn't do enough for the seniors.

64

65 **4. SOUTHERN VERMONT COLLEGE-SVC ADMINISTRATOR**

66 Dr. David Evans, President of Southern Vermont College shared the following information
67 with the Board:

- 68
- 69 • He also is President of the Chamber of Commerce and is deeply involved in workforce
70 development in the Town, and is aware of the economic impact that the closure of SVC will
71 have on Bennington.
 - 72 • There is concern about the SVC property, itself. It is, however, protected by Preservation
73 Easement on the Management, Land Trust on the forest land, and the entire property is
74 Act 250.
 - The Art Center is anticipated to not be affected by the closure.

- 75 • Our priority has been to secure transfers for our students to other colleges, and that is
76 going very well.
- 77 • Our next concern is our administrative employees. We have a number of high quality
78 personnel that other businesses are encouraged to pursue. Faculty placement is a bit
79 different and more difficult.
- 80 • There are many moving parts and legal issues that we will be working through the next
81 couple of months.

82 Board comments/questions:

83 Mr. Jacobs: Noted the “perfect storm” article where it is recognized that we are just
84 entering a demographic issue where there are fewer high school graduates in the region and,
85 therefore, fewer college students. The “experts” predict that there will be 25 fewer colleges in
86 New England within 10-15 years. Dr. Evans agreed, and stated that it is currently bad and will only
87 get worse. In addition, even though SVC has kept its tuition as low as possible, we serve a high
88 number of needy and 1st generation students. This also translates into not having large donations
89 or an endowment to fall back on.

90 Mr. Gordon: A 2001 graduate of SVC, is concerned about the void that not having SVC will
91 leave in the community - in other ways in addition to economical.

92 Ms. Jenkins: Agreed that it is a huge loss to the community in terms of cultural diversity
93 and bringing young people here, as well as, economically.

94 Mr. Campbell: Asked Dr. Evans to explain the history of SVC closing and the new
95 accreditation system that will affect all colleges. Dr. Evans stated that the accreditors are charged
96 with more aggressively protecting federal Title 4 financial aid. If not done, then accreditation
97 would be taken over by the federal government, and “that would be very bad for education in the
98 United States”. SVC has never been strong financially and has been working to overcome the
99 Beckwith embezzlement (\$700,000-\$1,000,000) four years ago, as well as, the nursing
100 accreditation issue. Even though this was resolved educationally, it continues to hurt the SVC
101 reputation, and therefore, the nursing enrollment, for years after. Our enrollment is 100 students
102 down from where it needs to be to stay in business.

103 Mr. Carroll: Stated that the Town and State were “caught flat footed” because Dr. Evans
104 did not reach out to either, and Dr. Evans noted that he didn’t feel the Town - with the same size
105 budget that SVC has - would have the resources to help the college. He also cited the numerous
106 occasions that he had contacted the State and our representatives. The appeal would only work if
107 the college could have demonstrated their financial viability over the next four years. The amount
108 needed is \$4,000,000-\$6,000,000, not \$50,000.

109 Mr. Thurber: There are people commenting on this situation that have limited information,
110 and Dr. Evans will gladly entertain their questions. He also reminded everyone that he has
111 fiduciary responsibilities to others that the general public does not have privy to.

112 Ms. Conner: Kudos to Dr. Evans for his efforts to keep SVC open.

113 Zach Garafalo, a 2010 graduate of SVC, feels that SVC closing “came out of nowhere” and
114 stated that there are people driven to find solutions with the energy to not let it end.

115 **5. NATURAL PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT PRESENTATION**

116 Shannon Barsotti and Catherine Bryars did the following presentation:

- 117 • It was noted by a few interested parties in the fall of 2017 that the Stark Street Playground
118 wasn't being used and should be.
- 119 • Now it is primarily the entry to the trails on hospital property that connect to the Mt.
120 Anthony trail network - a total of ~10 miles.
- 121 • The Playground is a 5-10 minute walk from downtown.
- 122 • Public input in early 2018 established that people wanted public restrooms, natural
123 playground equipment, a bike pump track, perimeter walking trail, to address water issues
124 at the site, and access to the BATS trail network.
- 125 • More children get hurt on conventional playground equipment than on natural playground
126 equipment because children get bored with conventional equipment and do riskier things.
127 More injuries equal more insurance claims.
- 128 • Natural playgrounds are built into the landscape.
- 129 • We are working with a company from New Hampshire that has been building natural
130 playgrounds for 20 years and have had no injury claims during that time.
- 131 • Slides of existing natural playgrounds were shared.
- 132 • The cost of a natural playground equals the cost of only a few conventional pieces of
133 equipment.
- 134 • We have a \$3,000 grant from the Department of Health that needs to be spent by
135 September 2019.
- 136 • Home Depot is pledging volunteers and funding to support the project.
- 137 • A site visit was done by several of the key people today.

138 Board comments/questions:

139 Mr. Gordon: Is excited and asked if we have enough staff to maintain the Playground. Mr.
140 Hurd answered it's hard to know without seeing an actual design.

141 Ms. Jenkins: Is the consultant working off of a budget, and Ms. Barsotti answered yes.

142 Ms. Jenkins: Does the playground equipment at Willow Park need to be replaced this year,
143 and Mr. Hurd responded that it is good for a while. When the time comes to replace it, however,
144 we will probably also look into the natural playground as an option.

145 Ms. Jenkins: Is Stark Street the only way to access the playground, and Ms. Bryars
146 answered that there are possibly multiple access points but it is too early to know exactly how
147 many.

148 Mr. Campbell: We haven't earmarked any money for this project yet. Do we know how
149 much it will cost the Town, and Ms. Bryars stated that the Land and Water Conservation Fund is
150 for \$75,000 with a \$75,000 match over a 2-year period. Matching funds can also be in in-kind
151 services, so with the other grants and donations, the Town will probably only be providing the
152 restrooms. An RFP was not done because there are only a few companies that do natural
153 playgrounds, however, Mr. Campbell recommended getting another quote for comparison.

154 Mr. Carroll: Wished them well.

155 Mr. Thurber: Encouraged that multiple quotes be obtained on the landscaping and actual
156 construction of the playground.

157 Ms. Conner: Asked if the community could volunteer to help build the Playground, and Ms.
158 Barsotti answered that volunteer hours can serve as in-kind so several community groups will be
159 solicited for their help.

160 Norina Gilarde, a resident of Stark Street for 50 years, stated that the neighborhood is very
161 concerned about the water issue at the Playground and where the bio retention basin is going to
162 go. Decisions have been made without consulting the people that live there and we need to see
163 the plan.

164 Mr. Jacobs agreed, and noted that the Board also needs to know the cost in addition to
165 seeing the plan before signing off on it.

166 Ms. Barsotti stated that the bio retention basin has been removed from the plan because
167 the water table is so high.

168 **6. ONE WORLD CONSERVATION CENTER - OFFER TO DONATE GREENBERG RESERVE TO TOWN**

169 Mr. Monks explained that the One World Conservation Center (OWCC) has offered to
170 donate the 96-acre Greenberg Conservation Reserve off of Route 7 South to the Town of
171 Bennington. This will facilitate a trail system spanning from Route 7 South to Route 9 East. The
172 property is currently tax exempt so there are no tax cut implications.

173 ***Donald Campbell moved and Jim Carroll seconded to accept the donation of the 96-acre***
174 ***Greenberg Conservation Reserve from the One World Conservation Center.***

175 Mr. Monks added that this does not include the old Howard Johnson building on the west
176 side of Route 7.

177 Mr. Campbell stated that there is a Conservation Easement on the property which forbids it
178 from being developed but does allow for an education center.

179 ***The motion carried unanimously.***

180 **7. LIQUOR LICENSES**

181 The following 2019 Liquor License Renewal Applications were circulated for signatures:

182 *2019 1st Class Liquor License Applications -*

183 1. The Dutchman's Tavern (Formally known as JC's) (Outside Consumption)

184 *2019 1st Class Renewals -*

185 1. Aramark Dining Hall

186 2. Aramark Student Center

187 3. Catamount Glass & Tap Room (Outside Consumption)

188 4. Eagles

189 5. Four Chimneys

190 6. Moose (Outside Consumption)

191 7. Ramunto's (Outside Consumption)

192 *2019 2nd Class Renewals*

193 1. Beshara's 99 Cents & Up

194 **8. MANAGER'S REPORT**

195 No report.

196 **9. OTHER BUSINESS**

197 Ms. Conner asked if the interested parties for the Monument Avenue solar array have been
198 notified, and Mr. Monks answered that the developer and the neighbors all know that they need
199 to come back before the Board before the project can go forward.

200 Mr. Thurber asked if there was anything that we need to do concerning the water tower at
201 SVC, and Mr. Hurd responded that we have an easement from SVC for the land that the water
202 tower sits on, as well as, a right-of-way to maintain the water tower and the sewer lines.

203 Mr. Campbell read a humorous poem - Jacobs At The Bat - in recognition of, and to honor,
204 Tom Jacobs for his 6 years of service on the Select Board. Mr. Jacobs wished the Board well.

205 **10. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

206 **A. CONTRACTS**

207 *At 8:20pm, Donald Campbell moved and Carson Thurber seconded that the meeting was*
208 *adjourned finding that an Executive Session be held on Contracts as premature public knowledge*
209 *would place a person involved in the subject matter at a substantial disadvantage. The motion*
210 *carried unanimously.*

211

212

213

214 Respectfully submitted,

215 Nancy H. Lively

216 Secretary