

1 BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD

2 BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY

3 130 RIVER STREET

4 BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201

5 FEBRUARY 10, 2020

6 MINUTES

7 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Donald Campbell-Chair; Jeannie Jenkins-Vice Chair; Jeanne Conner
8 (at 6:12pm); Jim Carroll (at 6:10pm); Bruce Lee-Clark; and Chad Gordon.

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

10 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Daniel Monks-Assistant Town Manager and Planning
11 Director; Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director; Kevin Hoyt; Colleen Harrington; John
12 Shannahan; Matt Willey; Matt Harrington; Nancy White; Police Officer; 4 citizens; CAT-TV; and Nancy H.
13 Lively-Secretary.

14 At 6:00pm, Chair Donald Campbell called the meeting to order.

15 **1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

16 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

17 **2. CONSENT AGENDA**

18 **A. MINUTES - JANUARY 27, 2020**

19 **B. WARRANTS**

20 *Jeannie Jenkins moved and Bruce Lee-Clark seconded to approve the Consent Agenda amended*
21 *as follows:*

22 *Lines 14 and 198 - Change "Paranvaseau" to "Perrin"*

23 *Lines 14, 15, 205, and 223 - Change "Hasslett" to "Hassett"*

24 *Line 208 - Change "Hurst" to "Horst"*

25 *The motion carried with Jeanne Conner, Jim Carroll, and Bill Scully absent.*

26 **3. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

27 Colleen Harrington asked if Mr. Campbell, or any of his family members, had an investment in
28 the Putnam Block, and Mr. Campbell answered no.

29 Kevin Hoyt stated that he would like to see the results of the \$66,000 audit of the Bennington
30 Police Department and proposed an audit by an outside service of Town spending at potentially half of
31 what the BPD audit cost.

32 **4. LOCAL OPTION TAX**

33 Mr. Campbell referenced some comments/suggestions that were made by the following people:

34 Mr. Gordon's statement from the last meeting - "...after we have our additional public hearings in
35 February, we could decide the percentage of how the money is spent from whichever taxes pass.
36 Thereafter, the determination of how it could be used would be done at budget discussion time in
37 January."

38 Ms. Barsotti's Memorandum dated February 4th - "In talking with various community groups, one area of
39 consensus about the proposed local option tax is that many community members do not want to see the
40 potential revenue from a local option tax going into the general fund without being designated for
41 specific investments. Many also want to have an opportunity to discuss the use of these funds at public
42 meetings. One suggestion was for the Select Board to create a spending guidelines policy that
43 establishes two public meetings during the budget sessions to designate spending categories for local
44 option tax revenue in the coming fiscal year. Policy language could include: The Bennington Select
45 Board recognizes the importance of community dialogue and input during the annual budget sessions
46 and will establish two additional public meetings every year during budget season to designate spending
47 guidelines for any revenue created from a local option tax."

48 Mr. Hurd also submitted a schedule for the local option tax revenue for FY2021 should the option tax
49 questions pass. They are Property Tax Reduction-50%; Marketing-10%; Debt Reduction-20%; and
50 Community Built Park-20%. The Debt Reduction suggestion would be for debt that we have already
51 incurred - except for bond debt. And, the replacement of the Community Built Park has been identified
52 as a real necessity with the price of which being in the range of \$100,000 for a new, downsized plastic
53 composite playground to \$480,000 for a new similar sized playground using wood composite materials
54 with all labor done by a contractor.

55 *Board questions/comments:*

56 Mr. Campbell: Thinks it is a good idea that a revenue spending guideline policy be created for future
57 Select Board's, that the discussions on how to spend the revenue generated be done at budget time,
58 and that additional meetings be scheduled for the public at that time to be able to weigh in on how they
59 feel the revenue should be spent.

60 Ms. Jenkins: Agrees with this approach, as well.

61 Mr. Lee-Clark: Agrees that Ms. Barsotti's policy suggestion is a good start to a policy but would like to
62 give additional thought to what additional verbiage there should be in the revenue spending guideline
63 policy.

64 Ms. Conner: Clarified that the policy is about the public process, and Mr. Campbell answered yes with
65 the result of the public process being a list of percentages of use that could change every year based on
66 the Town's needs.

67 Mr. Gordon: Show the public an actual dollar amount translation of the "1¢=\$100,000" so they can more
68 easily see how a tax reduction would affect their taxes.

69 Ms. Conner: Would like the data from other towns - specifically on the impact on small businesses -
70 available at the next meeting. Ms. Barsotti has already done this and it will be available on the 17th.

71 Mr. Carroll: Reiterated constituent concerns on the percent of property tax reduction. Board members
72 stated that all percentages will be discussed at next week's meeting.

73 *Public comments:*

74 Matt Willey: Mr. Campbell explained to him the previous discussion concerning the spending guidelines
75 policy and percentages.

76 Kevin Hoyt: Is opposed to the local option tax because the Select Board ultimately gets to decide how to
77 use it when they overspend as it is. He stated that the Pocket Park was paid for by the Town, and Mr.
78 Carroll rebutted that the land was donated and paid for by private individuals. Also, most of the people
79 in Town are just trying to survive and we are overtaxed. Mr. Campbell noted that many of our service
80 increases, such as health insurance, is monitored but is ultimately out of our control.

81 Colleen Harrington: Stated that this is not the right time for a tax increase and there are polls that show
82 that a high majority of people don't want the tax. Her research has shown that in Pennsylvania, most of
83 their local option tax was paid by the residents. It is not a sustainable tax, and if the property taxes go
84 down - and there's no guarantee of that - they will go back up in a couple of years. A longer projection
85 of numbers, like out to 10 years, should be available. Mr. Campbell added that all of the tax exempt
86 items are listed on the website.

87 Letter from Mike Bethel (was not in attendance): Was read by Mr. Lee-Clark and stated that Mr. Bethel
88 would only support a local options tax if it went to buy Southern Vermont College as that would provide
89 the Town with many opportunities. Mr. Lee-Clark recommended to everyone to keep an open mind
90 during the discussions that have/will take place on the uses of the local option tax revenue.

91 *There will be a Special Select Board Meeting on February 17, 2020 dedicated to the Local Option*
92 *Tax and it will also be an agenda item at the Select Board Meeting on February 24, 2020.*

93 **5. TIF DISTRICT REPORT**

94 Mr. Monks reported that the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District must submit a report to the
95 Vermont Economic Progress Council (VEPC) every year that must include changes to the TIF District's
96 taxable values, the amount of the tax increment retained, and other relevant information.

97 Bennington has not bonded for any improvements yet, so no tax increment has been retained,
98 and, due mostly to the demolition of buildings associated with Phase 1 of the Putnam Project, the TIF
99 District taxable values have decreased by about \$108,000.

100 The report summarized private development and public improvements completed to date. Most
101 notable is the commencement of Phase 1 of the Putnam Project. The report also notes brownfields
102 projects that have been completed and includes a jobs inventory.

103 *Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded to acknowledge receipt of the FY2019 Annual*
104 *TIF District Report.*

105 Ms. Jenkins noted that we did have 100 temporary construction jobs and the training program
106 that Breadloaf put on allowed those construction workers to become more skilled. Mr. Monks added
107 that those jobs will be included in next year's report.

108 *The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

109 **6. WILLOW PARK PAVILION RENTAL FEES**

110 Mr. Hurd explained that the previous rental fee increase was a flat rate with the assumption that
111 the pavilion would be used for the whole day. Many times the pavilion is only used for a short time, so
112 staff have proposed rates per hour at the behest of the Board. These fees are for those that reserve the
113 pavilion for a period of time, and not someone that may stop by for a picnic if it is not in use. Staff will
114 monitor the use of the pavilion, however, the honor system is in play, as well.

115 Mr. Carroll feels this is "too complicated" and we should maintain a flat fee.

116 *Jim Carroll moved that the Willow Park Pavilion Rental Rates remain on a flat fee basis. The*
117 *motion died because there was no second.*

118 *Chad Gordon moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded to approve the Willow Park Pavilion Rental*
119 *Rates as proposed. The motion carried with Jim Carroll opposed and Bill Scully absent.*

120 **7. ARMORY/TOWN LAND EXCHANGE, 1ST READING**

121 Mr. Hurd stated that discussions began in 2012 to exchange the Armory (owned by the State) for
122 the 22.9 acres of open land the Town owns off Bowen Road to construct a Readiness Center for the
123 Vermont National Guard. The potential funding is on the horizon for the Vermont National Guard and
124 they have developed basic plans for the concept at the Bowen Road site.

125 This would be a straight exchange, the State must do an appraisal to determine equal value so
126 there will be no money spent. Once an official agreement is made and there is a closing, the Town will
127 own the Armory and the National Guard will be there as our tenants at no cost to them. Construction of
128 the Readiness Center will not begin for 2-3 years.

129 Mr. Carroll spoke to a tour that he and Mr. Campbell had taken of the Armory this summer and
130 stated that the facility "sparkles". There is a commercial kitchen, an elevator, cots, a basketball court, a
131 stage, and classrooms. It would offer many opportunities to the town, not the least of which could be
132 housing for the homeless. Mr. Hurd added that, if we chose to do so, there would need to be
133 discussions on housing the homeless while the Armory still occupies the building for the next 2-3 years.

134 Kudos to Mr. Hurd for his diligence all these years to make this transaction reach fruition.

135 **8. LIQUOR LICENSES**

136 The following 2020 Liquor License Renewal Applications were circulated for signatures:

137 2020 1st Class Renewals

138 1. Chili's Grill & Bar

139 2020 2nd Class Renewals

140 1. Apple Barn

141 2. Bennington Beverage Outlet

142 3. CVS Pharmacy #337

143 4. Elm Street Market

144 5. Hannaford Supermarket & Pharmacy

145 6. Price Chopper #171

146 7. Stewart's Shop #195

147 2020 3rd Class Renewals

148 1. Chili's Grill & Bar

149 **9. MANAGER'S REPORT**

150 Mr. Hurd reported the following:

151 ➤ EMPLOYEE CHANGES - Ron Bull, Chief Operator at the WWTF, retired as of the end of 2019 after
152 40 years with the Town. Jon D'Amour, Assistant Chief Operator has been promoted to Chief
153 Operator and Mike Lane has been promoted to Assistant Chief Operator. This has created an
154 opening in the Department which we intend to fill when the 20 day evaluation required by the
155 Union for the Assistant Chief's position have passed.

156 ➤ DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION GRANT - The Community Development Director and the
157 Bennington County Regional Commission Transportation Planner are preparing an application to
158 the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development for a Downtown
159 Transportation Fund Grant. If the grant funds are awarded, they will be used to improve the
160 Franklin Lane alley between the Drysdale Building (Jay's) and David Buckley's building (Harvest
161 Brewery). The improvements to Franklin Lane will tie into the improvements as part of Phase 1
162 of the Putnam Project, be more aesthetically appealing, and safer for pedestrians. If the
163 estimated cost is reasonable and it is determined that there are sufficient reserves in the parking
164 fund to meet the 50% required match, the grant application, along with a conceptual design for
165 the improvements, will be presented to the Select Board for review and approval at the February
166 24th Select Board meeting.

167 ➤ WWTF UPGRADE - We're closing in on substantial completion and we have turned on the
168 methane burners.

169 ➤ BENNINGTON COUNTY SOLID WASTE ALLIANCE - The Alliance, has won a \$71,000 grant to create
170 a permanent Household Hazardous Waste collection facility. We are looking at the former pump
171 station at Bennington's transfer station for use. The Alliance is also looking to provide an asphalt
172 shingles collection container at the transfer station. The facility must be used one day/month
173 from April through October which will eliminate the two days/year that we currently have and
174 would prove to be cost effective. The Alliance is made up of 13 towns so this would be open to
175 all of Bennington County and The Alliance would pay for all expenses.

176 Composting is supposedly being mandated as of July 1, 2020, and the Alliance is considering
177 putting a container at the transfer station. The Alliance would also pay for all expenses incurred,
178 however, we are not sure of what the progress is for this at this time. Enforcement would be
179 difficult. It will be an agenda item in the spring.

180 ➤ ISEP - The ISEP have asked for more time to get their assessment of the Police Department to us.

181 ➤ NEW WATER FACILITY - We are getting an update to just build on the permitted part of Main
182 Street as other negotiations have slowed. The Board would make the decision to pay for this
183 from reserves, and we will continue to pursue the other negotiations as the weather improves.

184 **10. UPCOMING AGENDA**

185 The following are planned for the indicated meeting dates:

- 186 ❖ February 17th - Local Option Tax Discussion.
- 187 ❖ February 24th - Local Option Tax Discussion, Lead Service Line Bond Question, Transportation
- 188 Grant, Shires Community Development Block Grant-300 Pleasant Street, and YMCA Presentation.
- 189 ❖ March 2nd - Town Meeting.
- 190 ❖ March 9th - Work Force Development and the Hospital.
- 191 ❖ March 23rd - Regular Meeting.
- 192 ❖ April 13th - Reorganization.

193 **11. OTHER BUSINESS**

194 Mr. Campbell: Was impressed with the Energy Committee Minutes and the good ideas that they have,
195 as well as, thanking Ron Bull for his 40 years of service.

196 Mr. Lee-Clark: Announced that Vermont Public Radio is having the noontime show, 7:00pm show, or
197 podcast on February 11th on the Local Option Tax.

198 Mr. Carroll: Kudos to the following employees for their service to the Town: Ron Bull-40 years; Jarod
199 Austin-1 year; Benjamin Kasama-2 years; Michael Sharshen-5 years; Michael Pierce-5 years; Kirk
200 Chipwood-6 years; Roscoe Harrington-11 years; Joshua Stemp-15 years; Anthony Sylvester-17 years;
201 Edward Coyne-25 years; and Stuart Hurd-47 years.

202 Mr. Gordon: Thanked Ms. Barsotti for her Community Development Report that is in the Board packets.

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204

205 ***At 7:32pm, Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded the adjournment of the meeting.***
206 ***The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.***

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210 Respectfully submitted,

211 Nancy H. Lively

212 Secretary