

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **130 RIVER STREET**

4 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

5 **JANUARY 11, 2020**

6 **MINUTES**

7 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Donald Campbell-Chair; Jeannie Jenkins-Vice Chair; Jim Carroll;
8 Chad Gordon; Bruce Lee-Clark 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; Cassandra Barbeau-Town Clerk; Lynne Fonteneau McCann-Bennington Free Library Executive
13 Director; Jennie M. Rozycki-Library Director and Mary Rogers-Treasurer-John G. McCullough Free
14 Library; Art Groux-Executive Director; Brian Peat-Board Chair and Brian Murphy-Board Vice Chair-
15 Bennington Rescue Squad; 10 citizens; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

16 At 8:00am, Chair Donald Campbell called the meeting to order.

17 **1. F.Y. 21 BUDGET WORK SESSION**

18 **A. BENNINGTON FREE LIBRARY**

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

- 20 • Studies have been done as to the importance that reading to children has on their literacy, and
21 the role that libraries play in that.
- 22 • The 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten is an important collaboration with community partners.
- 23 • Seedlings afterschool program collaboration with Bennington Elementary and Molly Stark
24 Elementary are for students who parents are incarcerated.
- 25 • Kindergarten Initiative takes 14 kindergarten groups to museums for exposure to art.
- 26 • Delta Dental has received a grant for 2 additional dental health backpacks.
- 27 • Access to the Bennington Banner online, Learning Express Library, and monthly movies are
28 provided.
- 29 • Rise VT has provided adult walks throughout the downtown to educate participants on our
30 history.
- 31 • Our 2018 Adult Summer Reading Program, Libraries Rock, was very well attended.
- 32 • Annual Circulation is "down slightly" which is typical nationwide.
- 33 • There are 8,339 registered borrowers with 513 of those new and 137 of the new are children.
- 34 • There are 74,562 annual visitors.
- 35 • We have 138 volunteers that donated 1,148 hours.
- 36 • 124% of Bennington's contribution was spent locally and the Meeting Room is used by 64
37 organizations and individuals for a fee.

38 *Board questions/comments:*

39 Ms. Jenkins: Asked what new programs have been brought in to reach new audiences that you might not
40 be reaching, and Ms. McCann's only answer was working with Job Service to help applicants prepare
41 their online applications.

42 Mr. Campbell: How do we parse out how many of the 74,562 visitors use the library as opposed to how
43 many times the door is opened, and Ms. McCann stated 80% - "sometimes just to use the bathroom,
44 sometimes to come for a program, sometimes to use the computers, and sometimes it's to sit and read
45 in a quiet room".

46 Mr. Campbell: The request is for a 2%, or \$10,000 increase with the overall revenue and expenses being
47 somewhat "flat". Salary and Wages has only increased 2.1% despite more hours. Grants, for the most
48 part, offset Program Expenses.

49 Mr. Campbell: Requested that the budget presentation next year be in the format that the John G.
50 McCullough Library presented this year, which is, Actual 2018, Estimate 2019, Budget 2020, and Budget
51 vs Estimated 2019. Ms. McCann will get together with Ms. Rozycki on this.

52 Ms. Jenkins: The \$3,300 in grant monies coming in seems like a "modest amount" for a library of your
53 size. Are there other grant opportunities available to you? Ms. McCann answered that the availability
54 of grants isn't known until the year that you're in, and Ms. Jenkins added that the budgeted amount for
55 grants basically hasn't changed in 3 years.

56 Ms. Jenkins: Since we're a regional hub, is surprised that we don't have more non-resident people
57 joining the library, and Ms. McCann stated that other states resources have provided what we used to
58 uniquely provide to patrons in their own local libraries, so there is less of a need to come to Bennington.

59 Mr. Carroll: Asked if they still had micro-fiche and Ms. McCann responded that they have automated
60 microfilm.

61 Mr. Campbell: Thanked Ms. McCann for the work that the library does.

62

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

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

- 65 ✓ The amount originally submitted as their request was a typo at \$48,000. The actual request
66 amount is \$40,000.
- 67 ✓ The American Library Association and Penguin Random House Publishers has recognized the
68 library as the first runner up for the first ever Innovation Through Adversity Award. This award
69 recognized our ability to deliver high-quality free public events through creative partnerships and
70 the development of innovative practices with tight financial constraints.
- 71 ✓ In September, we needed to have an emergency replacement of our furnace - a \$24,500 six week
72 project - that was entirely funded through donations and grants without negatively impacting
73 our operating budget.
- 74 ✓ We have only withdrawn \$5,000 in principal dollars from our endowment in the past 4 years, and
75 will not be drawing any this year for the first time in many years.

- 76 ✓ Our annual fundraising appeal is off to a strong start with already having received \$20,000.
- 77 Other fundraising events are the Table of Contents Gala in April, an auction, and a Chair-to-Chair
- 78 fundraiser specific to replace chairs that are no longer able to be repaired.
- 79 ✓ We have seen a 40% increase in circulation over the past 4 years.
- 80 ✓ The interlibrary collaboration is very successful, computer and Wifi usage continues to rise, and
- 81 attendance for our programming “has remained robust”.
- 82 ✓ We are partnering with nearly 20 area organizations, businesses and venues to provide a series
- 83 of mystery-themed events in the area in 2020. We will serve as the financial host for any grant
- 84 money received from the Humanities Council for this.
- 85 ✓ We credit our success to our marketing and outreach activities.
- 86 ✓ We have \$235,000 in our non-restricted endowment; \$6,500 in another endowment designated
- 87 for principal only; and a building only endowment for \$80,000. After we secure a USDA loan for
- 88 an elevator, fire safe staircase and rest rooms renovations for ADA accessibility, we will go after a
- 89 series of grants and donations. If we can cover the project without accessing our endowment,
- 90 then the project will go forward.
- 91 ✓ Currently, we have 3,750 patrons with 2/3 from Bennington/North Bennington and the
- 92 remainder from Shaftsbury and out-of-state. On the average, someone is walking through the
- 93 door every 7 minutes.

94 *Board questions/comments:*

95 Mr. Campbell: Is the Trustee review and revision of the policies due to the increase in library usage, and
96 Ms. Rozycki answered somewhat, as well as, having a more formalized, best practice reference available
97 to staff. The new policies will be posted to the Library’s website as they are approved.

98 Ms. Conner: Asked if there are trends that need to be planned for financially, and Ms. Rozycki answered
99 that being proactive by eliminating late fees has been successful, as well as, the integration of
100 technology and letting the people determine with their requests what the future of the library will look
101 like.

102 Mr. Lee-Clark: Asked Ms. Rozycki to expand upon what the furnace replacement entailed, and she said
103 that they replaced the furnace, a heat pump-enabled water heater (which was in the old furnace),
104 asbestos remediation, and a new oil tank. We are investigating a heat pump system, which will improve
105 the efficiency of our heating and cooling, to be paid for with grant funds to be applied for by May 2020.
106 We will go forward with the heat pump system if approved for a grant to do so.

107 Ms. Jenkins: It looks like your electric costs are going down, and Ms. Rozycki responded that is due to
108 solar credits being donated to the library from North Bennington Variety.

109 Mr. Campbell: It looks like your endowment investments are earning 2% interest, and Ms. Rogers
110 answered that it was 6% in 2018. If it is actually 6%, then the budgeted Investment Interest is
111 understated at \$5,500 by ~\$8,000. Ms. Rogers will let the Board know what the actual 2019 interest
112 earned is on Monday.

113 Mr. Campbell: Thanked Ms. Rozycki for the work that the library does.

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116 C. BENNINGTON RESCUE SQUAD (BRS)

117 *Art Groux, Brian Peat and Brian Murphy did the following presentation:*

- 118 ➤ We were named the Vermont EMS Service of the Year for the second year in a row - a credit to
- 119 our staff's performance.
- 120 ➤ We have increased the number of Critical Care Paramedics available to the Town. These are
- 121 paramedics who take additional training to be able to serve and attend critically ill patients
- 122 during transport to hospitals beyond Bennington.
- 123 ➤ We have increased the training that we provide to our own and other EMS agencies and are
- 124 working on collaborative programs with health care partners to further this effort.
- 125 ➤ Our apprenticeship program is showing great promise in expanding the potential EMS workforce.
- 126 This is partially funded by the State and the attendees are paid as of their first day in the
- 127 program.
- 128 ➤ The increasing High Deductible Health Care Plans are having a negative impact in rural America
- 129 with the first health care provider bills going unpaid by insurers, as stated in USA Today on
- 130 1/10/2020. EMS is often the first health care provider seen in serious cases.
- 131 ➤ We have increased insurance costs - employee health care, workers compensation, motor
- 132 vehicle, and professional liability.
- 133 ➤ We have increased capital costs - ambulance stretchers, for example, have increased 125% in the
- 134 past 15 years and additional equipment is needed to carry out the roles of the increasing skills
- 135 and abilities of our providers.
- 136 ➤ Our workforce challenges continue with a declining younger workforce and a rapidly aging
- 137 experienced workforce.
- 138 ➤ In 2019, our 911 call volume was 4,509 - the highest ever - with 88% from the Town of
- 139 Bennington. Of these calls, 7.4% are for transports, and we never receive payment for 4.5% of
- 140 those transports which translates to a monetary loss of ~\$76,000.
- 141 ➤ The BRS reviewed the Executive Summary budget submitted today to the Proposed Budget
- 142 submitted in November 2019 with the following comments:
 - 143 ○ Patient Billing Income - down from the 2019-2020 budget by ~\$42,000 reflects the
 - 144 dollars that are withheld from us for various reasons.
 - 145 ○ Fundraising/Donations and Requests - remains the same as last year even though a one-
 - 146 time donation of \$25,000 has increased the projected actual dollars for this year.
 - 147 ○ Community Education (CPR/First Aid) - is pass through revenue to offset the expense of
 - 148 doing it.
 - 149 ○ EMS Education Courses - income for teaching courses to others outside our system and
 - 150 is also pass through revenue to offset the expense of doing it.
 - 151 ○ Trust Distributions - income received is same as last year.
 - 152 ○ Other Income - ancillary income for other services, such as running reports, etc.
 - 153 ○ Management Services - services provided to neighboring EMS squads to help stabilize
 - 154 them so they can remain in business. A decrease of ~\$56,000 from last year is because
 - 155 some of those services will be going back to them.
 - 156 ○ Staffing Services - providing staff to neighboring EMS squads.
 - 157 ○ Total Income = \$2,182,694.
 - 158 ○ Operations Expense - cost of putting an ambulance on the road in salaries and benefits.

- 159 ○ Management Services & Staffing - cost of doing those services for others. As the others
- 160 assume more responsibilities, this line item will decrease.
- 161 ○ Billing and Administration - cost of billing and our administrative staff.
- 162 ○ Facilities and Maintenance - cost of the building and its upkeep.
- 163 ○ Vehicles - maintenance and operation of our fleet only. Not the replacement of it.
- 164 ○ EMS & Community Education - the cost is higher than the income brought in because
- 165 this includes training our own personnel, as well.
- 166 ○ Depreciation and Amortization - includes the cost of the new ambulance coming in for
- 167 part of the year.
- 168 ○ Interest Expense - nearly flat from last year.
- 169 ○ Total Expense = \$3,012,311.

170 *Board questions/comments:*

171 Mr. Campbell: Requested that the financial information read left to right instead of right to left next
172 year. For example, this year it should have read Actuals for 2018, Projected for 2019, Budget for 2020,
173 Budget for 2021 and Δ. Also, change the name of the "Vehicles" line item to "Vehicles Maintenance".
174 Mr. Groux stated that these changes will be done.

175 Mr. Campbell: Where is the dispatch expense, and Mr. Groux answered that it's within Operations.

176 Mr. Campbell: Requested the detail of what makes up the Operations, Management Services & Staffing,
177 and Billing and Administration line items. Mr. Groux stated that will be provided.

178 Mr. Campbell: Requested a detailed statement of the endowment and Mr. Lee-Clark would also like a
179 copy of the Spending Policy. Mr. Murphy noted that BRS had changed investment firms and the
180 endowment balance was at \$3.6M at the end of 2019. The market did well so it has helped to "blunt the
181 deficit spending".

182 Mr. Lee-Clark: Noted that Municipal Funding is not going to get the BRS out of deficit spending. Mr.
183 Murphy agreed and the financial conditions for EMS services is getting worse nationally. He added that
184 the BRS is looking long range proactively by our fundraising efforts, service to other agencies, changing
185 our staffing, billing people that did not require transport, and creating a "long term integration" with
186 funding from the towns. Billing people that did not require transport for 8 months, however, was a
187 losing endeavor.

188 Ms. Jenkins: Noted it was brought up last year if there are ways to work closer with the hospital and who
189 gets called for service, and wondered how that was going. Mr. Groux answered that we are meeting
190 monthly, or more frequently, to discuss how we can foster a plan for BRS to be called first by utilizing
191 scheduling with the understanding that we may not always be able to come. Mr. Murphy added that
192 the higher officials of the hospital want to work with us, however, this doesn't always translate to the
193 operations level. Mr. Peat stated we can only have so many ambulances and staff, and can't send our
194 last ambulance to the hospital for a non-emergency transport that can wait a bit, and leave the town
195 without 911 coverage.

196 Mr. Carroll: Asked why the per capita amount for Shaftsbury is so much less than Bennington or
197 Woodford, and Mr. Peat answered that is because we don't serve all of Shaftsbury. Arlington serves
198 north of the Chocolate Barn and we serve south of the Chocolate Barn.

199 Mr. Carroll: If we got all of the transports from the hospital, would that eliminate your deficit, and Mr.
200 Groux responded that we can't answer that now because the hospital owns the data of how many
201 transports they have. Only if we knew that, and what it would cost us to be able to answer all of those
202 transports, could we answer that question. "My anecdotal answer is no." Mr. Peat added that "we
203 would have to be losing 30-40 transfers a week and that's not happening".

204 Ms. Conner: Noted that Europe, for example, has a single payer system and are EMS services covered
205 within that, and Mr. Groux answered yes.

206 Mr. Campbell: Verified that the anticipated cash flow deficit is (\$373,023), and Mr. Murphy concurred.

207 Mr. Campbell: Thanked the Bennington Rescue Squad for the work that they do.

208

209 D. WRAP UP

210 Mr. Campbell summarized the funding requests from the entities that presented today as
211 follows:

- 212 ❖ Bennington Free Library - \$10,000 increase as requested.
- 213 ❖ John J. McCullough Library - \$8,000 increase as requested contingent upon the accuracy of the
214 \$5,500 Investment Interest revenue line item.
- 215 ❖ Bennington Rescue Squad - 10% increase to \$206,250 instead of the \$220,000 requested.

216 Mr. Hurd shared a memorandum from Larry McLeod and Mark Sawyer on the Community Built Park
217 at Willow Park with the Board that states that the life expectancy of these structures is 20 years and we
218 are at 21. In 2015, we brought in the contractor to review the current status of the playground and a
219 report was developed for staff and Select Board review. While the Company indicated that the
220 playground was in medium condition at that time, they also identified maintenance, safety and non-
221 compliance concerns in the report. The Park is not in terrible condition, however, it is taking more and
222 more of our time to keep it safe and maintained.

223 Four options were presented on how to proceed with the Park:

- 224 1. RETROFIT EXISTING - \$125,000-\$140,000 (Use recommendations from 2015 report).
- 225 2. RETROFIT EXISTING - \$280,000-\$300,000 (Contractor to do all work from 2015 report).
- 226 3. REMOVE AND REPLACE - \$240,000-\$260,000/Community Labor or \$480,000-\$500,000/Contractor
227 Labor (Similar size and scope of existing structure using wood composite/plastic/metal materials
228 throughout).
- 229 4. REMOVE AND REPLACE - \$95,000-\$130,000 Basic (Construct a new playground using
230 plastic/composite/metal pole type structures that are being constructed around Town now).

231 Discussion ensued as how to go forward with the following comments:

- 232 ▪ Safety is of the utmost importance.
- 233 ▪ There is money already in the budget for maintenance of it. Mr. Hurd will provide that amount
234 to the Board.

- 235 ▪ The recommendation is not to add any dollars to the budget for it this year but to look at a long
236 term solution during this year.
237 ▪ Consideration can be given to the options tax (if it passes) and looking into grant opportunities
238 for funding.

239 *It was the consensus of the Board that if the Community Built Park at Willow Park is unsafe, it should*
240 *be taken down.*

241 Mr. Hurd reported the following on the budget:

- 242 ✚ Inclusion of the \$50,000 line item for Marketing would change the increase from 3.1% to 3.6%.
243 ✚ Ms. Barsotti made reductions to the Community Development budget in consideration of the
244 dollars that were being budgeted for Marketing.
245 ✚ The recommendation is to increase the \$500 for the Sophomore Summit to \$2,000, and Mr. Hurd
246 will develop a policy and application form for non-profits to use through Community
247 Development when requesting small amounts of money.
248 ✚ The recommendation is to increase the Select Board CAT-TV amount by \$2,800 and to increase
249 the Development Review Board CAT-TV amount by \$1,400.

250 *Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded to approve the FY21 Budget presented to the*
251 *Board at last week's meeting with the revisions to the Marketing line, the revisions to the Community*
252 *Development line, and the revisions to the CAT-TV line, and to approve this morning's presentations as*
253 *requested for the Bennington Free Library, as requested for the John G. McCullough Free Library*
254 *contingent upon receiving the documentation regarding interest income from their endowment, and*
255 *the Bennington Rescue Squad for \$206,250. The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

256 Mr. Hurd stated that any salary increases for the Town Manager, Town Clerk, and Treasurer have
257 not yet been included in the budget.

258 It was determined that an Executive Session on Personnel was necessary.

259 *At 10:48am, Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded that the meeting was*
260 *adjourned finding that an Executive Session be held on Personnel as premature public knowledge*
261 *would place a person involved in the subject matter at a substantial disadvantage. There may be*
262 *actions taken on these items when going back into Open Session. The motion carried with Bill Scully*
263 *absent.*

264

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266

267 Respectfully submitted,

268 Nancy H. Lively

269 Secretary