

**BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING  
SPECIAL MEETING – BUDGET SESSION  
BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY  
130 RIVER STREET  
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

***SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2017***

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Tom Jacobs – Chair; Michael Keane-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeanne Conner; Jeannie Jenkins; Donald Campbell; Justin Corcoran

*Absent: None*

**ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Michael Harrington, Economic & Community Development Director; Paul Doucette, Police Chief; John Shannahan, BBC Director; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (15) Citizens

At 8:00 A.M., **Tom Jacobs** called the meeting to order.

**1. FY'18 BUDGET WORK SESSION MINUTES – JANUARY 07, 2017**

**MOTION:** Michael Keane motioned and Jim Carroll seconded to accept and approve the FY'18 Budget Work Session minutes of January 07, 2017 as presented. Motion passed unanimously

**2. FY' 18 BUDGET WORK SESSION (A-E)**

***A) Bennington Free Library***

Lynn McCann, Director of Bennington Free Library stepped forward to present. Jim Carroll recused himself as he has done business with the Library. Ms. McCann continued by reviewing a fact sheet regarding library services. They provide free internet access to the community through (28) computers on-site. Free WiFi is also available to the community. The Bennington Free Library's children's programs are State recognized. Other libraries within the State come to Bennington to train with us. There are also programs designed for the elderly and blind.

Ms. McCann stated that 81% of their budget is spent locally (including salaries). The Town of Bennington request for FY'18 is up 4.6%, however this is lower than in the

past. The overall increase in the Free Library Budget is mostly due to the increase in minimum wage and keeping up with the cost of books. The Library is aggressive with grant applications and works hard to keep insurance and resource costs low.

Tom Jacobs asked about facility maintenance and repair costs. Ms. McCann stated they have taken on an aggressive pro-active approach to maintenance etc in recent years. They have begun a Capital Reserve Fund and this will be the second year of contributions. Discussion continued with what repairs etc are expected over the next three to five years.

Mr. Jacobs asked if there were any grant opportunities to enhance their IT or computer capabilities. Ms. McCann stated there were not any available now; however, there were many used in the past to do exactly that including upgrade wiring within the building. That is how they have gotten to get where they are now.

Mr. Jacobs concluded by thanking both Ms. McCann and all of their employees and volunteers. The library is the heart of a community and one of the best dollar values we get.

**B) BBC Budget & Work Plan**

Michael Keane and Jeanie Jenkins noted they would recuse themselves due to conflict of interest (Board membership).

John Shannahan (Director), Michael McDonough (President) and Eric Peterson (Vice-President) of BBC (Better Bennington Corporation) stepped forward to present. Mr. McDonough began with a historical review of the organization. BBC was founded in 1989 and currently has (3) employees and (13) Board members. They are responsible for many things including daily and strategic support of downtown property owners, the Town of Bennington, Planning Commission and advocate the downtown area on all matters.

Mr. McDonough continued by reviewing their priority list moving forward for each of their four committees (Design, Economic Development, Marketing, & Organization). Discussion focused on the marketing committee, its members and how to strengthen this moving forward. Its most challenging aspect is lack of funding for marketing. Additionally, many members are temporary because they are specifically event focused. Once their interest event is finished many no longer serve.

Justin Corcoran asked if the BBC was part of the “Four Corners North” marketing campaign in the Capital Region. Mr. Shannahan stated they were not involved because the “Four Corners North” is outside the downtown designated area. Jim Carroll asked what it would take to extend the boundaries of the downtown designation. The Manager stated it would take voter approval and acceptance from Montpelier.

**C) *Rescue Squad Funding Request***

Forrest Weyen and Brian Peat stepped forward for the discussion. The Manager explained that every five years the Rescue Squad must request to be placed on the ballot for voter approval to continue Tax Exempt Status for their building. Tom Jacobs stated he would recuse himself.

**Motion: Justin Corcoran moved and Donald Campbell seconded a motion to place Bennington Rescue Squad Tax Exempt Status on the Bennington March 2017 ballot for voter approval. Motion passed unanimously (Tom Jacobs recused)**

The Manager continued by stating currently the Rescue Squad is also petitioning to be on the March ballot for funding request of over \$200,000. The deadline to submit that petition is January 19<sup>th</sup>.

Donald Campbell thanked Mr. Weyen for returning for this discussion. Mr. Campbell continued by explaining his concerns. If the Rescue Squad is successful in their petition and the voters approve the approximate \$200,000 request that would be a significant impact on the Town's budget all at once. However, if they do not receive voter approval then they remain in financial troubles they currently are experiencing. Mr. Campbell would like to suggest the acceptance of a smaller amount from the Town's budget to extend their finances while they continue to research other funding opportunities.

Justin Corcoran expressed great concern for a \$200,000 request. This would send taxes through the roof. He continued by stating many believe the large building expansion several years ago, was unnecessary. There are now also additional Rescue Squads in the area; Bennington is not doing it all alone. Mr. Corcoran then asked if the Board could receive a copy of the Bennington Rescue Squad's financial statements. Mr. Weyen stated he could have those available early next week.

Brian Peat, Chairman of the Rescue Squad Board gave a brief history of the organization. He stated in 1963 they were a 100% volunteer organization. In the 1990's call volume increased dramatically and it became difficult to keep up. Night time volunteers were the most difficult to come by; therefore, they had to move towards compensation for their time. Last year, they received over 6,000 calls

Jim Carroll asked how much of their budget goes to salaries. Mr. Weyen stated at this time just over \$2 Million Dollars goes to salaries.

Donald Campbell stated the Board is used to having a comprehensive budget and more information regarding operating costs etc before making a decision regarding funding. Mr. Corcoran suggested the Rescue Squad fill out the agency packet given to the other agencies requesting funding.

The Manager reminded the Board they could adopt the budget as presented today or waive and/or modify the decision at the next regularly scheduled meeting on January 23, 2017. This would be allowed as it would still meet the posting deadline of February 4<sup>th</sup> 2017.

The Manager asked Mr. Weyen why the Rescue Squad does not bill for those services not covered. Mr. Weyen stated they do not have any recourse; there are no repercussions. Jim Carroll strongly encouraged the Rescue Squad to begin billing for all services.

Donald Campbell suggested a modest amount (\$33,000) be added to the budget to help the Squad and to not have such a large impact on taxes. This would allow more time to find additional funding sources and not have such a large impact on Bennington taxpayers all at once.

Michael Keane suggested this be contingent on receiving the financials and removal of the ballot petition. The Board was in consensus (*Jeannie Conner absent*)

**Motion: Donald Campbell moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to add \$33,000 to the FY'18 budget for the purpose of supplemental funding of Bennington Rescue Squad**

**AMENDED Motion: Donald Campbell moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to add \$33,000 to the FY'18 budget for the purpose of supplemental funding of Bennington Rescue Squad subject to the Board's satisfaction with Bennington Rescue Squad Financials and no ballot petition be submitted.**

*Discussion:*

Justin Corcoran stated it was irresponsible to put money on an issue without seeing their financials. Donald Campbell stated Rescue Squad had a compelling presentation previously that was missed by Mr. Corcoran. Mr. Corcoran asked Mr. Weyen if they did not receive any money how long before they would no longer exist. Mr. Weyen stated with no funding they will no longer exist in approximately five years.

After further discussion amongst Board members it was decided the discussion would be tabled until the next regularly Select Board meeting on January 23, 2017. Mr. Keane asked Mr. Weyen to submit the financials as soon as possible.

***VOTE: No vote was taken - DONALD CAMPBELL WITHDREW MOTION***

Tom Jacobs moved the meeting forward with the discussion and acceptance of FY'18 Budget presentations.

**General Fund:**

**Motion: Donald Campbell moved and Justin Corcoran seconded a motion to accept and approve FY'18 General Fund Budget Request as presented**

*Discussion:*

Michael Keane had questions regarding computer upgrades. The Manager stated new universal software was installed so that all computers are working within the same version. This makes them more efficient and compatible. Computers themselves are upgraded every five years.

**VOTE: Motion passed unanimously** (*Jeanne Conner absent*)

**Highway Fund:**

**Motion:** Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to accept and approve FY'18 Highway Fund Budget Request with Amendment as presented

*Discussion:*

Donald Campbell had questions regarding the amendment. The Manager reviewed the amendment of additional \$12,500 for a trailer that was in the budget however the numbers had not carried over. The current trailer is now 20 years old (1996), undersized for our equipment and is a safety hazard.

**VOTE: Motion passed unanimously** (*Jeanne Conner absent*)

**Fire Fund:**

**Motion:** Justin Corcoran moved and Donald Campbell seconded a motion to accept and approve FY'18 Fire Fund Budget Request as presented

*Discussion:*

Justin Corcoran thought this was tight budget

**VOTE: Motion passed unanimously** (*Jeanne Conner absent*)

**Bennington Free Library Request:**

**Motion:** Michael Keane moved and Donald Campbell seconded a motion to accept and approve FY'18 Bennington Free Library Budget Request as presented

*Discussion:*

Jeannie Jenkins expressed concern regarding future building repairs. The Manager stated their capital needs can be followed along the way.

**VOTE: Motion passed unanimously** (*Jim Carroll abstain; Jeanne Conner absent*)

**Better Bennington Corporation (BBC) Fund Request:**

**Motion:** Donald Campbell moved and Justin Corcoran seconded a motion to accept and approve FY'18 Better Bennington Corporation (BBC) Fund Budget Request as presented

**VOTE: Motion Passed**

*(Michael Keane & Jeannie Jenkins abstain; Jeanne Conner absent)*

Tom Jacobs stated it was necessary to go into Executive Session to discuss salaries of the Manager, the Town Clerk and the Treasurer.

**Motion:** Justin Corcoran 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 either of those matters would place persons involved at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed unanimously *(Jeanne Conner absent)*

D) *Executive Session*

A. *Personnel*

Tom Jacobs re-opened the meeting

E) *Finalize Salaries & Budget*

1) *Town Manager Salary*

**Motion:** Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to approve Bennington Town Manager's FY'18 salary at \$108,477. Motion passed unanimously *(Jeanne Conner absent)*

2) *Town Clerk Salary*

**Motion:** Jim Carroll moved and Donald Campbell seconded a motion to approve Bennington Town Clerk's FY'18 Salary of \$80,132. Motion passed unanimously *(Jeanne Conner absent)*

**3) Treasurer Salary**

**Motion:** Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to approve the Bennington Treasurer's FY'18 Salary at \$14,134. Motion passed unanimously (Jeanne Conner absent)

Tom Jacobs thanked the Manager, the Town Clerk and the Treasurer for all that they do and in the way they do it. They are all friendly and open.

**Motion:** Michael Keane moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion to close FY'18 Budget Work Session. Motion passed unanimously (Jeanne Conner absent)

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Bermudez  
Secretary