

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

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2017

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Jacobs-Chair; Donald Campbell-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Jeanne Conner; Carson Thurber; Jeannie Jenkins; Chad Gordon

Absent: None

ALSO PRESENT: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager; Dan Monks, Zoning Administrator & Assistant Town Manager; Zirwat Chowdhury, Community Development Director; Linda E. Bermudez – Secretary; (11) 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 20, 2017 and November 27, 2017

B) Warrants

MOTION: Jeanne Conner motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to accept and approve both the Minutes of November 20 and November 27, 2017 as well as the warrants as submitted. Motion passed (*Chad Gordon and Jeannie Jenkins abstained from vote on Minutes November 20th, 2017 ONLY*)

3. CITIZENS

Jeff Grimshaw, Bennington resident wished everyone happy holidays. He then announced the annual Sno-cross event may not come to Bennington. The issue has become how the Willow Park field is treated during and after the event. Mr. Grimshaw is working alongside Mr. Pappas, owner of the Paradise Motel, to find a privately-owned location that may be used. If a new venue is found, the Town Manager has offered additional resources needed to pull it together. There is still hope in seeing this event return this year; however, it would be pushed out until end of March 2018.

Mr. Grimshaw then announced he is now partial owner of the Southern Vermont Storm Football team. He is meeting with the MAU Board soon regarding playing games in Bennington and in Manchester. The team really wants to play in Bennington.

Jim Carroll noted approximately 1,000 people attend these games. That could be a lot of business for this town. People need to eat and places to stay. Chad Gordon stated he will be present at the meeting with MAU and will offer support on this issue.

Lastly, Mr. Grimshaw stated he would like to return with a presentation on the results of a survey taken in Bennington about attitudes towards Bennington. He believes the Board will be pleased.

David Crowley, Bennington resident stepped forward to express his appreciation and support to the Select Board and the Town Manager for all they do. They are respectful to the Community and responsive to requests. Thank you!

Tom Jacobs thanked Mr. Crowley for his kind words.

Joel Lentzner, Bennington resident acknowledged a news report over the weekend featuring Bennington. The Downtown Alliance and local Downtown Merchants are working together on a special contest/raffle to draw business downtown. After a minimum purchase of \$10, customers can enter the raffle to win (2) tickets to see Phish and a room at the Marriott Hotel on New Year's Eve in New York City. Mr. Lentzner invited the public to shop local and enter the raffle.

Rose Thelford, North Bennington resident asked for an update on the Senior Center's request for additional help (non-volunteer). Jeannie Jenkins noted she and Zirwat Chowdhury, Community Development Director had a successful meeting at the Senior Center. Approximately (60) people turned out for the meeting. Ms. Jenkins reviewed some of the feedback from the meeting. However more details on those subjects are needed. Ms. Chowdhury noted it is an on-going process. Tom Jacobs suggested the Senior Center Director come speak with the Select Board. The Manager noted there was a request for (2) part-time positions to be added. They had not made the initial cut.

Ms. Thelford stated it seems like the Seniors don't matter in this town.

Gerry Bird, area resident, stepped forward to discuss a new meditation group called Spirit of Bennington. Their focus is on good energy here in the community. Mr. Bird stated the group continues to grow and gave the Select Board a handout regarding the group.

No other citizens spoke this evening.

4. HEARTSAFE COMMUNITY PLAQUE PRESENTATION

Lindsey Simpson, State of Vermont EMS Office stepped forward to present the Bennington Rescue Squad with the HeartSAFE Community Award. It means they have taken the time to learn CPR, teach others CPR and supply AED's within the community. Ms. Simpson then thanked the Rescue Squad for their dedication. She noted not many towns in Vermont or even cities across the county have this designation.

5. BCIC/WORKFORCE AND EDUCATION PRESENTATION

Tom Jacobs echoed the need for job growth in Bennington but added there is also a need for a workforce to meet that need.

Jeannie Jenkins, Wendy Morse, Bill Colvin, James Selerno and Dixie Zens stepped forward to discuss ways they are working to develop a local workforce to meet growing job market needs.

Bill Colvin reviewed the new contractual agreement between the Town of Bennington and BCRC to take over Economic Development initiatives for the Town. This new contract began July 1, 2017 and allows Community Development and the Downtown Alliance to focus on their other responsibilities.

Mr. Colvin continued by listing some of their successes to date including obtaining additional resources for the "Lightening Jar" and several Vermont Training Grants to help maintain a strong workforce here in Bennington.

James Selerno reviewed the beginnings and growth of the small company he owns here in Bennington. He spoke of a new contract he recently received and concerns about obtaining the properly trained workforce locally. Previously, Mr. Selerno obtained his small group of current employees through word of mouth. He has been able to retain them with competitive wages and providing a clear roadmap of where he would like to take the company and their roles in that growth. Surrounding areas (i.e. Hudson Valley Community College etc) have added programs to their curriculums to include more specific workforce trainings. He doesn't want to have to poach from surrounding areas for talent. Bennington could reap long term benefits if we close the knowledge gaps in our High Schools, CDC program and Community College of Vermont (CCV).

Dixie Zens, owner of Abacus, reviewed his long history here in Bennington and the workforce he has had over that (30) years. He has looked to RPI Graduates in Troy to fill some of those positions. They were wonderful, but most only stay approximately (2) years. At that young age they do not find enough here to keep them entertained in their off time. Bennington is a great place to come back and raise a family, but it has been a struggle to keep young people here. Mr. Zens did state those local students who did come through our local High School with some additional training have been some best employees.

Wendy Morse & Jeannie Jenkins then reviewed some of the local employment statistics. As of October 2017, Bennington unemployment rate is 3.2%. This is a clear indication of our strong economy. Employers however, have always been challenged by finding specific talent for their workforce. It is important we make sure we have a prepared workforce ready to enter.

Ms. Jenkins continued by reviewing some of the current programs working to prepare students and adults alike. They have been working closely with Bill Botzow on many of these things including getting training grants for small businesses like James Selerno's.

There are currently programs in elementary and middle schools addressing business development and finances. In High School there are several programs addressing financial realities, providing career summits, and leadership training. For adults there are Certified technician and bookkeeping programs as well as apprenticeships and internships. And lastly for the Community there is now an annual Career Month initiative and regional workforce & education efforts. There has been growing participation from local employers, colleges and education centers as well as workshops developed for job changers/seekers and Dress for Success events.

Jeanne Conner was overwhelmed with how much is going on. This is great. How would someone access this information if they wanted to move here or learn more? Ms. Morse & Ms. Jenkins stated at this time the best place is the Vermont Department of Labor's website. They hope to have in the future a target sector pipeline, but it is still evolving.

Carson Thurber and Jim Carroll thanked everyone for the presentation it was well done.

Donald Campbell asked if there were some monies available, where would it make the biggest impact. Ms. Jenkins felt the adult programs right now would benefit the most.

Chad Gordon expressed that as a local teacher he has seen an impact on the students through some of these programs.

Tom Jacobs asked for continued feedback from local employers.

6. DOWNTOWN DESIGNATION RENEWAL APPLICATION

Zirwat Chowdhury and John Shannahan stepped forward to present. Bennington has had this designation since 1994 and must be renewed every 5 years. This year's annual meeting is in Bennington. Ms. Chowdhury is excited to showcase the great relationship between the Town's DPW Department and Buildings and Grounds Departments in helping keep our Downtown so nice. Mr. Shannahan stated we are known in the State for their great relationship in working together.

Mr. Jacobs asked what added benefits does the designation bring to Bennington. Ms. Chowdhury noted it gives us priority for Town Grants, signage, housing and lastly it is necessary for the TIF Designation.

MOTION: Carson Thurber motioned and Donald Campbell seconded to adopt and sign the application for Downtown Designation renewal. Motion passed unanimously.

7. MANAGER'S REPORT

The Manager announced the Governor was in town today for the ceremonial turning on of the first water connection of the water main expansion due to PFOA contamination.

Additionally, the Town received a press release today that Bruce Laumeister has donated the Southern Vermont Arts Center (on Gypsy Lane) to Southern Vermont College.

The Manager stated the next regularly scheduled meeting would fall on Christmas Day. Therefore, they have rescheduled the next Select Board meeting for Tuesday, December 19th, 2017. It will take place at the Bennington Rescue Squad on McKinley Street at 4:30pm. This will also be Linda Bermudez's last meeting as Recording Secretary. After 5 ½ years, she has decided to take some time off. Nancy Lively will be taking over as of January 2018.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

Jeanne Conner asked for update on the Non-profit presentation. The Manager stated the letters had gone out and he has begun receiving the requested information. Next week's Select Board's meeting at the Rescue Squad will hear their presentation regarding returning to the ballot for funding or being integrated into budget.

Jim Carroll stated snow was coming, please be careful.

Tom Jacobs noted the next several weeks will be very busy for the Select Board. We will be hearing from the Charter Review Committee; Budget process begins first two Saturday's in January and then the Manager's Evaluation process.

Donald Campbell was excited about the news for SVC and the first connection of water today. Additionally, he announced the Secretary of Agriculture had been in town and was also very impressed. Especially with Mountain Mozzarella company. They too were a small startup company here in Bennington and now have (68) employees and ship all over the world.

Jeannie Jenkins was excited about the launch of the Green Table initiative. Kudos to Zirwat Chowdhury and John Shannahan.

Chad Gordon stated High School sports have begun and both the Women's and Men's teams did well.

There was no other business this evening

Tom Jacobs stated there was an unexpected need for Executive Session.

Motion: Donald Campbell moved and Jim Carroll seconded a motion finding that an Executive Session be held on a litigation matter and that premature general public knowledge of this matter would place person(s) involved at a substantial disadvantage. Motion passed unanimously

9. EXECUTIVE SESSION (Added)

A) Litigation

Respectfully submitted,



Linda E. Bernudez
Secretary