

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **NOVEMBER 25, 2019**

6 **MINUTES**

7 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Donald Campbell-Chair; Jeannie Jenkins-Vice Chair; Jeanne
8 Conner; Jim Carroll; Chad Gordon; and Bruce Lee-Clark.

9 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** Bill Scully.

10 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Daniel Monks-Assistant Town Manager and
11 Planning Director; Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director; John Shannahan-Better
12 Bennington Corporation (BBC); Matt Harrington-Chamber of Commerce (COC); Jonathan
13 Cooper-Bennington County Regional Commission-SoVermont (BCRC); Lynn Green; Keith Martin;
14 Sam Restino; James Salerno; Kevin Hoyt; 10 citizens; Jim Therrien-Bennington Banner; CAT-TV;
15 and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

16 At 6:03pm, Chair Donald Campbell called the meeting to order.

17 **1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

18 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

19 **2. CONSENT AGENDA**

20 **A. MINUTES - NOVEMBER 11, 2019**

21 **B. WARRANTS**

22 *Jeannie Jenkins moved and Jim Carroll seconded to approve the Consent Agenda*
23 *amended as follows:*

24 *November 11, 2019 Minutes - Line 9, Delete "(absentee verbal vote on Agenda Item #5 via*
25 *Bruce Lee Clark)."*

26 *Line 68, Delete "unanimously with a verbal vote from Bill Scully*
27 *as stated by Bruce Lee-Clark."*

28 *Line 68, Add "with Bill Scully absent."*

29 *Line 73, Delete "Department of"*

30 *Line 81, Change "Mont" to "High"*

31 *The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

32 **3. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

33 Sam Restino is concerned about the propane tanks that are parked on the railroad
34 tracks near residential areas and the potential danger that they may present to the residents.
35 The definition of "in transit" is the issue and this will be addressed in the Manager's Report this
36 evening.

37 James Salerno, representing the Bennington Area Makers (BAM), stated the various
38 activities/workshops that they are providing and/or participating in during the next couple of
39 months. The Lantern Walk will begin at BAM, 239 Main Street, at 4:00pm on December 4th, up
40 North Street with caroling along the way, the tree lighting at the Vet's Home, followed by a
41 walk through the Deer Park to the Chamber of Commerce for refreshments. They also hold a
42 community meeting at 239 Main Street every Thursday at 6:00pm, are on Facebook, and will
43 soon have a website, www.BAMVT.com .

44 Kevin Hoyt expressed his concern of the participation of Bennington Redevelopment
45 (Putnam Block) in the Town Loan Program noting the large amount and that it was "like the
46 Town paying themselves". Also, he stated the "massive election fraud" with votes from those
47 that did vote being discarded, and votes from those that did not vote being counted. Mr. Hoyt
48 requested that the Town dedicate some dollars to investigate the fraud.

49 **4. BENNINGTON MARKETING/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

50 Presentations were done by the following:

51 John Shannahan-Better Bennington Corporation:

- 52 • Our marketing budget is small and markets downtown businesses.
- 53 • We go after two avenues of marketing - tourism and business recruitment.
- 54 • Tourism is promoted beyond downtown with reference on our website to other
55 pertinent websites, and business recruitment is more for targeting a specific property to
56 relocate to.
- 57 • We appeal to the Albany and Berkshire areas - our "low hanging fruit".
- 58 • Much of our marketing budget is spent to underwrite the marketing of our members.
- 59 • Expenses for our events and activities are in other than marketing line items, and we
60 utilize all free marketing options that are available to us, for example, through the State.

61 Shannon Barsotti, Community Development Director:

- 62 ➤ The Vermont Begins Here campaign was started several years ago by Michael
63 Harrington through the USDA Redevelopment Grant.
- 64 ➤ We have redesigned the Vermont Begins Here logo to make Bennington more
65 prominent.

- 66 ➤ Our goals are to brand Bennington as a tourist destination with many photos, things to
67 do, events, lodging, restaurants, wedding destination info, blogs, etc.
- 68 ➤ The website is also for locals or those who may want to move here or start a business
69 here with the mention of websites that would be of assistance to them in these areas.
- 70 ➤ We reach thousands with hits on the website and are reaching people through
71 Instagram and Facebook, as well. Eight Oh Two Marketing has designed Facebook ads
72 that target specific groups of people, and we currently have ~700 followers on
73 Instagram and ~400 on Facebook.
- 74 ➤ The Vermont Begins Here website exists because of the efforts of the self-created
75 original volunteer Marketing Committee members and continues due to the
76 collaboration with the BBC, COC, and BCRC.
- 77 ➤ Steps going forward are to augment online and hard copy advertising while looking to
78 further broaden our base through television ads, as funds allow. We will continue to
79 “tell the story of Bennington” and promote what draws people to our town.

80 Matt Harrington, Chamber of Commerce:

- 81 ✓ Shared statistics of the tremendous economic impact that tourism has in the State of
82 Vermont, such as, over 32,000 tourist related jobs and tourist spending of \$2.8 billion in
83 2018.
- 84 ✓ The Bennington.com website was purchased in 1994 but has only taken off since it was
85 redesigned in 2017. Similarly, even though the Vermont Begins Here campaign was
86 created several years ago, it has only become vibrant since its recent resurrection.
- 87 ✓ There are over 200,000 visitors to Bennington.com with the most going to the page on
88 restaurants and the community calendar.
- 89 ✓ Social media is very strong with Instagram and Facebook. Instagram has increased 150%
90 going from 3,000 to 5,000 hits since 2017.
- 91 ✓ We also produce videos and work with CAT-TV and GNAT, maintain racks in Bennington
92 with local info only, maintain the Welcome Center that has ~130,000 visitors each year,
93 and create ~60,000 Visitor’s Guides that are disbursed throughout Vermont, the Lake
94 George region, and the Boston and New York City areas.
- 95 ✓ We have received the Best Fall Events Award for 10 consecutive years with this year’s
96 Garlicfest drawing an unprecedented 16,000 people.
- 97 ✓ Some of the Chamber’s marketing expenses were shared with the Board.
- 98 ✓ The Chamber looks forward to continue to be a collaborative marketing partner and
99 reminded everyone that Jonah Spivak has said that “It takes ten years to build a brand.”

100 Jonathan Cooper, Bennington County Regional Commission-SoVermont:

- 101 ❖ The SoVermont brand is primarily Bennington and Windham counties making it “the
102 largest of the Russian nesting dolls” within the collaborative marketing group.
- 103 ❖ We target what people are doing with their time when they are not working in each
104 respective season.

105 ❖ Our attendance at craft fairs, college fairs, etc. is the only presence that focuses on a
106 location and not a position.

107 *Board questions/comments:*

108 Ms. Conner: Are you doing these presentations regionally, and Mr. Harrington answered the
109 Chamber will be going out to the 17 towns that they serve in 2020, and Mr. Cooper stated that
110 SoVermont has not done so at this time.

111 Mr. Lee-Clark: Is interested in how we can present to the taxpayers that we are spending their
112 money wisely in areas that are giving us results, and Ms. Barsotti responded that their focus is
113 based on the data the Eight Oh Two has provided, however, the ads have only been out for a
114 couple of months. Ms. Green added that we hope to at least double our Instagram and
115 Facebook followers by next year. Ms. Barsotti will also make tonight's presentation available to
116 the Board.

117 Mr. Carroll: Is there crosslinking among the agencies, and Mr. Harrington stated with events,
118 but more of the crosslinking is on strategies which is not visible on the website.

119 Mr. Carroll: How far is our reach, and Mr. Cooper noted that it is all over the country and world
120 with a focus on smaller cities within a rural hub.

121 Mr. Campbell: Are there examples of the dollars that other communities invest in marketing,
122 and Ms. Green stated that Woodstock's input for the original launch of their website and
123 advertising was \$70,000. Ms. Green added that by Bennington stepping up to budget dollars
124 for marketing has stimulated others to do so, as well. Eight Oh Two has done much work that
125 they haven't billed us for along with others who have donated their time for graphic designs
126 and photos, and those that have made cash donations.

127 Ms. Jenkins: Appreciates all the work that has taken place so far, and reminded everyone that
128 this is a young collaboration and will take years to develop, as we have been told before.

129 Ms. Jenkins: Was excited about motor coaches coming to town, and Mr. Shannahan stated that
130 they have been coming to town for quite some time. Bennington is an easy sell to the motor
131 coach companies with the difficult part being if they want to come during our busy season and
132 are looking for half price room rates.

133 Mr. Gordon: Is appreciative of the collaboration and the work that has been done.

134 **5. FINAL HEARING BRIDGE 6 ROUTE 9 EAST**

135 Mr. Hurd stated that the Agency is looking for the Board to decide on an option with the
136 Agency's recommendation being the full bridge replacement with a 60-day construction time
137 frame and traffic routed to an offsite detour. If the Board agrees to this, the Town's portion will
138 be reduced to half of the original amount, or 5%, with a section where the Board may submit
139 comments to the Agency, if they desire to.

140 Mr. Campbell noted that the Board is informally in favor of the full bridge replacement
141 and stated the following items of concern from the last hearing:

- 142 1. Have the road closure in May/June before the busy season begins.
- 143 2. Limit the construction to 6, 12-hour days.
- 144 3. No Sundays or 24 hour days. The contractor, however, would have the option of 24
145 hour days if they are not on schedule.

146 *Board questions/comments:*

147 Mr. Campbell: Push for the May/June time frame unless the fisheries say this will cause
148 detrimental damage, as we need to take care of them also.

149 Mr. Gordon: Is there any reimbursement of substantial (10%) lost revenue due to the project,
150 and Mr. Hurd answered that the State does not offer that consideration.

151 Ms. Jenkins: Is there any consideration because the Safford Inn would have to build a
152 footbridge from one of their businesses to the other, and Mr. Hurd responded that this wasn't
153 part of their presentation but could be added as a Board comment.

154 Mr. Lee-Clark: Do we have any say as to the location of the detour, and Mr. Hurd stated that
155 they have proposed two in-town detours for smaller vehicles (Coolidge Avenue and Gage
156 Street) and Route 279 for all trucks.

157 *Public questions/comments:*

158 Keith Martin, owner of the Buck Stop and the adjacent Car Wash, supports the full
159 bridge replacement but is concerned for his income if there would be a full road closure for 60-
160 days. There was a 35% reduction in revenue from the phased closing of the Ben Mont Avenue
161 bridge project. He would prefer the phased closing for this bridge that would extend for a
162 longer period to be done as early in the spring as possible and would not detour traffic away
163 from his businesses.

164 Mr. Hurd added that Mr. Martin's proposal would also double the Town's share of the
165 expense to 10% from 5%.

166 Discussion ensued with some ideas being to put signage on the detour signs back to the
167 affected businesses, have a community effort in support of the businesses affected by the
168 construction, and appealing to the State for assistance.

169 *It was the consensus of the Board to further think about the project options and to make
170 their decision at the December 9, 2019 meeting.*

171 **6. MANAGER'S REPORT**

172 *Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded to support the Sophomore*
173 *Career Summit scheduled for April 8, 2020 with a donation of \$500.00. The motion carried*
174 *with Bill Scully absent.*

175 *Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Chad Gordon seconded to support the Manager's*
176 *determination to create a 4-way stop at the intersection of Weeks Street and Jefferson*
177 *Heights. The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

178 Mr. Hurd reported the following:

- 179 ➤ TANK STORAGE - A letter to our congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. has been
180 sent expressing our concerns of the petroleum tank storage being on the railroad tracks
181 near residential areas, requesting that they find other locations for storage, and
182 requesting a clearer definition of "in-transit".
- 183 ➤ IACP - Have completed their work in Bennington and are back in Washington, D.C.,
184 however, their e-mail is still open for correspondence. The survey was closed on
185 November 16th and we have completed all that they have requested of us. We expect
186 to have their report in late December.
- 187 ➤ TAXES - The tax collections went very well and we are at \$1.12M delinquent which will
188 decline as we get into December.

189 **7. FUTURE AGENDA**

190 The following are planned for the indicated meeting dates:

- 191 ❖ December 2nd - Executive Session at 6:00pm to complete the Manager's Review.
- 192 ❖ December 9th - Potential Southern Vermont CED effort.
- 193 ❖ December 9th - Bridge #6 decision.
- 194 ❖ December 16th - There will be a meeting on December 16th in lieu of the December 23rd
195 meeting for warrants and action items.
- 196 ❖ December 23rd - Cancelled.
- 197 ❖ January 4th - Budget meeting preceded by a tour of the firehouse.
- 198 ❖ Early January - Discussion on recreational assets.

199 **8. OTHER BUSINESS**

200 Ms. Jenkins: Come out tomorrow and bang on tin cans from 6:00pm-8:00pm, and be part of the
201 Red Wagon Parade to the Tree Lighting on December 4th.

202 Mr. Carroll: Due to the decline in fire fighter and EMT volunteers, the legislature is considering
203 waiving property taxes for those volunteers. He does not think that is a good idea. He also
204 feels that some of our decline is related to not being able to serve liquor at the firehouse and
205 recommends that we restore their liquor license to encourage more social activities for the fire
206 fighters, as well as, for the community.

207 Mr. Carroll: Acknowledged that tomorrow would have been his father's 100th birthday.

208 Mr. Lee-Clark: Thanked everyone that participated in the Empty Bowls event with nearly 1,000
209 people in attendance.

210 Mr. Lee-Clark: Encouraged everyone to attend the Chamber Mixer at the Tri-State Federal
211 Credit Union on December 12th.

212 Ms. Conner: Encouraged everyone to attend the Pop-Up Choir at Old Castle tomorrow to raise
213 money for their roof.

214 HAPPY THANKSGIVING TO ALL

215 **9. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

216 **A. CONTRACT**

217 *At 8:17pm, Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded that the meeting was*
218 *adjourned finding that an Executive Session be held on a Contract as premature public*
219 *knowledge would place a person involved in the subject matter at a substantial*
220 *disadvantage. There will be no actions taken on these items when going back into Open*
221 *Session. The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

222

223

224

225

226 Respectfully submitted,

227 Nancy H. Lively

228 Secretary