

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

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2016

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; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; Keith Whitcomb, Bennington Banner; (5) Citizens

At 6:00 P.M., **Tom Jacobs** called the meeting to order.

1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

2. CONSENT AGENDA (A-B)

A) Minutes – November 14, 2016

Jeanne Conner noted a spelling correction for the Shaftsbury Dentist as Dr. Carmack.

B) Warrants

There were no questions.

MOTION: Michael Keane motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept and approve the minutes of November 14, 2016 as presented, as well as the warrants as submitted. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

3. CITIZENS

No citizens spoke this evening.

4. HOUSING AUTHORITY

Representatives had to cancel due to a conflict

5. HOMELESS COALITION

Chris Oldham, Director stepped forward to present. He cited the history of the Coalition noting they began in 2000 and he took position of Director approximately 18 months ago. The previous system was a first come first serve basis and people lined up for just a bed. They began looking at ways to improve the system and prevent people lined up feeling like they were on display. Moving forward with the new facility they purchased at 966 Main Street once someone enters and receives a bed that will be their place until they complete the program. Being a resident of this location will require them to take part in multiple programs and be assigned a case worker from day one. Some of those programs would teach them financial literacy, nutrition, peer counseling and drug, alcohol and/or mental counseling if needed.

Mr. Oldham continued by describing some of the other facilities they run such as the family orientated Thatcher House and the recovery program on McCall Street. The Manager stated he is a neighbor of the McCall Street program and the Coalition has been a very good neighbor.

Discussion continued around the Coalition's annual budget. Last year's budget was approximately \$312,000. This year's budget will increase to \$471,000. Funding is supplied by multiple sources including State and Federal grants, local fundraising and a Townwide vote request for Town funds. Although there had been difficulty within their budgets in the past, the most recent State and private audits show the Coalition has passed with flying colors.

Jim Carroll praised Mr. Oldham for what he has been able accomplish in the last 18 months. He applauds their efforts to take people out of poverty. Mr. Carroll suggested the Coalition purchase one of local motels that accept the voucher system and continue their work planned for 966 Main Street on larger scale.

Mr. Oldham stated he cannot do all the work he does alone; he has a great team and many wonderful volunteers. Their next step would be to look at how they can improve/update the family shelters.

Mr. Carroll asked how many people their organization serves. Mr. Oldham stated once 966 Main Street is open (in approximately three weeks) they will be serving a total of 65 people across all the programs. 966 Main Street specifically will be serving 16 people.

Jeanne Conner thanked Mr. Oldham for his work and asked if there were any other organizations within Bennington County that do the same work. Mr. Oldham stated they collaborate with many State and local organizations but the Coalition in Bennington is the only shelter available.

Ms. Conner asked if the surrounding towns contribute to their funding. He stated all except Manchester. He will be petitioning to get on their ballot this year. He would like to have more a presence in Manchester as we have assisted several people up there as well.

Michael Keane stated he was grateful for this organization's work. He asked to compare to other areas in the State. Mr. Oldham stated we would be approximately fourth in line behind areas such as Rutland, Burlington and Brattleboro who have significantly higher rates of homelessness.

Jeannie Jenkins asked about the transition from the programs into permanent housing. Mr. Oldham stated that's one of their biggest hurdles is sustainable/affordable housing. Most will have to rely on subsidies such as Section 8 to assist in housing costs.

Donald Campbell thanked Mr. Oldham for his hard work and asked him what their success rate was. Mr. Oldham stated previously the success rate was 37%. They have been able to raise this to 60% now. As they will be adding more staff and new programs to 966 Main Street to assist they will set a goal of 90%.

Tom Jacobs thanked Mr. Oldham and his staff for all their work.

Mr. Oldham reminded the public that the next day was "Giving Tuesday" and people could donate.

Joseph Kulkin, resident, asked about their policies regarding cash donations. Mr. Oldham stated they are now open 24 hours a day and donations can be accepted anytime. Although a receipt would be written for that donation an official policy is not currently in place. Moving forward they will look to develop something.

Mr. Kulkin also asked what percentage of the budget goes to administration and how much goes to the actual programs. Mr. Oldham stated that approximately \$200,000 goes to administration and approximately \$161,000 goes to programming. The remainder of the budget goes to operations. Mr. Oldham stated he doesn't want any of his employees to be in danger of homelessness and is working to pay them \$15 per hour. They currently have (4) Full-time employees and will add (11) Part-time with the opening of 966 Main Street.

6. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager noted in the warrant was the first required payment to the Rural Fire Department and both school districts collected at Real Estate Tax time. The remainder is due by March 30th. Collection has been good. Currently there is 5% delinquency. As payments are continued to be received we expect this to reduce to 3-4%.

Michael Harrington stated the last day to fill out the Citizen Survey was November 30th. Currently 491 have been filled out electronically and 5-6 paper copies have been returned. Our goal is a minimum of 500 surveys. A presentation of the results is expected in December.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Donald Campbell again thanked Chris Oldham for his presentation. He then suggested that all agencies that request funding on the ballot come to a meeting to present. It would be a great way for the people to understand better what each organization does. Tom Jacobs stated that was the goal.

The Manager then reminded the Board will the upcoming holidays there would be a shorter than usual meeting scheduled for December 19th rather than meet on December 26th. Therefore the meetings for would be December 12th and December 19th.

Tom Jacobs stated there was a need for Executive Session.

Motion: Jeanne Conner moved and Michael Keane seconded a motion finding that an Executive Session be held on a personnel matter and that premature general public knowledge of that matter would place persons involved at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed unanimously (*Justin Corcoran absent*)

8. Executive Session

A. Personnel

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez
Secretary