

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

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2014

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Greg Van Houten- Chair; Sharyn Brush-Vice Chair; Tom Jacobs; Michael Keane; John McFadden; Justin Corcoran

Absent: Jim Carroll

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Mike Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Patrick McArdle – Rutland Herald; Keith Witcomb - Bennington Banner; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (4) Citizens.

At 6:00 P.M., **Greg Van Houten** called the meeting to order.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Greg Van Houten, recited by all.

At this time Greg Van Houten introduced each member of the Board, the Town Manager and the Recording Secretary. He wished everyone in the audience a Happy Thanksgiving, wished all those traveling a safe trip and welcomed home those who were returning to Bennington for the holiday.

2. MINUTES – NOVEMBER 10, 2014

There were no corrections for the minutes of November 10, 2014

Motion: Michael Keane motioned and Sharyn Brush seconded to approve the minutes of November 10, 2014 as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*Greg Van Houten & John McFadden abstained; Jim Carroll absent*)

3. WARRANTS

The next warrants of FY'15 were reviewed. Tom Jacobs asked if the Annual Audit is bid out. The Manager stated that it has in the past. The last few years it has not gone out to bid though. Love, Cody et al, has conducted the audit for the last 10 years. Mr. Jacobs stated he would like to see some type of comparison of costs. This can be looked at during budget time.

Michael Keane asked about the payment to Great Fields Kennel. The Manger noted this was for the impoundment of the dogs taken from Mr. Jensen. The Town will seek reimbursement when Mr. Jensen is prosecuted. We will also see out organizations such as rescue groups to offset costs.

There were no further questions. Warrants were then circulated for signatures.

4. CITIZENS

Mike Bethel moved forward and asked the board to consider the referendum he submitted. This would be a Charter Amendment that allows the voters of Bennington to petition for an issue to be on the ballot and voted upon by the people. According to Mr. Bethel this would be for only the important issues in this town. Citizens could then be more responsible. Mr. Bethel continued by stating that this would not impede on the rights of the Board and not effect emergency decisions.

Greg Van Houten read the referendum to the audience. He noted no decision or action would be taken tonight. The Board will consider it but must have more information.

Tom Jacobs asked who and what decides on what is an "important issue". If the Select Board is second-guessed for every decision made, then why have a Board at all?

It was discussed that two public hearings would be needed and a public warning of almost two months before anything could be changed. Justin Corcoran requested this be on an agenda for further discussion once more information is received. A target date of December 22nd, 2014 was agreed upon.

Joanne Erenhouse, Chamber of Commerce stepped forward. Ms. Erenhouse announced the Bennington Tree lighting would be at the Vermont Veteran's Home on December 3, 2014 at 5:30pm. She also noted that the State Capital tree would be cut next week in Arlington and lit at dusk at the Capital on December 4th, 2014. Lastly Ms. Erenhouse wanted to remind the public of Small Business Saturday, which is November 29, 2014. She asked everyone to join the festivities and shop local.

Greg Van Houten stated he had received a few letters as the board does each year, requesting the Late Payment Penalty be waived for Real Estate Tax bills. This subject is discussed each year; the penalty cannot be waived. Justin Corcoran stated it couldn't be case-by-case basis; it must be policy set for all. He would like, however, to look at changing the penalty to a step type system. Perhaps 3% for first several days then increase to next level. It was noted that this too would be a Charter Amendment and therefore would need public warning and two hearings. This must be considered in the near future if the Board wants to move forward.

The Board asked the Manager to gather more information regarding this issue for consideration. The Manager will have the Finance Director produce the numbers for delinquency, what portion is the 8% penalty and compare 8% versus 3%.

5. BENNINGTON FREE LIBRARY – ROOF REPAIR FUNDING

Lynn McCann, Library Director stepped forward to present. She was requesting to be placed on the March 2015 ballot a "not to exceed \$300,000" request so that the slate roof may be replaced using the same materials. They have tried to secure funding by donations and grants but have been unsuccessful.

Justin Corcoran along with other Board members asked what the comparison material costs were. The Board members agreed they would like to see the different options other than

slate. Michael Keane questioned how critical is the roofing situation. Ms. McCann noted that it has been put off for sometime now and there is water seepage from the roof and the fascia had more damage than originally thought.

The Manger clarified that placing it on the ballot allows the Town to borrow the money for the Library. However he is concerned about doing this for a property the Town does not own. The Manager asked why the Library itself could not borrow the money. Ms. Mcann stated because they would just have to pay it back. In order to do that, they would come to the Town and ask for an increase in their annual request to cover it.

John McFadden asked if this could be looked at in the budget. The Manager again stated he has concerns about cutting a Town budget for a property the Town does not own.

The Board agreed to make no decision until further information is received. Justin Corcoran asked if there was someone on the Town staff that could help consult regarding different materials, quality and cost. The Manager stated that Larry McLeod would be contacted for this. Sharyn Brush asked to have a copy of the Library's new Capital Plan be submitted for review. John McFadden asked to see the other slate bids that were turned down for a comparison as well.

6. BENNINGTON HOUSING STUDY - PRESENTATION

Dan Monks stepped forward to recap the origins of the study. He noted that a Municipal Planning Grant had been applied for and received to define the housing needs and aspirations for Bennington. The hope is that the Board will consider using the recommendations as part of the Town Plan in the future.

Bill Colvin stepped forward to review in detail the findings of the study. He reminded the Board that housing needs were labeled as a Top 10-priority strategy in the Economic Development Plan.

Many outlets of information were used including looking at other former Mill-Towns and similar economic towns. They reviewed multiple documents including the Bennington Town Plan and hosted multiple focus groups. The population of Bennington has remained relatively stable since 1980 with a slight drop projected for the future. Mr. Colvin continued by reviewing census information regarding age of residence, education levels and gender. He also compared the average household income of single and multiple person homes for the Town of Bennington, the County of Bennington and the State of Vermont. Housing costs versus income were also compared through the three locations.

Mr. Colvin reviewed focus group information gathered, employer surveys and suggestions made on how to improve quality-housing stock. They would like to encourage more renters to homeownership in the core urban areas of town.

Justin Corcoran noted that this contradicts what Mr. Colvin had vocally supported with the Shires Housing project stating that there was a need for more quality rentals in the downtown area. How is it now that he is recommending more homeownership in the downtown urban core? Mr. Colvin stated that the report shows a need for both.

Greg Van Houten stated he would like to see some data regarding the trends outside of Bennington. It seems that "young people" are not interested in buying homes. Mr. Van Houten wondered if this was a cultural trend or an economical trend. Mr. Colvin said he had no data with him regarding these questions.

John McFadden liked the idea of creating a finance education program in the schools. He feels that is important. It could be the difference in changing a lifetime renter into a homeowner.

He also noted that many people who move to the area are single or with only one other. There are very few (1) bedroom apartments available.

Mr. McFadden then asked to see the list of employers that were surveyed. Mr. Colvin noted that it was done anonymously through Survey Monkey.

Mike Bethel asked if he might comment. He feels that Mr. Colvin did a nice job but asked the Board to not adopt the whole thing. Mr. Bethel feels it identifies a lot of problems but provides no answers to those problems. John McFadden stated that identifying the problems is Step 1. The next step is to discover the solutions.

Greg Van Houten stated that this will be discussed further it is not an “automatic approval” or adoption.

Mr. Colvin stated that there are no radical suggestions provided. He hopes the Board adopts and considers the recommendations made. They will also be happy to take any comments or recommendations from the Board.

7. MANAGER’S REPORT

The Manager stated that in previous Fiscal Years the fees charged to rent the Firehouse have not been enough to cover the cost to prepare and clean-up after the events. The Fire Chief is suggesting there now be two different permits and raising certain fees. He would like to see the fees increased for the Non-profit organizations based on what they are using the facility for.

The Board then discussed the difference between a “volunteer group” and a “Non-profit”. Organizations such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts primarily run on volunteerism. There is no grant money to help them operate etc. Non-profit groups have money available to them through agency funding, grants etc.

The Manager stated he is reluctant to compete with locations like the Elks Club, Moose Lodge etc who rely on rentals as part of their income. The Town simply would like to cover our costs for preparations and clean up.

The Board asked what the current fees are. The Manager apologized he did not have those in front of him. He will gather that information and be prepared to discuss this further at the next scheduled meeting (December 8th, 2014).

The Manager then requested to close the Town Office on December 26th this year. Christmas falls on a Thursday and many employees wanted to use their own time to take the day off. This will leave skeleton crew there.

Greg Van Houten noted that this could make sense. It would save on heating, electricity etc used to open the building.

A consensus by the Board was reached to Close the Town Offices this year only on Friday December 26, 2014.

The Manager then noted that the Benmont Bridge project now has been pushed forward to the Spring 2015. The Contractor and the State could not agree on an “end date”; therefore they pushed it forward. This will have no financial impact on the Town or the State.

Further progress has been made in the Joint Municipal Survey Committee. A resolution to join the Solid Waste Alliance will be before the board on December 8th, 2014.

One liquor license was circulated for signatures. Ramunto’s will change ownership; however it will operate in the same manner.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Sharyn Brush wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving.

Greg Van Houten did the same and wished everyone safe travels. He also reminded the public about Small Business Saturday.

Dan Monks announced that the Town was awarded a \$20,000 grant for a Downtown Master Plan. This requires no local match.

Greg Van Houten continued by announcing the next Cultural Plan committee meeting is scheduled for December 4th, 2014. They are moving closer to finalizing a one-site location to finding cultural events across town (lavinlocal.com)

Mr. Van Houten wanted to congratulate North Bennington on the completion of their fountain. It has been wrapped for the winter but was beautifully done. He also noted the former Mosely Bridge has been reconstructed on the Park McCoullough property thanks to the help of L & G Fabricators.

Greg Van Houten then noted there was need for Executive Session.

Motion: Sharyn Brush motioned to close the meeting and move into Executive Session. Michael Keane seconds the motion. Motion passed unanimously (*Jim Carroll absent*)

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- A. Contract
- B. Litigation

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary