

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **JANUARY 4, 2020**

6 **MINUTES**

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

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

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; Joan Pinsonnault-Treasurer; James Wright-Fire Chief; Paul Doucette-Police Chief; Cam Grande-
13 Police Lieutenant; R.J. Joly-Public Works Director; Larry Gates-Assistant Public Works Director; 6
14 citizens; John Therrien-Bennington Banner; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

15 At 8:04am, Donald Campbell called the meeting to order.

16 **1. CONSENT AGENDA**

17 **A. MINUTES - DECEMBER 16, 2019**

18 **B. WARRANTS**

19 *Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded to approve the Consent Agenda with the*
20 *Minutes of December 16, 2019 amended as follows:*

21 *Line 34, Add "Mr. Campbell had a long conversation with Sue Andrews in the afternoon of the*
22 *meeting."*

23 *The motion carried with Jeannie Jenkins abstaining from the Minutes of December 16, 2019 and Bill*
24 *Scully absent.*

25 **2. F.Y. BUDGET WORK SESSION**

26 Mr. Hurd stated that the combined FY21 General, Highway and Fire Fund budgets presented
27 show an increase of 4.53%. The General Fund increase is at 6.82%; the Highway Fund is level funded;
28 and the Fire Fund an increase of 0.38%. The increase in the General Fund is generally related to an
29 increase in the Police Budget, health care costs increasing 11%, and wages increasing 3.5%. Using last
30 year's Grand List, the taxes are expected to be increased by 2.6%. Any changes in the Grand List or
31 changes made by the Board will impact this amount. All agencies, with the Turning Point Center's
32 amount not yet known, are requesting to be level funded except the three that are in the budget - the
33 Bennington Free Library, the John McCullough Library, and the Bennington Rescue Squad.

34 **B. FIRE BUDGET**

35 *Fire Chief James Wright and Police Chief Paul Doucette did the following presentation:*

- 36 • Given that the voters approved a \$1.2M purchase of a ladder truck, diligent work was done to
37 keep the budget as level funded as possible.
- 38 • *Uniform Equipment* - This is level funded with our intent to replace 6 sets of gear each year.
39 Those going into the fires (inside work) getting the newest gear and those doing (outside work)
40 getting the hand-me-downs. We have had 5 or 6 new recruits this year.
- 41 • *Small Tools/Equipment (Fire Fighting)* - We are proposing to replace 8 pagers at a cost of \$500
42 each. Pagers go to Wells Communication to have their worth evaluated, however, it is less
43 expensive to replace them than it is to repair them.
- 44 • *Communications* - An overall inventory assessment of the old equipment has been done and we
45 propose to purchase a set of 4 Motorola radios as replacements. Requests for more radio
46 replacements will be in next year's budget. Every fire fighter should have a radio.
- 47 • *Small Tools/Equipment (Building)* - Update kitchen cabinets (\$4,300); update kitchen equipment
48 (\$1,250); replace damaged tables (\$1,500); and purchase a new vacuum cleaner (\$750) is nearly
49 level funded from last year.
- 50 • *Building Improvements* - Parking lots sealing was presented for \$37,530 and was cut from the
51 budget for the 2nd year. The walkway needs replacement and remains in the budget for \$2,100.
52 Sealing the cracks in the parking lot may need to be looked at toward the end of the year.
- 53 • *Machinery and Equipment* - We began a phased upgrade of the HVAC system based on an
54 engineering study. The air conditioning and heat work sporadically. Total cost of the upgrade is
55 estimated at \$105,500. We will continue using budgeted funds to tackle the smaller fixes.
- 56 • *Lease Payments* - Includes the payments for the new SCBA system (25 air pack units) at \$24,550
57 and the 2014 new to us rescue pumper truck at \$49,900.
- 58 • *Transfer to Reserve Fund* - continue with the increased amount of \$60,000 approved last year
59 since the new ladder truck is expected to come in under budget.
- 60 • *Overall Budget* - increase of .38%.

61 *Board questions/comments:*

62 Ms. Conner: Questioned if the Energy Committee should be involved with the HVAC upgrades, and Chief
63 Doucette answered that he will contact Mark Sawyer and Larry McLeod for their input on that. Mr. Hurd
64 added that the engineering study was done in 2018 and has been available to Mr. Sawyer and Mr.
65 McLeod.

66 Mr. Gordon: Noted that the Battle Day budget hasn't changed in 4 years and asked if that was enough.
67 Chief Wright answered that they are always trying to come up with new fundraising ideas to offset
68 increasing costs without burdening the Town. Mr. Carroll added that we should give consideration in
69 the future to add funds to what the State may provide for the 250th anniversary celebration in 2027.

70 The Board thanked the Fire Department for all that they do.

71

72 **A. POLICE BUDGET**

73 *Chief Doucette did the following presentation:*

- 74 • *Salaries and Wages* - The increase of \$152,755 in salaries and wages plus additional pension and
75 benefits expenses is due somewhat by contracted increases but mostly by the addition of 3
76 officers to be able to provide a Student Resource Officer (SRO) in all elementary schools to satisfy
77 the contract the Town has with the schools. We feel that building a police relationship with the
78 students and their families at a younger age will be beneficial in the future. The expense for the
79 officers will be offset by revenue from the elementary school district for the 185 days that they
80 would be working in the schools - the cost of just over 2 of the overall cost of the officers.
81 Beyond that, they could be utilized in other areas of the Town.
- 82 • *Small Tools and Equipment* - stable except to replace 3 desks in the administrative offices at an
83 estimated cost of \$3,750 and breath testing equipment for court ordered checks to mount in the
84 lobby for \$600.
- 85 • *Insurance - Workers Comp* - decreased 18.9%, or \$27,000, this year. The availability of Tasers and
86 increased training may be reducing the need for physical intervention.
- 87 • *Lease Payments* - increase of \$800 because we need to replace our computers/printer every 3
88 years.
- 89 • *Police Communications - Machinery and Equipment* - we propose to replace 3 radios.
- 90 • *Building Improvements* - we dispatch for several other organizations and need to replace the
91 generator at a cost of \$31,940 to ensure 24/7 operation, as well as, lock and security upgrades
92 for \$5,200.
- 93 • *Principal and Interest* - the Police Building Bond payment will end during FY20.
- 94 • *Police Equipment - Machinery and Equipment* - we propose to replace 2012 Tahoe vehicles with a
95 new Interceptor Ford SUV and an F150 Interceptor pickup truck. The truck will be used for
96 Animal Control, highway safety equipment and for towing. Employees have been using their
97 own trucks on a volunteer basis for these purposes for years, and occasionally we have used
98 Mark Sawyer's town truck. We do, however, need a truck available year round. A closed course
99 demonstration at Ft. Devens showed that this pickup truck is suitable for police work.
- 100 • *Overall Budget* - increase of 9.03%.

101 *Board questions/comments:*

102 Mr. Lee-Clark: It seems that the financial support from the school districts is dependent upon their
103 budget limitations and Board support in the future. What is your sense of their commitment to the SRO,
104 and Chief Doucette answered that the CDC and high school are very committed. Supt. Culkeen and the
105 principals were very excited about the presence of officers in the schools.

106 Mr. Gordon: Is the reduction in overtime due to the additional 3 officers, and Chief Doucette stated that
107 it is primarily due to rescheduling.

108 Mr. Campbell: Will you have a full, trained staff this year, and Chief Doucette responded that there are 3
109 officers retiring during calendar year 2020 that will be somewhat overlapped with officers coming out of
110 the Academy which will put us at full staff for short periods of time throughout the year. This also
111 contributes to the reduction in overtime. Mr. Campbell added that he supports working with the
112 schools when they have requested us to do so.

113 Mr. Carroll: How will the additional staff effect your presence in the community, and Chief Doucette
114 answered that our calls for service this year were 11,557 with the same staffing numbers of 2016 when
115 the calls were 8,500. Rutland's calls for service were 12,139 with a much larger staff.

116 Ms. Conner: Do the other elementary schools - Shaftsbury, Pownal, and North Bennington - have SRO's,
117 and Chief Doucette responded that the Sheriff's Department has deputies at Pownal and Shaftsbury.

118 Mr. Campbell: Noted there was \$8,900 for Building Repairs and Maintenance which seems high with the
119 new HVAC system, and Chief Doucette answered that is for the annual maintenance service of the
120 system, sump pumps because of the location of the building, and repair of a hole in the roof.

121 Mr. Campbell: Other Purchased Services has been cut \$2,500, and Chief Doucette commented that this
122 line has been cut the last two years because it is less expensive for us to do our own transports instead
123 of hiring it out.

124 Ms. Conner: Are the agencies that we dispatch for billed for the service, and Chief Doucette stated that
125 they are.

126 Ms. Conner: It seems like the court should pay for the breath testing equipment, and Chief Doucette
127 responded that he has unsuccessfully tried to get them to do that. Mr. Lee-Clark added that the
128 legislature has underfunded the court system for the last 15-20 years. Chief Doucette agreed.

129 Mr. Gordon: How are the cruisers serviced, and Chief Doucette answered that we are working with a
130 local business on Northside Drive that will do a normal service without an appointment in 15 minutes.
131 Warranty work must be done with the dealer.

132 Mr. Gordon: If the Town were to hire a mechanic, do you see a cost savings there, and Chief Doucette
133 said "That is an amazing idea."

134 Mr. Carroll: Does the Animal Control Officer bring licenses when they go to an unlicensed dog call, and
135 Chief Doucette answered no. That would require proof of rabies shots, additional documentation and
136 carrying cash which he doesn't want to start doing.

137 The Board thanked the Police Department for all that they do.

138

139 **C. HIGHWAY BUDGET**

140 Mr. Hurd stated that the Highway Budget is basically level funded due to the internal work done
141 that reduced the cost of bond projects.

142 *R.J. Joly did the following presentation:*

143 They will be doing less sidewalk work this year with our focus on the repair by the hospital,
144 Northside Drive for the completion of Performance Drive to Aldi's entrance, Willowbrook, and
145 Applegate.

146 There will also be less paving work this year with Overlea Road, North Branch Street,
147 Performance Drive, Sweet Lane, and Matteson Road scheduled. There should be no paving this year
148 related to PFOA because they aren't expected to be done until the summer of 2021. The roads affected

149 by this are Upper Chapel Road, Lower Chapel Road, Crossover Road, Upper East Road, and the Apple Hill
150 Development.

- 151 • *Insurance and Bond and Insurance-Workers Comp* - these costs decreased due to a dramatic
152 reduction in Workers Comp insurance.
- 153 • *Construction & Maintenance-Winter Maintenance Supplies* - we are proposing to purchase 3,400
154 tons of salt, an increase of 200 tons, for \$234,600. Salt costs have stabilized with the remaining
155 \$32,900 for deicer and winter sand.
- 156 • *Projects-Other Purchased Services* - level funded again this year to offset the new bond payments
157 with projects to include North Branch Street, Performance Drive, Sweet Lane, and Mattison Road
158 unless other needs develop. We also plan to repair/replace the retaining wall on Imperial
159 Avenue.
- 160 • *Construction & Maintenance-Sidewalks - Contracted Services* - we will be doing less internal
161 sidewalk work this year with proposed work to be Dewey Street, Harwood to Weeks, Applegate
162 Pathway, and Kocher Drive completion.
- 163 • *Construction & Maintenance-Bridges* - \$10,000 is for installing a motor device to open and close
164 the dam sluiceway at Papermill Bridge as a flood relief project. Opening this manually requires
165 many man hours for multiple employees plus equipment. The \$55,800 is to upgrade and paint
166 the Orchard Road Bridge.
- 167 • *Vehicles & Equipment-Lease Payments* - included here are annual payments for the sweeper, a
168 wheel loader, the grader, and a loader backhoe. Ms. Currier added that there was a piece of
169 equipment that was more expensive to lease than to purchase so we decided to purchase it.
170 That is why the actual lease payments total \$116,300 and the line item is \$117,860, a difference
171 of \$1,560.
- 172 • *Principal and Interest Payments* - we propose acquiring a new tandem axle dump truck replacing
173 a 2012 F550, a new pickup with plow replacing a 2012 model, a roller replacing a 1997 model,
174 and a second tandem to replace a 2011 model adding \$44,700 to the existing principal and
175 interest budget via the State's Highway Equipment Fund.
- 176 • *Overall Budget* - increase of 0.00%.

177 *Board questions/comments:*

178 Mr. Campbell: Do you feel that you're keeping up with the replacement of equipment, and Mr. Joly
179 answered yes, all of the important items are being replaced as established in the Capital Plan. There are
180 a few pieces that we will never replace but are keeping operational as long as they last.

181 Mr. Campbell: Asked about the \$10,000 jump in Taxes, Licenses, Registrations, and Mr. Hurd responded
182 that is due to the new required storm water permits.

183 Mr. Campbell: Questioned the cuts in Repair-Main Supply-Summer and Other Purchased Services at
184 \$40,000 and \$10,000, respectively, and Mr. Hurd answered that the Pleasant Street Project (\$10,000
185 cut) will be completed this year. Mr. Joly added that the Repair-Main Supply-Summer (\$40,000 cut) is
186 for grant matches and we don't have any this year.

187 Mr. Campbell: Why the reduction from actual FY19 of \$591,107 to the proposed FY20 budgeted of
188 \$343,140 in Downtown-Other Purchased Services, and Mr. Hurd stated that was due to the bond
189 reduction.

190 Mr. Campbell: Questioned the \$97,530 cut of the Washington Avenue (Elm to Observatory) and the
191 \$38,450 Main Street (Pageant to Union), and Mr. Hurd answered that was because we don't have that
192 funding yet plus the lead line replacement will be taking place in these areas. However, the
193 Kocher/Applegate project was added for \$60,000.

194 Mr. Gordon: Would it be feasible to have a house mechanic, and Mr. Joly answered that he "thinks it's a
195 great idea" and thinks it may be feasible for normal equipment maintenance upkeep. "We're currently
196 paying \$90-\$130/hour wherever we go." Mr. Joly will put together a cost presentation of hiring a
197 mechanic for normal equipment maintenance for next year's budget noting that he would still need to
198 go elsewhere for the specialized jobs on the equipment.

199 Ms. Conner: Questioned why Electric went up \$7,000 and Heat went down \$8,000, and Mr. Joly
200 responded that they shut as much off as possible electrically and the thermostat is set at 52°. Even
201 though the electric bill is high, it is actually low in comparison to other buildings of this size. This seems
202 like something that the Energy Committee could weigh in on.

203 Ms. Jenkins: Suggested that Mr. Joly come to a Select Board Meeting to explain the process involved to
204 decide which sidewalks get done and which ones can wait.

205 Ms. Jenkins: Noted that there are areas in Town, such as Hillside Street now that Friendly's has closed
206 and the Bennington Potter's yard, that are dark and should be checked out for additional lighting. Mr.
207 Monks stated that the Town and Green Mountain Power (GMP) did a comprehensive review 7 years ago
208 and the push has always been to not do unnecessary lighting. Mr. Joly added that we now spend
209 \$115,000 on street light electricity. Mr. Hurd stated that the historic lighting on the outskirts of Town
210 are owned by the Town and we pay the electricity for them. All others are owned by GMP and we pay a
211 per fixture cost for those that "is not significant". Mr. Hurd suggested that Ms. Jenkins put together a
212 list of areas that she feels should be looked at with GMP for additional lighting.

213 Mr. Lee-Clark: Suggested that the neighbors within a few blocks of the sidewalks that need repair be
214 sent a time frame of when their sidewalks are expected to be done. Mr. Joly stated that, because there
215 are often many factors involved, it is difficult to determine a schedule that can be adhered to. However,
216 they do put notes on people's doors when they know actual dates when a sidewalk project will begin.

217 The Board thanked the Highway Department for all that they do.

218 **D. IF TIME ALLOWS - REMAINDER OF GENERAL FUND BUDGET**

219 *Mr. Hurd did the following presentation:*

- 220 • Wages for the Town Clerk line item of \$142,660 includes the Town Clerk and ^{one} ~~two~~ full time
221 employees and has increased because we have 3 elections in this fiscal year. The hourly rate for
222 election workers/BCA members is \$12/hour and the Clerk's salary is currently \$86,507 and will be
223 set by the Board. The Town Clerk generates \$162,000 in fees.
- 224 • All of the contracted amounts with the YMCA are in the Recreation-Administrative category.
- 225 • Our property casualty insurance went up due to additional properties even though the rates
226 went down.

- 227 • The Marketing Budget was cut, and if the Board wishes to reinstate it, his recommendation is to
228 put it into a Reserve Account earmarked for marketing in future years instead of becoming part
229 of the fund balance.
- 230 • The salaries in Permitting and Planning are increased due to the transfer of a former Recreation
231 employee to this office which has decreased that position from the Recreation Budget. Also, the
232 Water/Sewer employee has relocated to Bowen Road.
- 233 • Nearly all of the line items in Community Development have been reduced or eliminated because
234 these were all costs that were going to the minimal marketing plan that we had been doing with
235 the idea that we were going to a larger marketing project.
- 236 • The Community Development budget - except for the removal of Marketing - was the budget
237 that Ms. Barsotti submitted. Perhaps an in person presentation by her is in order so she can
238 explain her reasoning in preparing her budget.
- 239 • It doesn't make sense to pave the Recreation Center parking lot with the building addition that is
240 taking place.
- 241 • Even though the Senior Center Admin line item for Salaries shows a reduction in the budget that
242 only means that it is lower than last year's budget. The reality is that the Senior Center Director's
243 salary has, and will be, increasing as the activities have, and will, increase also.
- 244 • The cost to put a slate roof on the Senior Center Building is \$113,000. This is especially expensive
245 when the future of the building is unknown.
- 246 • The Miscellaneous Contingencies-Transfer to Parking Fund was reduced by \$7,000 based on what
247 we have spent on our parking lots in the past.
- 248 • This budget is based on the FY19 Agencies Funding Allocations so any change from that will
249 increase this budget by that amount. The Bennington Free Library is seeking a \$10,000 increase;
250 the John McCullough Library is seeking a \$16,000 increase; and the Bennington Rescue Squad is
251 seeking a \$32,500 increase.
- 252 • All other Agency Funding Allocation requests are the same as last year with the Turning Point
253 Center unknown at this time.
- 254 • The Town Manager, Town Treasurer, and Town Clerk salaries are also in the budget with FY19
255 amounts.

256 *Board questions/comments:*

257 Ms. Jenkins: With all of the other improvements at the Recreation Center, we should consider an
258 alternate way, such as biomass, to heat it. Mr. Hurd will need to have staff research this during this
259 year.

260 Ms. Jenkins: Is concerned that the only funding in the Community Development is for people without
261 any costs related to community development opportunities, themselves.

262

263 Discussion ensued as to the need to replace the Community Built Park play structure at Willow Park with
264 the following comments:

- 265 ✓ The play equipment at Willow Park has reached its life expectancy.
266 ✓ Mr. Hurd is confident that staff would have advised him if the equipment was unsafe to use.

- 267 ✓ It should be in the budget for repair or demolition if there are any safety issues at all.
- 268 ✓ We need to continue to do our due diligence in monitoring the safety of the Park.
- 269 ✓ We have had estimates done to replace it that are all over \$100,000.
- 270 ✓ If one of the local tax options passes, enough money would be generated from that to pay for the
- 271 replacements and lower our property taxes. The first check would be received ~ September
- 272 2020.
- 273 ✓ The Community Built Park is used extensively.
- 274 ✓ Mr. Hurd will follow up on what playground equipment options are available today so that when
- 275 it is time to replace the Community Built Park, we are ready to do so.
- 276 ✓ If the local tax options are put on the ballot, there will be much discussion on that at that time.

277

278 Discussion ensued as to the removal of Marketing as a line item with the following comments:

- 279 ➤ There will be a fee to advertise on the website where it had been free the first year.
- 280 ➤ It is important that we continue to market our community.
- 281 ➤ Mr. Hurd recommends that the \$50,000 be put in a reserve account earmarked for Marketing.
- 282 ➤ The passing of the local tax options could also replace or enhance these dollars.
- 283 ➤ We should know the details of what the \$50,000 would be spent on and have Ms. Barsotti give
- 284 us this information.
- 285 ➤ Mr. Hurd will leave the \$10,000 marketing cut and add \$50,000 to the budget as a Marketing
- 286 Reserve Account. Also, the Board will know how that will impact the tax rate at the next
- 287 meeting.

288

289 To summarize for the next meeting:

- 290 ❖ Mr. Hurd will add \$50,000 to the Community Development Budget for Marketing and advise its
- 291 impact on taxes.
- 292 ❖ Mr. Hurd will add a small amount for contingencies to the Community Development Budget.
- 293 ❖ Mr. Hurd will try to get a statement on the condition/safety of the Community Built Park at
- 294 Willow Park.
- 295 ❖ A decision must be made on how, or if, the local option tax will appear on the ballot and Mr.
- 296 Hurd will provide information on how much the other than sales tax options would generate in
- 297 revenue.

298

299 ***At 11:43am, Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded the adjournment of the meeting.***

300 ***The motion carried unanimously with Bill Scully absent.***

301

302 Respectfully submitted,

303 Nancy H. Lively

304 Secretary