

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **JANUARY 12, 2019**

6 **MINUTES**

7 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Thomas Jacobs-Chair; Donald Campbell-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll;  
8 Jeannie Jenkins; Chad Gordon; Carson Thurber and Jeanne Conner.

9 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** None.

10 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan Monks-Zoning Administrator and Assistant Town  
11 Manager; Michele Johnson-Human Resources and Contracts Administrator; Melissa Currier-Finance  
12 Director; Lynne Fonteneau McCann-Bennington Free Library Executive Director; Jennie M. Rozycki-  
13 Library Director and Mary Rogers-Treasurer-John G. McCullough Free Library; Forest Weyen-Executive  
14 Director; Brian Peat-Board Chair and Brian Murphy-Board Vice Chair-Bennington Rescue Squad; 10  
15 citizens; Bennington Banner; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

16 At 8:00am, Thomas Jacobs called the meeting to order.

17 **1. F.Y. 20 BUDGET WORK SESSION**

18 **A. BENNINGTON FREE LIBRARY**

19 *Lynne Fonteneau McCann-Executive Director did the following presentation:*

- 20 • Newsletter circulation is down, however, people are still coming into the library and we have  
21 6,000 active accounts.
- 22 • We have added 5 laptop computers bringing our total to 19.
- 23 • 94.88% of Bennington's contributions were spent locally.
- 24 • The per capita tax support from Bennington, Woodford and Shaftsbury in 2018 was \$26.21.
- 25 • The slate roof has been completed for ~\$250,000.
- 26 • Working on getting a bathroom dedicated only to children and families for \$10,000-\$12,000.
- 27 • We're switching the LED lights to halite for \$500 which will save us \$430 annually.
- 28 • Weather works - we're working on increased circulation and insulation and continue  
29 fundraising for capital improvement goals of a new heating system and flooring.
- 30 • Have received a few pair of snowshoes and passes to Prospect Mountain will be coming soon.
- 31 • Library cards can now be used at an on line data base with the Bennington Banner so an  
32 individual can search articles back to 1999 without coming into the library.
- 33 • A conference was attended in Chicago on how libraries serve their communities.

34 *Board questions/comments:*

35 Mr. Jacobs: Congratulations to the Library for the fundraising involved for the roof.

36 Mr. Jacobs: What is the relationship between the Bennington and North Bennington libraries,  
37 and Ms. McCann answered that the two communities are quite different and the only resources that  
38 are shared are those that are shared with all libraries in the State.

39 Mr. Campbell: Just using Bennington, came up with a per capita tax support of \$32.52 - still  
40 lower than other towns but not as low as \$26.21.

41 Mr. Campbell: The salary and wages line item has increased 5% due to minimum wage  
42 increases and other factors that are not controllable - other than a few hours for technical support.  
43 This is a greater increase than the requested increase in funding. We should move onto the next  
44 budget.

45 Mr. Gordon, Ms. Jenkins and Mr. Carroll: Thanked Ms. McCann for this resource in the  
46 community.

47 Mr. Thurber: It needs to be considered at some point that there are two libraries within a close  
48 proximity serving a modest population and that perhaps more collaboration - although there is some -  
49 could save the taxpayers some money.

50 ***Donald Campbell moved and Chad Gordon seconded to approve the allocation of \$488,000.00***  
51 ***to the Bennington Free Library. The motion carried unanimously.***

52

---

53 **B. JOHN G. MCCULLOUGH FREE LIBRARY**

54 *Jennie Rozycki-Director and Mary Rogers-Treasurer did the following presentation:*

- 55 • All of the various educational and instructional programs for adults and children, as well as,  
56 internet access are all “needs” and not “wants”. We also have several entertainment events  
57 that bring the community together.
- 58 • We have 3,468 active accounts with more than 400 of those new accounts this year.
- 59 • Our visitors and circulation have increased this past year.
- 60 • 2017-2018 was our best fundraising year on record and the 2018-2019 Annual Fund Campaign  
61 has raised nearly \$16,000 to date. This is still under the budgeted amount but we are  
62 continuing to push ourselves to raise more.
- 63 • Last year the North Bennington voters approved a 60% increase to \$25,000 and the Shaftsbury  
64 voters approved a 100% increase to \$20,000.

65 *Board questions/comments:*

66 Mr. Gordon: Is the \$3,000 for the migration to the Cloud an annual or one-time cost, and Ms.  
67 Rozycki answered a one-time cost that is less expensive than replacing our 10-year old server with  
68 annual maintenance costs available at no, or very little, cost to libraries.

69 Ms. Jenkins: Why do you think 1/3 of your patrons are from Bennington, and Ms. Rozycki stated  
70 that is probably due to proximity to their residence, on their way to work, or because we have  
71 eliminated late fee charges and ask for a donation. Some donations are for more than the fees would  
72 have been.

73 Ms. Jenkins: In thinking of specializing areas and/or collaboration between the two libraries,  
74 Ms. Rozycki added that since joining the Catamount Library Network with shared catalogues, we have  
75 been working more closely together than ever. "It would be more expensive to combine  
76 organizations" because everyone is part-time in North Bennington with no benefits.

77 Mr. Campbell: North Bennington residents are paying ~\$32.00/person for the Bennington  
78 Library plus an additional amount in their budget for the North Bennington Library. By using the new  
79 requested amount of \$32,000, this amounts to ~\$35.00/person which is in the range that the  
80 Bennington Library is at. "I'm not sure there is a really good way for this Board to figure out a fairness  
81 issue under the current form of government that we have."

82 Mr. Campbell: What is the current amount of the endowment, and Ms. Rogers answered  
83 ~\$240,000. The goal is to only take the interest at an anticipated 4%-8%, however, we did need to take  
84 more this year which was far less than in years past. There is another endowment for \$80,000-\$90,000  
85 that is earmarked for building expenses only.

86 Mr. Jacobs: Even with the increased fundraising, there is still much work to be done. "The  
87 \$32,000 is just playing catchup."

88 Mr. Thurber: Are there any other significant amounts of money available, and Ms. Rogers  
89 stated no. The Board approves all withdrawals other than interest from the general endowment.

90 Ms. Conner: Do the two libraries join forces in purchasing supplies, and Ms. Rozycki answered  
91 that purchasing is primarily managed by the State for all libraries.

92 Ms. Conner: Where would the impact be if the \$10,000 requested increase was not approved,  
93 and Ms. Rozycki responded personnel and further endowment withdrawals.

94 Ms. Conner: Have the two libraries considered coordinating a joint marketing plan since people  
95 may be willing to contribute to both libraries? Although they do some coordination, marketing jointly  
96 hasn't been considered.

97 ***Jeanne Conner moved and Carson Thurber seconded to approve the allocation of \$32,000.00***  
98 ***to the John G. McCullough Free Library.***

99 Mr. Jacobs noted that the nearly 50% increase was a "very big jump" but was impressed with  
100 their presentation and management over the last couple of years.

101 Mr. Campbell agrees that this is a large increase, however, if the North Bennington Library  
102 requested funding at the same rate as the Bennington Library, their request would be for \$52,000, so  
103 Bennington residents “should be happy with this amount - at some level”.

104 Mr. Thurber respects both libraries, but feels that having two libraries, may not be a long term  
105 reality.

106 Ms. Jenkins stated that they are “small and scrappy” and work hard to raise money and involve  
107 the community.

108 Ms. Conner feels that the North Bennington Library “is on an upswing” and now is not the time  
109 to hold back.

110 ***The motion carried unanimously.***

111

---

## 112 C. BENNINGTON RESCUE SQUAD (BRS)

113 *Forest Weyen, Brian Peat and Brian Murphy did the following presentation:*

- 114 • We became a National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT) Approved  
115 Training Center.
- 116 • We are providing the only initial (leading to certification) EMS Courses in Southwest Vermont.
- 117 • We established an EMS Apprenticeship Program that is partially funded by the Department of  
118 Labor and will lead to full time employment by April or May. We have 7 open full time  
119 positions and have been filling these vacancies with overtime which is not a long term solution.
- 120 • The Board has approved a Spending Policy that allows us to take 5% of our endowment from  
121 the average of the last 12 quarters to go back into operations.
- 122 • We put out an RFP for Financial Management Firms with 10 that responded. We interviewed 4  
123 and have chosen a new firm to work for us.
- 124 • We are a public service and cannot deny care if someone doesn’t pay their bill, so we are not  
125 sending bills to patients that we don’t transport, and therefore, don’t get paid for. We are,  
126 however, sending them donation requests.
- 127 • We have done our annual donation appeal.
- 128 • We have begun providing billing and management services for other EMS agencies which has  
129 been a budget positive move.
- 130 • We are now financing our capital purchases instead of paying cash which will help level fund  
131 year-to-year.
- 132 • Insurance claim payments have had declining reimbursement levels and continue to decrease  
133 or stay flat, not increasing for simple cost of living adjustments.
- 134 • Since we are now receiving funding from Bennington, Shaftsbury and Woodford, we will always  
135 leave one ambulance available for a call from the community and not take it out to do a  
136 transfer.

- 137 • Insurance companies are now considering 'medical necessity' when deciding to pay a claim or  
138 not. Just because an individual has insurance, doesn't mean they will pay if they deem it wasn't  
139 necessary. This is a reduction in revenue that used to be there.  
140 • 911 calls are up 3% in 2018 from 2017 and transfers are down primarily due to turning down  
141 business in order to keep an ambulance available to the communities.  
142 • The endowment is down \$158,000 to \$3.3M through November 2018.

143

---

144 *Board questions/comments:*

145 Mr. Carroll: Will not vote in favor of the request because he feels that the BRS should be  
146 sending bills to the non-transport individuals, and Mr. Weyen responded that we cannot discourage  
147 people from calling for an ambulance because "the fundamental mission of Bennington Rescue is to  
148 provide service".

149 Mr. Carroll: What is this about expanding into Hoosick Falls and not being able to answer a call  
150 in Bennington, and Mr. Weyen answered that other EMS agencies contract with us to provide staffing,  
151 billing and/or management services. If we provide staffing services, they have to give us 8 weeks'  
152 notice of the need. "We don't cut our resources to send over there." Since we are the only Advanced  
153 Life Support (ALS) provider in southwest Vermont, we also contract with towns for this service. And,  
154 mutual aid is on an as needed basis that serves all EMS agencies and their towns. Costs would  
155 "skyrocket" for all agencies if it didn't exist. BRS is here "24/7/365" to service the residents of  
156 Bennington, Shaftsbury and Woodford.

157 Mr. Jacobs: Fundraising has declined, is this still as important to you, and Mr. Weyen responded  
158 that we still do our annual fund drive, however, some of the smaller events have been  
159 counterproductive. We also don't budget for bequests or the in lieu of unexpected donations.

160 Mr. Jacobs: If you have a patient that requests to go to a specialist in Dartmouth instead of  
161 Albany, their insurance will only pay for a trip to the closer hospital. Mr. Weyen agreed, and the  
162 patient will be billed for the difference.

163 Ms. Conner: What is Commission of Accreditation for Pre-Hospital Continuing Education  
164 (CAPCE) and what is the cost of it. Mr. Weyen answered that it cost ~\$3,500 to get it and allows us to  
165 offer EMS Education that would be accepted in any state which is a revenue stream for us.

166 Ms. Conner: If someone calls because they've fallen, do you have to dispatch an ambulance,  
167 and Mr. Weyen responded yes, because Vermont does not have priority of care and there may be a  
168 more serious reason that caused them to fall.

169 Ms. Conner: Is there discussion among EMS agencies on how to improve the situation that is  
170 affecting everyone, and Mr. Weyen noted that he attends regional and statewide meetings where  
171 operating methods are discussed, however, BRS is more innovative than most when it comes to  
172 generating revenue.

173 Mr. Campbell: Why is the request for \$220,000 in one place and \$185,000 in another, and Mr.  
174 Weyen explained that the BRS is on a calendar year so the \$185,000 is half of the \$220,000 plus half of  
175 last year's \$150,000. Mr. Murphy further explained that the Town approved the \$150,000 because the  
176 market had a good year, and the \$220,000 request, is based on an inflation increase over the \$207,000  
177 that the voters had approved the previous year. Working with two fiscal year ends is very confusing.

178 Mr. Campbell: Will future requests include capital expenditures, and Mr. Peat answered that  
179 we hope to never come to the Board for capital expenses. That is why it is so important to us to handle  
180 those in-house from our reserve (endowment) fund and not have to use that for operating costs.

181 Mr. Campbell: What is in the vehicles line item, and Mr. Weyen answered vehicle maintenance  
182 and fuel.

183 Mr. Campbell: Will you continue to request more each year, and Mr. Weyen stated hopefully  
184 not, however, the "health system is broken".

185 Ms. Jenkins: What is the explanation of the \$70,000 increase, and Mr. Murphy answered  
186 staffing the 7 vacant positions with full time benefit eligible employees. We can no longer depend on  
187 per diem people to handle the work load.

188 Ms. Jenkins: Is the apprenticeship program ongoing and how many employees are going to full  
189 time, and Mr. Weyen answered that we will evaluate our staffing situation in the fall to see if we need  
190 another apprenticeship program. In addition, we also have our normal hiring process. We currently  
191 have 47 employees with 23 or 24 full time.

192 Mr. Gordon: Could you "piggyback" on the highway and police radio improvements, and Mr.  
193 Weyen said "that would be fantastic" if the 4 fire departments, police department, sheriff's  
194 department, BRS, and the other EMS agencies in the area could develop an economy of scale to make  
195 that work.

196 Mr. Gordon: Kudos to the BRS employees for the courtesy and professionalism when they  
197 responded to a recent call for one of his football players. Also, he agrees with the BRS Board's  
198 philosophy in not billing people the non-transported patients so as not to ever deter them from calling  
199 in an emergency.

200 ***Jeanne Conner moved and Chad Gordon seconded to approve the allocation of \$220,000.00 to***  
201 ***the Bennington Rescue Squad.***

202 Mr. Campbell feels that it is critical for the BRS to be on the same budget year as the Town. He  
203 also understands that the market was down and the staffing situation that they're in, but they are also  
204 sitting on a large endowment. He recommends that we do a 25% increase this year to \$187,500, and  
205 possibly a 25% increase next year to get to the \$220,000 requested.

206 Mr. Gordon concurred.

207 Ms. Jenkins also agrees the budget years should be the same and deeply supports the BRS and  
208 the work that they do. "It is a fine organization", however, has a difficult time approving a \$70,000  
209 increase.

210 Mr. Jacobs noted that it is difficult to compare "apples to apples" and that the Town does not  
211 have any revenue increases.

212 Ms. Conner stated that no one around the table questions the value of the BRS but wonders if  
213 there are some solutions available through discussions from other sources, or other states.

214 ***The motion failed with Chad Gordon in favor and six opposed.***

215 ***Donald Campbell moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded to approve the allocation of***  
216 ***\$187,500.00 to the Bennington Rescue Squad and request that they change their budget years to***  
217 ***agree with the Town of Bennington.***

218 Mr. Jacobs sympathizes with the BRS but the Board has a responsibility to the taxpayers to keep  
219 their taxes as low as possible. The \$37,500 increase is a substantial increase.

220 Mr. Gordon noted that this doesn't bring it up to the \$207,000 that voters approved two years  
221 ago, and Mr. Campbell added that "arguably" some voters thought that was for five years.

222 Mr. Campbell asked Mr. Hurd for his opinion of the BRS budget, and Mr. Hurd replied that they  
223 are adding staff and their increases are in salaries, benefits, and workers comp. "Their budget is a  
224 realistic budget." "Forest does a great job as Director and their Board does a great job presenting their  
225 budget and helping us understand what their problems are."

226 ***The motion carried with six in favor and Jim Carroll opposed.***

227

---

228 **D. RECREATION BUDGET AND REMAINDER OF AMINISTRATIVE BUDGETS**

229 *Stuart Hurd, Town Manager did the following presentation:*

- 230 • The Recreation Budget is mostly level funded.
- 231 • The Town is not selling the Recreation Center to the Berkshire YMCA. "It is ludicrous to think  
232 we would be."
- 233 • We have a 1-year Management Agreement with the Berkshire YMCA which has reduced the  
234 Salaries and Wages line item while potentially expanding the programs that are offered.
- 235 • There will be no increase in fees during the year of the Management Agreement. If the  
236 relationship becomes more permanent, the fees may potentially increase, however, the Town  
237 will not allow the cost of fees to prohibit people from enjoying the Rec Center.
- 238 • Discussions are taking place now with the YMCA concerning senior improvements. The Director  
239 will be retiring this year and we propose to add a part-time assistant at 20 hours/week.

- 240 • We need to replace the roof shingles on the Senior Center which would be done half this year  
241 and half next.
- 242 • We propose adding one position to the Building and Grounds Salaries and Wages line item to  
243 cover the continuing expansion of our downtown and other municipal parks.
- 244 • Insurance costs have increased again this year but not as much as last year. We are now in a 2-  
245 year rate lock.
- 246 • Economic and Community Development Marketing has doubled this year in anticipation of  
247 greater marketing effort. Mr. Jacobs added that we will hold off acting on this until after the  
248 Marketing Presentation on January 14<sup>th</sup>.
- 249 • The Southern Vermont Development Zone effort transfer to reserve was increased from \$7,500  
250 to \$10,000.

251 *Board questions/comments:*

252 Ms. Jenkins: Had hoped that the Recreation Budget and Senior Center Budget would not be  
253 presented separately since there are overlaps between the two. The YMCA has formulated integrated  
254 services so it is difficult to look at this budget presentation when there may be some savings if they  
255 were combined. Mr. Hurd stated that, if combined, the staffing expenses would remain the same and  
256 prefers to see what, if any, structure changes will take place for future years. "Now, it would only be  
257 speculation." Ms. Jenkins added that her frustration is that it had been discussed last year to combine  
258 the two for this year.

259 Mr. Campbell: Why the increase of \$4,000 in the Repair and Maintenance line item, and Mr.  
260 Hurd answered that is to buy paint for the Ross Pavilion.

261 Mr. Campbell: What is the Other Purchased Services, and Mr. Hurd answered that is for  
262 program presenters and is a reimbursable expense reflected in revenue as part of fees.

263 Mr. Campbell: Are the Police Special Services and Interest Earnings increases realistic, and Mr.  
264 Hurd responded, yes, because that's what we've seen.

265 Mr. Campbell: Why is the Other Purchased Services line item up nearly \$6,000, and Mr. Hurd  
266 answered that that is a one-time cost to upgrade the Listers maps.

267 Mr. Campbell: What is the increase in the Economic and Community Development Salaries and  
268 Wages line item for, and Mr. Hurd stated that is due to the Director's final stepped up increase.  
269 "Economic &" will be removed from that category to read "Community Development".

270 Mr. Campbell: Asked about the \$1,080 increase in Professional Fees, and Mr. Hurd answered  
271 that that is all for legal fees.

272 Mr. Campbell: Is the roof at the Senior Center so bad that it couldn't wait a year or two, and  
273 Mr. Hurd stated that more than likely it could be put on hold. Meals on Wheels is our only tenant in  
274 that building. Mr. Monks added that pieces of slate are falling off which makes it more of a safety  
275 issue. Larry McLeod will be contacted for his input.



276 Mr. Thurber: The roof on the Senior Center was “the only thing that jumped out” to him.

277 Ms. Conner: Which pathway is the Recreation-Pathway referring to, and Mr. Hurd answered the  
278 Ninja Pathway.

279 Ms. Conner: Asked about the \$3,500 increase in the Highway Professional Fees, and Mr. Hurd  
280 responded that that was for legal fees related to easements.

281 Mr. Jacobs: Asked if the hiring of a new maintenance person was necessary at this time since  
282 many projects are not done yet, and Mr. Hurd responded that the Splash Pad with public bathrooms  
283 and water structures will require a lot of maintenance, and it will be done by July 1<sup>st</sup> when this budget  
284 begins. Our current staff of 5 are already maxed out by taking care of the current Town facilities.

285 Mr. Gordon: Would prefer to add the staff to keep all of the Town areas clean and inviting to  
286 the public rather than to have areas not well kept.

287 Mr. Thurber: Are the employees that saved the Town so much money at the Waste Water  
288 Treatment Facility able to help out here, and Mr. Hurd stated that was the Highway Department staff  
289 that helped with the work. We do that kind of helping out all the time. Mr. Monks added that the help  
290 was on a project and not the day-to-day maintenance that is required at all of our facilities.

291 Ms. Conner: Would we reduce overtime with an additional person, and Mr. Hurd answered that  
292 we have scheduled overtime at the Rec Center because we are open additional hours. This position  
293 wouldn’t have any effect on that.

294 Mr. Gordon: Suggested cutting the additional pickup truck to help offset the cost of the  
295 additional staff, and Mr. Hurd will look into that.

296  
297 Mr. Hurd summarized the following potential budget reductions:

- 298 ➤ \$40,000 - Senior Center roof repair
- 299 ➤ \$11,000 - Part-time position at the Senior Center
- 300 ➤ \$44,000 - Buildings and Grounds truck
- 301 ➤ \$ 1,000 - Highway legal fees
- 302 ➤ \$40,000 - Staff cut
- 303 \$136,000

304 ***At 11:35am, Donald Campbell moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded that the meeting was***  
305 ***adjourned finding that an Executive Session be held on Personnel as premature public knowledge***  
306 ***would place a person involved in the subject matter at a substantial disadvantage. The motion***  
307 ***carried unanimously.***

308

309

310 Respectfully submitted,

311 Nancy H. Lively

312 Secretary

**SELECT BOARD  
MINUTES ADDENDUM**

**January 12, 2019**

Present: Tom Jacobs, Chair, Donald Campbell, V. Chair, Jeanne Conner, Jeannie Jenkins, Chad Gordon, Jim Carroll, and Carson Thurber.

The Board came out of executive session at 11:55 PM.

A motion was made and seconded to set the Manager's salary at \$110,642.00 annually. The motion carried 7 – 0. The Chair indicated that the Board appreciated the Manager's efforts on behalf of the Town.

A motion was made and seconded to set the Town Clerk's salary at \$86,498.00 annually. The motion carried unanimously. The Board thanked the Clerk for her efforts this past year.

A motion was made and seconded to set the Treasurer's salary at \$14,708.00 annually. The motion carried 6-0-1, Chad Gordon abstained due to a familial relationship with the Treasurer.

The Board still had to finalize the budget, discuss Lake Paran's special request for \$1,500 in one-time funding to help in a matching grant and discuss the BCRC/BCIC request. The Board agreed to meet Wednesday January 16 at 5:30 pm in the Town Offices to conclude its work on the budget.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 12:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Stuart A. Hurd