

1 **TOWN OF BENNINGTON**
2 **2018 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**
3 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**
4 **130 RIVER STREET**
5 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**
6 **MARCH 5, 2018**

7 **MINUTES**

8 **MODERATOR:** Jason Morrissey

9 **ALSO PRESENT:** Bennington Select Board Members - Thomas Jacobs-Chair; Donald Campbell-Vice Chair; Jim
10 Carroll; Carson Thurber; Jeannie Jenkins; Chad Gordon and Jeanne Conner; Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Joan
11 Pinsonneault-Treasurer; Cassandra Barbeau-Town Clerk; Zirwat Chowdhury-Community Development
12 Director; Representative Mary Morrissey; Charles Koslosky; Abby Shapiro; John Connell; Jeff Grimshaw; Bill
13 Twain; Mary Garisch; David Durfee; Richard Dundas; Ken Swierad; Joe Hall; Charlie Gingo; Charlie Murphy; Joy
14 Kitchell; Suzanne Fitzpatrick; Mary Ann St. John; Jennifer Boudain; Ken Sitzburg; Linda Putney; Ann Mook;
15 Chris Oldham; Forest Weyen; 150 citizens; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

16 At 7:30 p.m., Moderator Jason Morrissey called the meeting to order and reminded everyone that the
17 first Town Meeting was held in 1762.

18 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

19 Mr. Morrissey read the following Warning:

20 **WARNING**

21 **TOWN OF BENNINGTON**

22 **2018 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

23 *The residents of the Town of Bennington qualified by law to vote in Town Meeting are hereby notified and*
24 *warned to meet at the Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance) in said Town on*
25 *Monday, March 5, 2018 at 7:00 p.m., or immediately following the Bennington School District's Annual*
26 *meeting should that run over, to transact the business specified to be done from the floor.*

27 *If you are a resident of the Town of Bennington, intend to be present at the meeting and are hearing impaired,*
28 *arrangements will be made for a sign interpreter to be present at this meeting. For necessary arrangements,*
29 *please contact Stuart A. Hurd, Town Manager at the Bennington Town Offices, 205 South Street, P.O. Box 469,*
30 *Bennington, VT - (802) 442-1037 no later than Friday, February 16, 2018.*

31 *Following the completion of such business, the Meeting will stand adjourned to Tuesday, March 6, 2018, at The*
32 *Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance). The polls are open from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00*
33 *p.m. for the election of officers and voting on all ballot articles specified. However, those on the checklist to*
34 *vote in the Village of North Bennington shall vote for the election of officers and on all ballot articles at the*
35 *North Bennington Village Office on Main Street in North Bennington. The Bennington Fire Facility above*
36 *mentioned, is hereby established as the central polling place for those on the checklist to vote in said*

37 Bennington. Residents of Bennington and North Bennington may register to vote at the Town Clerk's Office,
38 205 South Street, Bennington, Vermont. Eligible residents registering on Election Day must do so at the polling
39 place where they will cast their Town Meeting ballot.

40 -----
41 **BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED FROM THE FLOOR**

42 Monday, March 5, 2018

7:00 P.M.

43 **ARTICLE 1. TOWN REPORT:** To hear the report of Town officers and to take appropriate action thereon.

44 Tom Jacobs stated that there were copies of the Annual Report available in the back of the room, as
45 well as, at the Town Office, and that this was the best one that he had seen in the past 5 years both in content
46 and aesthetically. The Town Report is within the Annual Report and there were no questions on it.

47 **It was moved and seconded to accept ARTICLE 1. TOWN REPORT as presented. The motion carried**
48 **unanimously.**

49 -----
50 **ARTICLE 2. SELECT BOARD MEMBERS COMPENSATION:** To determine what compensation shall be paid to the
51 Town Select Board Members.

52 **Joe Hall moved and it was seconded to accept ARTICLE 2. SELECT BOARD MEMBERS COMPENSATION**
53 **with the compensation to remain at \$1,400/year/member. The motion carried unanimously.**

54 -----
55 **ARTICLE 3. OTHER BUSINESS.** To transact such other proper business when met.

56 **BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED BY BALLOT**

57 TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2018

58 THE POLLS TO BE OPEN FROM 7:00 A.M. TO 7:00 P.M.

59 AT THE POLLING PLACES SPECIFIED ABOVE

60 **SELECT BOARD ELECTION.** Two Select Board Members residing in the Town shall be elected for terms of
61 three (3) years.

62 **TOWN CLERK ELECTION.** A Town Clerk residing in the Town shall be elected for a term of three (3) years.

63 **ARTICLE 1.** Shall the Town appropriate for the next fiscal year, July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019, the total
64 sum of \$12,893,030.00 consisting of the following: \$4,087,120.00 for the laying out, maintaining, and repairing
65 of the highways and bridges of the Town; and \$8,805,910.00 for the payment of the following: Any
66 indebtedness not otherwise specifically provided for, interest on indebtedness, legally authorized State and
67 County taxes, the prosecution and defense of the common rights and interests of the inhabitants of the Town,
68 and for other necessary incidental expenses?

69 The proposed budget includes \$60,000.00 for fire equipment, \$20,000.00 for parking improvements, \$7,500.00
70 for regional economic development, and \$451,600.00 for healthcare reserve and workers compensation
71 insurance, any unexpended portion of which will be reserved to subsequent years for that purpose.

72 ARTICLE 2. Shall the Town of Bennington amend the Town Charter to add Section 407 as follows:

73 §103-407. Mayoral form of government

74 (a) In lieu of a town manager, the voters may adopt a mayoral form of government, by vote at a duly-warned
75 annual meeting, warned pursuant to a petition signed by five percent of the voters or on the Selectboard’s own
76 motion. Once a vote in favor of this form of government is successful, the voters shall elect a mayor at the next
77 annual meeting. Once the mayor takes office, the Town Manager system of governance shall end for
78 Bennington.

79 (b) The mayor shall be responsible for the management of the administrative affairs of the Town, in the same
80 manner and with the same powers and responsibilities as the Town Manager, as stated in statute and this
81 charter.

82 (c) The mayor shall have the power to make or break a tie, and shall have the power to veto any action of the
83 Selectboard.

84 (d) The mayor shall serve as the voice of the Town of Bennington, taking responsibility for implementing the
85 policies of the Selectboard, leading the Town toward greater prosperity and a healthy economy, and a better
86 life for all its residents.

87 Charles Koslosky spoke against Article 2 reiterating his experiences in large and small communities that
88 had a mayor noting that a mayor is, first and foremost, a politician. We are being asked to replace a Town
89 Manager who is “an experienced, trained, well-education professional hired by, and controlled by, the duly
90 elected Select Board”. Article 2 is a binding article of “boss politics” where the mayor has absolute veto power
91 over the Select Board. We also don’t know the term limit of the mayor, salary, staffing, budget, or tax policies.
92 Vote NO on Article 2. (Applause)

93 -----
94 Abby Shapiro concurred with Mr. Koslosky’s comments, and despite prior disagreement with the Town
95 Manager, feels that this Article is “a half-baked vision that has been crafted by one person to be legally
96 binding”. We have no details to support that this would improve Bennington or that it won’t raise taxes. If
97 you truly want a mayor, vote NO for Article 2, “do your homework”, and present a well thought out product.
98 (Applause)

99 -----
100 John Connell spoke in support of a mayor because of the recent salt shed issue where he feels the
101 Town “lost out on a \$340,000 grant”. Mr. Connell also stated that we’re paying \$500,000 for a salt shed that
102 we are not even using and does not know “what the rush was”. In addition, we still don’t know how much not
103 having a Wetland Permit in place will cost us. “I don’t know if this particular version of the mayor is the best
104 version, and it’s my understanding that this is Phase I, and all the details can be worked out by the people here
105 at the table.”

106 -----
107 ARTICLE 3. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$2,500.00 for Turning Point
108 Center of Bennington?

109 Ken Sitzburg, a long term recovering opiate addict, thanked the Town for their support and stated that
110 the \$2,500 requested would be to set up a program specific to opiate addiction. All other Turning Point
111 funding comes from grants.

112 -----
113 *ARTICLE 4. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for Bennington County*
114 *Association Against Child Abuse?*

115 Joy Kitchell spoke to the work that the CAC's - as she called the organization -do and that they have
116 been in operation for 29 years. They provide counseling, family assistance, and court appearances to 135-140
117 children per year who have been sexually abused, with 75% of those coming from Bennington. Education is
118 also provided to all of the teachers in the SVSU. This is the third year Town funding has been requested and
119 continued support will be appreciated.

120 -----
121 *ARTICLE 5. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for Project Against*
122 *Violent Encounters?*

123 Suzanne Fitzpatrick thanked the Town for their past support and noted that PAVE provides a 24-hour
124 hotline, legal services, financial support, emergency housing, parenting support, supervised visitation, and
125 school based education. A second housing facility was opened and there were 3,139 nights of lodging this
126 past year. Domestic violence is the 3rd leading reason for homelessness.

127 -----
128 *ARTICLE 6. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$5,500.00 for Green Mountain*
129 *Retired and Senior Volunteer Program?*

130 A representative from the Green Mountain RSVP Program cited all of the beneficial work that the
131 volunteers do for the community, such as, Meals on Wheels, food drives, tax assistance, companionship, etc.,
132 and noted that staff salaries are paid for from a federal grant. Continued Town support would be appreciated.

133 -----
134 *ARTICLE 7. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$7,000.00 for Vermont Center for*
135 *Independent Living?*

136 Charlie Murphy noted that the Vermont Center for Independent Living has offices throughout the State
137 and helps people to live with their disabilities that includes counseling, finding resources, equipment,
138 financing, Meals on Wheels, American signing classes, etc.. Please continue to support the Center.

139 -----
140 *ARTICLE 8. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for Bennington Free*
141 *Clinic?*

142 Charlie Gingo stated that the Bennington Free Clinic serves people on Depot Street that are 18 and
143 older who cannot afford health insurance. The Clinic has been in business since January 2009 and have seen
144 over 3,000 patients. In 2017, there were 12 doctors, 1 nurse practitioner, 13 nurses, and 20 lay people - all
145 volunteers. We use the money from the Town for medical supplies and equipment.

146

ARTICLE 9. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for BROCC - Community Action in Southwestern Vermont?

Mary Ann St. John thanked the Town for their support in the past, and potentially, in the future. BROCC has served over 1,300 individuals over the past year by helping with 3 Squares a Day, lodging, heat, electric, job training, starting a business, tax preparation, etc.

152

ARTICLE 10. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging, Inc.?

Jennifer Boudain stated the various services provided by the Council on Aging, such as, case management, Meals on Wheels, counseling, etc., and requested the continued support from the Town.

157

ARTICLE 11. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$10,000.00 for The Tutorial Center?

There was no representative to speak on behalf of The Tutorial Center.

161

ARTICLE 12. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$11,000.00 Bennington Project Independence?

Linda Putney thanked the Town for their past support and noted that they have been providing adult day services for almost 40 years. We serve 50 people/day and 78% of those are from Bennington. We are requesting the same amount from the Town that we have been requesting for years.

167

ARTICLE 13. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$15,000.00 for Sunrise Family Resource Center?

Ann Mook spoke to the work of Sunrise Family Resource Center and the many challenges that they face daily. They have 27 employees and 98% of their funding comes from State and Federal sources. They have a school where teenage parents can earn their diplomas along with parenting skills, job coaching, case management, etc. There were 1,000 individuals and 500 families with 30% of those with an opiate addiction. Ms. Mook thanked the Town for their support.

175

ARTICLE 14. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$21,600.00 for Bennington Area Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice?

Christine, a representative from the Visiting Nurse Association and Hospice, stated that they serve patients of all ages to help keep them home in a familiar environment during their final days. 25% of patients served have no insurance and 85% of those that do have insurance have it through Medicaid and Medicare. Continued Town support would be appreciated.

181

182 -----
183 *ARTICLE 15. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2019 General Fund by the sum of \$25,000.00 for Bennington*
184 *County Coalition for the Homeless?*

185 Chris Oldham, Executive Director of the Coalition for the Homeless, stated that the requested \$25,000
186 is 5% of their budget to be used to support their family and single shelters, as well as, the new unlocked
187 community program. February 1st was the 1st anniversary of the Main Street facility that replaced a 6-bed
188 facility with a 16-bed fully accessible facility. The “hands up” approach instead of a “hand out” approach
189 requires that occupants participate in case management, counseling, and budgeting assistance. Many thanks
190 to the community for their support.

191 -----
192 Forest Weyen, Executive Director of the Bennington Rescue Squad, thanked the Select Board and Town
193 Administration for their work in getting the Rescue Squad on as a line item in the budget this year, as well as,
194 all of the residents in Bennington, Shaftsbury, and Woodford for their support. The Rescue Squad has EMT
195 and CPR classes available and is a 24/7 service to the community.

196 -----
197 Shelley, from the Second Chance Humane Society, shared the history of Second Chance throughout the
198 years noting that they can now house 16 dogs and over 100 cats. Funding is 100% from the community and
199 the capital campaign is in progress. (Applause)

200 -----
201 Bill Twain asked the voters for their support of the following non-binding Resolution:

202 “RESOLUTION URGING LEGISLATIVE ADOPTION OF A SET GOAL FOR MITIGATING CLIMATE CHANGE
203 SUBMITTED BY CLIMATE ADVOCATES, BENNINGTON 350

204 WHEREAS extreme weather events, more uncertain ski, maple sugaring, and hunting conditions, and changes
205 which have had to be made in FDA planting zone maps, all of which impact Vermont’s economy and ways of
206 life, clearly demonstrate that climate change is one of the most urgent problems facing our state, and

207 WHEREAS the Vermont Department of Public Service has, in its Comprehensive Energy Plan, set a goal of
208 meeting 90% of the state’s energy needs from renewable sources by 2050, and

209 WHEREAS the state is not, as yet, making sufficient progress toward achieving that goal,

210 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Town of Bennington urges the Legislature and Governor of the
211 State of Vermont to:

212 a. commit by act of legislation to the goal of meeting 90% of all energy needs within the state from
213 renewable sources by 2050.

214 b. ensure that the transition to renewable energy is fair and equitable for all residents.”

215 Mary Garisch, David Durfee, and Richard Dundas spoke in support of the Resolution. (Applause)

216 ***It was moved and seconded to close the debate on the non-binding Resolution Urging Legislative***
217 ***Adoption of a Set Goal for Mitigating Climate Change as presented. The motion carried unanimously.***

218 ***It was moved and seconded to support the non-binding Resolution Urging Legislative Adoption of a***
219 ***Set Goal for Mitigating Climate Change as presented. The motion carried with one opposed.***

221 Representative Mary Morrissey read the State of Vermont Multiple Myeloma Month Resolution that
222 brought awareness to Multiple Myeloma by describing the disease, the number of people affected by it in
223 2017, the treatment research for it, and the hopefulness of those with it. The Resolution named March 2018
224 as Multiple Myeloma Month.

225 Ken Swierad thanked the Cancer Center and the hospital for their work. (Applause)

227 Jeff Grimshaw was going to ask for donations to be sure that the Big Chair stays in Bennington, and Mr.
228 Morrissey stated that this was Out of Order because this isn't the venue to raise money for a private endeavor
229 and this is the subject of a legal proceeding in the Bankruptcy Court.

231 Zirwat Chowdhury, Community Development Director, shared a slide show presentation on some of
232 the achievements in the Town during 2017 that have affected the following areas and departments:

- 233 • The Illustration by Matthew Perry that appears on the cover of the Annual Report
 - 234 • Tax Increment Financing (TIF)
 - 235 • Putnam Block
 - 236 • Several other construction in Town
 - 237 • Department of Public Work
 - 238 • Water Department
 - 239 • Sewer Department
 - 240 • Building and Grounds
 - 241 • Ninja Bike Path
 - 242 • Office of Community Development
 - 243 • Berkshire Family YMCA
 - 244 • Police Department
 - 245 • Fire Department
 - 246 • Charter Review Committee
 - 247 • Piano Keys on Main Street
-

249 ***At 8:52 p.m., it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting until tomorrow, March 6, 2018, at***
250 ***7:00 a.m. The motion carried unanimously.***

252 Respectfully submitted,

253 Nancy H. Lively

254 Secretary