

BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD
MEETING HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201

APRIL 13, 2020

MINUTES

SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT BY VIDEOCONFERENCE: Donald Campbell-Chair; Jeannie Jenkins-Vice Chair; Jeanne Conner; Jim Carroll; Bruce Lee-Clark; and Sarah Perrin.

SELECT BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: Bill Scully.

ALSO PRESENT BY VIDEOCONFERENCE: Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Daniel Monks-Assistant Town Manager and Planning Director and Director of the COVID-19 Response; Melissa Currier-Finance Director; Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director; Mike Cutler-CAT-TV; and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

At 6:03pm, Chair Donald Campbell called the meeting to order and explained that, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic State of Emergency declared by Governor Scott, and pursuant to Addendum 6 to Executive Order 01-20, Act 92, this public body is authorized to meet electronically. There is no physical location to attend this meeting, however, the public may view it on CAT-TV and call in at 1-646-558-8656 when prompted to do so. The call in information will be periodically posted on the screen and the process for calling in was explained. If technology fails us, the meeting will be continued at a time and place to be determined and all votes that are not unanimous will be done with a roll call vote in accordance with the law.

On behalf of the Board, Mr. Campbell shared a moment of recognition for Tom Jacobs, former Chair of the Bennington Select Board, who recently passed away, and sent condolences and love to Lee Jacobs and her family.

Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jeanne Conner seconded to make the following changes to the Agenda:

Add "8. Other Business"

Change "8. Executive Session-A. Contract" to "9. Executive Session-A. Contract"

The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.

1. REORGANIZATION

Jim Carroll moved and Bruce Lee-Clark seconded the nomination of Donald Campbell for Chair of the Bennington Select Board.

There were no other nominations.

33 *The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

34 *Jeanne Conner moved and Jim Carroll seconded the nomination of Jeannie Jenkins for Vice-*
35 *Chair of the Bennington Select Board.*

36 There were no other nominations.

37 *The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

38 The Board welcomed Sarah Perrin to the Board.

39 **2. CONSENT AGENDA**

40 **A. MINUTES - MARCH 23, 2020**

41 **B. WARRANTS**

42 **C. LIQUOR LICENSES**

43 *Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jeanne Conner seconded to approve the Consent Agenda as*
44 *submitted.*

45 Ms. Conner asked if there should be an adjustment to the \$10,000 on the warrants for flowers
46 in the Downtown, and Mr. Hurd answered that this is a down payment to Sweet Williams for the
47 Downtown plantings that are usually done after Memorial Day. We feel that it is especially important
48 that the Downtown look good when we come out of the pandemic.

49 *The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

50 **3. COVID-19 UPDATE**

51 Mr. Monks, our COVID-19 Special Director, reported the following:

- 52 • We are continuing to “stay the course” in accordance with the Governor extending the date
53 until May 15th.
- 54 • All town facilities, including the Senior Center and the Recreation Center, are closed to the
55 public.
- 56 • All parks and fields are closed, however, we encourage residents to utilize them for walking
57 while maintaining a safe distance.
- 58 • The Town Office reception desk is manned from 8:00am-5:00pm so dialing 442-1037 during
59 those times will get you a person. We are also available by phone, e-mail or mail.
- 60 • Most of our meetings are being done by Zoom or conference call.
- 61 • We continue to update our Emergency Services Plan as we must maintain our public safety
62 measures, purifying the water, and providing wastewater services no matter how serious this
63 pandemic gets.

64 Mr. Hurd added:

- 65 o We are developing a protocol where all employees wear cloth masks while on duty or
66 where they are unable to maintain the 6' safe distance.
67 o We also encourage all merchants in the community to outfit their employees with
68 masks and gloves when waiting on the public and handling their money.

69 *Board questions/comments:*

70 Ms. Conner: Are building permits on hold? Mr. Monks stated that building permits are being issued for
71 when the contractors can go back to work. Permits are for one year and are routinely extended upon
72 request.

73 Mr. Carroll: Explained that people are able to file for unemployment, but due to the 30-year old system
74 at the State, payments have not been released yet. A year ago, the State had 5,000 unemployment
75 claims - there have been over 60,000 this past week. The checks will be coming, just not as fast as they
76 should.

77 Mr. Carroll: Also noted that the State will pay for lodging for essential workers to minimize the risk of
78 spreading COVID-19 to their families. The workers should check with the Department of Health or the
79 Agency of Human Services to find out the details.

80 Mr. Lee-Clark: Stated that an employee of the Veteran's Home tested positive for COVID-19 March
81 15th. Since then, as of today, all staff and residents have been tested with no positive results.

82 **4. WAIVERS**

83 **A. WATER/SEWER INTEREST**

84 **B. DOG LICENSE LATE FEES**

85 Mr. Hurd stated that the Town is proposing two small waivers to help our residents with the
86 financial hardships that many are facing. The first would be to waive the interest on water/sewer
87 delinquencies going back to January 2020 for as long as is necessary. The cost is estimated at \$5,000-
88 \$6,000 per quarter. And the second, would be to waive the late fees on dog licenses since the Town
89 Office is closed to the public.

90 At this point, we are not requesting a waiver on interest or penalty for real estate taxes. Taxes
91 are not due until November 2020 and we want to see how the pandemic progresses to know whether
92 it will wind down sooner or later.

93 If we end with a deficit in a particular fund, we are required to add that deficit to the next fiscal
94 year's budget so the deficit dollars are collected in the year following the deficit. Federal and State
95 governments can borrow money, whereas, by statute, local governments cannot borrow money to
96 offset operating costs.

97 *Board questions/comments:*

98 Ms. Conner: Is there any impact on staffing? Mr. Hurd answered that staff are working split shifts to
99 keep the water/sewer functions maintained and all spring cleanup and road work is being done.
100 Buildings and Grounds staff are keeping the buildings sanitized and will be starting work on our parks
101 and ball fields. All of our major paving and sidewalk projects are done except for a culvert project that
102 will be done when the safe distance requirement has been lifted.

103 Mr. Carroll: Will there be a reduction in school tax because the schools are closed? Mr. Hurd
104 responded that he hasn't spoken to Mr. Culkeen yet, however, he believes that the teachers are still
105 being paid and working remotely.

106 ***Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded to waive water/sewer interest on the***
107 ***delinquencies dating back to January 1, 2020 and continues until such time as the Board ends the***
108 ***waiver. The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.***

109 ***Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jeanne Conner seconded to waive late fees for dog licenses for***
110 ***this year only. The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.***

111 5. MANAGER'S REPORT

112 Mr. Hurd stated that People's Bank is requesting that the Business Card Resolution be adopted
113 that names the officers of the municipality authorized to issue credit cards to Town staff setting an
114 increased limit of all cards to \$35,000.

115 ***Jeanne Conner moved and Jeannie Jenkins seconded to waive the reading of the Business***
116 ***Card Resolution as presented and to authorize the Chair to sign on behalf of the Board. The motion***
117 ***carried with Bill Scully absent.***

118 Mr. Hurd noted that Casella has not raised their rates in 3 years and is proposing a 6% increase
119 in rates effective May 1, 2020. We request that this be placed on the April 27th agenda to give the
120 Board a second meeting and provide for posting to our residents. Also, recycling is free to the public,
121 but the Town is paying a fee of ~\$3,000/month for it. "We used to share in the profits that Casella
122 made on recycling, now it is costing us a lot of money."

123 *Board questions/comments:*

124 Mr. Campbell: Casella does a great service, kudos to the friendliness of Wanda at the weigh station,
125 and it never seemed that expensive to go to the dump.

126 Ms. Conner: Agrees with Mr. Campbell on all counts, however, since we just waived interest and late
127 fees to help the residents, it seems that it would be appropriate to delay this increase a month or two.

128 Ms. Jenkins: Supports delaying the increase a month or two, as well, and hopes that there aren't plans
129 to eliminate the free recycling to the individuals. Mr. Hurd responded that we will continue to look for
130 a market for it and continue to provide the benefit to our residents. "It is the right thing to do."

131 *Mr. Hurd will speak with Casella, express the Town's appreciation for the service they provide*
132 *and request that they delay the implementation of their increase until after the pandemic is over.*

- 133 ✓ PFOA Construction: Continues as it is considered essential work.
- 134 ✓ Household Hazardous Waste Collection Event: Postponed from May 9th at the MAU Middle
135 School from 9:00am to 1:00pm until August at the earliest. We are required by law to have two
136 a year. The second one will be in Sunderland or Dorset in the fall.
- 137 ✓ Employee Changes: Paul Dansereau started with the Town on April 6th and is working with Larry
138 McLeod "to get his feet on the ground". He has replaced Kevin Goodhue.
- 139 ✓ WWTF Upgrade: Substantial completion has not yet been formalized and the final punch list
140 items are on hold awaiting warmer weather. The overall savings on the project is \$300,000-
141 \$400,000.
- 142 ✓ Bennington County Solid Waste Alliance: Has accepted the smaller grant for collecting asphalt
143 shingles. We are working with Casella to determine costs, placement and markets. The Town
144 will be the financial entity for the grant funds, the Transfer Station will be the collection site,
145 and a separate container will be installed.

146 In addition:

- 147 ✓ All major projects, such as the Putnam Block and UCS Rec Center Expansion, are on hold and
148 unlikely to start back up until the Governor says it is safe to do so.
- 149 ✓ We have found a contractor who can identify the problems with the Splash Pad and have the
150 money to go forward, however, this is not an essential job.

151 **8. OTHER BUSINESS**

152 Mr. Carroll: Spoke to his personal remembrances of Tom Jacobs and Tom's smiling face.

153 Ms. Conner: Thanked Nancy Lively for her work on the Minutes.

154 Ms. Conner: Would like an update on the IACP report when possible.

155 Ms. Conner and Ms. Jenkins: Will draft a Letter of Appreciation to SVHC for their leadership during the
156 pandemic for all Board members to sign at the next meeting.

157 Ms. Jenkins: Expressed her gratitude to the Emergency Housing Group for their efforts in housing 105
158 households in motels throughout the county, as well as, their forward thinking on what the next phase
159 will be when we pull out of the pandemic. Also, kudos to Hunger Vermont and the local Hunger
160 Council for ensuring that everyone will have access to food during this emergency situation.

161 Mr. Lee-Clark: Thanked all of the groups that are making masks, and Maureen O'Neil and her staff for
162 the lunches provided to all kids - 18 years old and younger - 7 days a week.

163 Mr. Lee-Clark: Doesn't see why pre-ordering, pre-paying, and picking up food from the Farmers Market
164 is any different than the same process at other establishments. Mr. Campbell added that if we want to
165 change this, and allow our Farmer's Market - who have done an exemplary job of establishing a system

166 to sell their products during the pandemic - we need to call the Governor's office at 802-828-3333. Ms.
167 Jenkins added that the Better Bennington Corporation has sent a letter, there are petitions going
168 around, and how important it is for all of the Board members to write and call so the Governor
169 understands how proactive the Bennington Farmers Market has been.

170 Mr. Hurd: Noted the two acts of togetherness that are happening - Light Up Vermont where people are
171 putting lights in their windows or putting their Christmas lights back up, and Move to Your Front Porch
172 or Window at 7:00pm and make noise.

173 Mr. Campbell: Announced that he, Ms. Jenkins, and staff will be doing another Community Update on
174 April 20th at 1:00pm.

175 **6. UPCOMING AGENDA**

176 April 27th - SVMC Building Sale

177 There will not be any further agenda scheduling so as not to schedule any controversial issues when
178 public comment is difficult to get.

179 **7. PUBLIC COMMENT**

180 None.

181 **9. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

182 **A. CONTRACT**

183 *At 7:35pm, Jim Carroll moved and Bruce Lee-Clark seconded that the meeting was adjourned*
184 *finding that an Executive Session be held on Contract as premature public knowledge would place a*
185 *person involved in the subject matter at a substantial disadvantage. No decisions will be made this*
186 *evening. The motion carried with Bill Scully absent.*

187 Respectfully submitted,

188 Nancy H. Lively

189 Secretary