

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING**

2 **MEETING HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM**

3 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

4 **JANUARY 2, 2021**

5 **MINUTES**

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

8 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** None.

9 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan Monks-Zoning Administrator and Assistant
10 Town Manager; Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director (at 9:05am); Melissa
11 Currier-Finance Director; R.J. Joly-Public Works Director; Jessica Rumlow and Kayla Becker-
12 YMCA (9:20am); Lynne Fonteneau-McCann-Bennington Free Library; Jennie Rozycki and Mary
13 Rogers-John McCullough Library; Jim Vires-CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

14 At 8:05am, Donald Campbell called the meeting to order.

15 This is a work session so there is no Public Comments agenda item. However, if the
16 public wishes to comment on any of the budget items/discussion, please call 1-646-558-8656
17 and enter the Meeting ID of 851 0090 3428 when prompted to do so followed by #.

18 **1. F.Y. 22 BUDGET WORK SESSION**

19 Mr. Hurd stated that the overall budget is a "good budget" up 2.76% focusing on each
20 Fund budget, the General Fund, and including level funded agencies making the tax rate up
21 3.8%. We have a newly established reserve for parks at \$50,000 because we know we need to
22 replace the Community Built Park at \$260,000. Also, there is a new line item for worker safety
23 issues which has been separated out so the public can see what we spend on safety. The
24 Highway Fund is up 2.50% and the Fire Fund is up 3.87%.

25 Mr. Campbell had asked, given that this has been a difficult year, how we could get to a
26 target dollar amount that would mirror the estimated cost of living 1.4% increase, and Mr. Hurd
27 recommended not focusing on the revenues with potential elimination or reduction of reserves
28 while remembering that any increase in the Grand List will also decrease the tax rate. "We can
29 hit your target, or come very close, but we need to know what that target is and let us make
30 the cuts and make the recommendations back at you." There will be more discussion on this
31 later in the meeting.

32 **A. FIRE BUDGET**

33 *Mr. Hurd did the following presentation:*

- 34 • The Fire Budget is up 3.87% but is only an increase of \$14,380.
- 35 • *Uniform Equipment* - Replacing 4 sets of gear - \$16,600.
- 36 • *Small Tools/Equipment (Fire Fighting)* - Replacing 8 pagers at a cost of \$525 each -
- 37 \$4,200.
- 38 • *Communications* - Purchase 6 Motorola radios as replacements - \$12,830.
- 39 • *Small Tools/Equipment (Building)* - Replace damaged tables and chairs (\$2,260) and
- 40 purchase cameras for security (\$5,505) - \$8,800.
- 41 • *Building Improvements* - Seal the rear parking lot that is actually a public parking lot by
- 42 using Parking Funds - \$34,000. This will not impact the tax rate.
- 43 • *Machinery and Equipment* - Install heat pumps on the 2nd floor in 3 offices and the
- 44 conference room for energy efficiency in both heating and cooling - \$25,000.
- 45 • *Lease Payments* - New SCBA system (25 air pack units) at \$24,500 and the 2014 new to
- 46 us rescue pumper truck at \$49,910 - \$74,410.
- 47 • *Transfer to Reserve Fund* - Reduced amount from \$60,000 last year as we have
- 48 purchased the new console - \$40,000.
- 49 • *Transfer to Reserve Fund* - First interest payment on the ladder truck - \$18,970. First
- 50 principal payment will impact FY23.

51 *Board questions/comments:*

52 Mr. Campbell: This budget is so lean these reserves would be the last ones to touch and kudos
53 to the use of the energy efficient heat pumps.

54 Ms. Conner: How is recruitment going? Mr. Hurd answered that he hasn't seen any activity on
55 the line item that pays for the required physicals for the new recruits recently.

56 Mr. Lee-Clark: It was mentioned during the Board Tour that they were in need of a new dryer,
57 are they still? Mr. Hurd responded that he thought they had gotten a new dryer this year but
58 would need to check further to confirm.

59 Ms. Jenkins: Does the new console still have the capability to be used with the Bennington
60 Police Department and the Rescue Squad? Mr. Hurd said yes.

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

62

63 **B. HIGHWAY BUDGET**

64 *Mr. Hurd and R.J. Joly did the following presentation:*

- 65 • The Highway Budget increased \$103,000 on a \$4.3M budget, or 2.50%.
- 66 • We don't receive a large amount of money in grants but we apply for as much as we
- 67 can.
- 68 • *Salaries & Wages* - Increased on the recently agreed contract extension - \$956,200.

- 69 • *Insurance and Bond and Insurance-Workers Comp* - Increased slightly based on the
70 building value even though the rates went down and Workers Comp decreased again for
71 a net increase of \$9,100 - \$137,010.
- 72 • *Construction & Maintenance-Winter Maintenance Supplies* - Salt costs increased \$1.00
73 per ton and we are proposing to purchase 3,400 tons, the same as last year. The
74 remaining funds are for deicer and winter sand noting that the covered sand storage has
75 reduced the amount used.
- 76 • *Projects-Other Purchased Services* - Nearly level funded again this year to offset the new
77 bond payments with projects to include Dewey Street (Weeks to Harwood), Maple
78 Street, Observatory Street, Washington Avenue, Chapel Road after PFOA work
79 completed, School Street, a portion of Park Street and Hillside Street - \$343,180.
- 80 • *Buildings-Principal and Interest* - Principal-\$160,000 and interest-\$83,260 - \$243,260.
- 81 • *Construction & Maintenance-Sidewalks - Contracted Services* - Dewey Street, Maple
82 Street, and Washington Avenue (Elm to Observatory) - \$177,180.
- 83 • *Construction & Maintenance-Bridges - Transfer to Reserve* - Increased \$100,000 in
84 anticipation of a number of upcoming bridge projects to be started in 5 years. We have
85 \$1M of projects to do. The bridges that need replacement are Depot Street,
86 Peppermills, and Mt. Anthony Road - \$200,000.
- 87 • *Other Purchased Services* - A contingency for necessary work and installing a motor
88 device to open and close the dam sluiceway at Papermill Bridge, a flood relief project -
89 \$30,000.
- 90 • *Vehicles & Equipment-Lease Payments* - Annual payments for a wheel loader, the
91 grader, and a loader backhoe.
- 92 • *Equipment* - 20% local match to purchase a leaf blower - \$1,540.
- 93 • *Principal and Interest Payments* - Via the State's Highway Equipment Fund, acquiring a
94 new single axle dump truck with wing plow replacing a 2014 single axle, an F-350 with
95 plow, a skid steer loader, a tractor replacing our 14 year old model, and a sidewalk
96 paver. This will add \$57,670 to existing budget principal and interest - \$278,170
97 principal and \$31,510 interest.

98 *Board questions/comments:*

99 Mr. Campbell: We cannot cut anywhere that would affect health and safety.

100 Mr. Campbell: Line 02-5120-680 is consistently budgeted at \$15,000 but has been used
101 sparingly in FY19 - \$128 and FY20 - \$1,012. Do we need to continue to budget \$15,000 here?
102 Mr. Hurd answered that this is to maintain the brick sidewalks and we have had trouble getting
103 someone to do this in the past. However, we have someone this year and work will begin on
104 that in the spring.

105 Ms. Conner: How were the reductions in electricity and heat possible? Mr. Joly answered being
106 sure that the lights are turned off and letting all of the heaters run instead of just the air
107 handlers.

108 Ms. Jenkins: How have you cut back on winter maintenance? Mr. Joly responded by being able
109 to cut back on sand because it is now stored under cover.

110 Ms. Jenkins: When we do sidewalks we often do not do both sides of the street. For example,
111 Pleasant Street and Washington Avenue. Will we come back to do the other sides that need
112 the work? Mr. Hurd answered that we haven't done Washington Avenue because we don't
113 know how the Putnam Block work will affect that, and Mr. Joly added that we will be doing the
114 sidewalks on School Street and Pleasant Street, as well as, the retaining wall on Imperial
115 Avenue in the spring as these were part of our current budget. Also, we hold off on doing
116 sidewalks where there is potential lead line work to be done. Overall, redoing sidewalks is
117 expensive and there is only so much time to do 2,000-3,000 linear feet per year. We maintain
118 40 miles of sidewalks.

119 Ms. Perrin: Appreciates that the budget is kept to "bare bones".

120 Ms. Conner: Do you use how busy a sidewalk is when determining when to do them? Mr. Joly
121 answered yes along with the other considerations mentioned. We have our sidewalk schedule
122 for the next 2 years.

123 Mr. Carroll: Are there plans to fix the sidewalk on Main Street from Len Nichols to Stewarts, and
124 have we had lawsuits where people have fallen on the sidewalk? Mr. Hurd answered we have
125 had a few trips/fallen where we have replaced glasses, etc. because we didn't feel that we
126 responded fast enough, but it is rare. Mr. Joly added that we have a machine that will grind
127 down the sidewalks when there is a trip hazard.

128 Mr. Lee-Clark: What year are we talking about for the bridge repairs? Mr. Joly responded that
129 we do a bridge project every year. Depot Street would be slated to be done first within the
130 next 5 years because it has more traffic than Mt. Anthony Road. Mr. Hurd added that we have
131 \$104,000 in the bridge reserve for the Depot Street bridge, whereas, the Peppermill project is
132 Federal and State scheduled to be done in 2023.

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

134 C. RECREATION

135 *Mr. Hurd did the following presentation:*

- 136 • The YMCA experienced shortfall in their first year that they hope to make up with
137 additional programs going forward.
- 138 • Utilizing the Old Benn Hi (School) offers opportunities that we haven't had in the past
139 due to the lack of gymnasium space, as well as, space in general.

- 140 • We hope to “nail down” the agreement on the Old Benn Hi soon.
- 141 • The YMCA budget reflects the shortfall and the rental of the School’s space to support
- 142 their programs.
- 143 • Last year’s contract with the Y was \$146,900. A mistake in revenue calculation last year
- 144 created a shortfall remedied with \$40,000 and \$36,000 for the rent for the Old Benn Hi
- 145 gym.
- 146 • If their programs are successful in generating revenue, this will offset the expenditures
- 147 that we have included in the budget.
- 148 • We have also proposed a new reserve for Parks because the Community Built Park at
- 149 Willow Park must be removed and replaced.
- 150 • The alternative to a reserve would be to put the Penny for Parks on the ballot to
- 151 approve a penny each year earmarked for our parks that would generate, at the current
- 152 Grand List, \$100,000/year which is twice of the proposed reserve amount of \$50,000.
- 153 • The dollar amount to replace the Community Built Park in its entirety is currently
- 154 \$260,000.

155 *Board questions/comments:*

156 Mr. Campbell: If we knew we had the Penny for Parks dollars coming in each year, could we
157 borrow to build the park this year? Mr. Hurd answered that it may be possible to secure a tax
158 anticipation loan but he would have to research this further.

159 Mr. Campbell: Sees the increase for the Y as a necessary expense considering the alternative
160 would be to build a new building.

161 Ms. Perrin: What is the Rec Center budget increase? Mr. Hurd responded \$166,000.

162 Ms. Conner: We could also do fundraising for the Park which is why it is there to begin with. “A
163 square of dirt for 5 years is absolutely unacceptable.”

164 Mr. Carroll: Are maintenance and utilities factored into the lease? Ms. Barsotti answered that
165 we don’t have a final lease yet, however, we have made it clear that maintenance and utilities
166 are the owners’ responsibility. Also, the square footage of the area that we would be renting is
167 substantially larger than the Phase 2 project at the Rec Center at a substantially lower cost.

168 Ms. Jenkins: Agrees with Ms. Conner that we don’t want it to be a bare field, but we also don’t
169 want to replace it with what is there now. There have been significant changes to playgrounds
170 over the past 20 years so we should get community input and not assume that we’ll know what
171 it is going to look like.

172 Ms. Jenkins: Asked for more detail on the Senior Citizens budget, and Mr. Hurd answered as
173 follows:

- 174 ➤ The Other Purchased Services line item is to pay for instructors that are brought into the
- 175 building. These classes will be at the School and will be completely covered with a Y

- 176 membership and some may have an additional fee with a Rec Center membership.
177 There are programs to help Seniors make these payments.
- 178 ➤ The Repair and Maintenance line item is primarily for replacing 25-30 year old heaters
179 that will probably lower our electric costs, as well.
 - 180 ➤ We are paying the Heating Fuel and Electric line item for the whole building. We were
181 receiving rent from Meals on Wheels at \$685/month.
 - 182 ➤ Costs to paint the east side of the building and roof expenses have been cut as it is likely
183 that the Senior Center will eventually move to the School. This would be the “best of
184 every world” because the Seniors would have more room and more comforts as would
185 the Meals on Wheels program. This would also open up the possibility of selling the
186 building. The FY22 Senior Citizens budget, however, is based on the senior programs
187 taking place in the existing Senior Center.
 - 188 ➤ Ms. Barsotti added that senior programming is discussed monthly to coordinate with
189 what the Y is offering at the Senior Center and at the Rec Center to avoid duplication.

190 Mr. Carroll: Could we have a proposal for the Park to use for fundraising? Mr. Hurd answered
191 yes, but we need to have what the final plan will be before we solicit funding from individuals.
192 The last thing you want to do is have to go back to people and ask for more money. Ms.
193 Barsotti will spearhead the planning process with community input and funding sources for the
194 Park.

195 Ms. Perrin: Are there repercussions if we don't take the Park down this year? Mr. Hurd noted
196 that staff have said that it is past its useful life and strongly recommend that it come down. “It
197 has to come down in 2021.” We still have a playground for small children - it's the larger
198 structure that is the issue.

199 Ms. Perrin: Do you legally have to take it down? Mr. Hurd stated that it isn't a question of
200 legality, it's a question of liability.

201 Ms. Conner: Clarified that the Park has functioned beyond its useful life due to the maintenance
202 care that it has had throughout the years, and to be cognizant of the fact that Willow Park
203 serves several other communities in addition to Bennington.

204

205 **D. BENNINGTON FREE LIBRARY**

206 *Lynne Fontenau McCann did the following presentation:*

- 207 • Staff became very creative when forced to do so because of COVID.
- 208 • We offered downloadable videos, online story hours and programing, and updating
209 Facebook daily with new resources for the community.
- 210 • “Despite everything, we've had a very good year.”
- 211 • Dr. Trey Dobson from SVHC advised the staff on how to be safe.

212 • PDF files will be sent to the Board

213 *Board questions/comments:*

214 Mr. Lee-Clark: The income portion of the budget wasn't in the packet. \$.5M is a lot of tax
215 payers money and we need to see the entire budget. Ms. Fontenau had provided the income
216 portion, however, that was inadvertently not included in the packets. She read the income
217 sources below:

- 218 ➤ Gifts - \$7,350
- 219 ➤ Grants - \$3,300
- 220 ➤ Town of Bennington - \$498,000
- 221 ➤ Town of Shaftsbury - \$18,000
- 222 ➤ Town of Woodford - \$3,700
- 223 ➤ Fundraising - \$55,000
- 224 ➤ Earned Revenue - \$13,000
- 225 ➤ Endowment Income - \$32,000
- 226 ➤ Interest Income - \$3,000
- 227 ➤ PPP Funds - \$8,408
- 228 ➤ TOTAL = \$641,758

229 Ms. Perrin: Can you work with the North Bennington Library to incorporate some of their online
230 materials in Bennington? Ms. Fonteneau responded to have Ms. Perrin e-mail her to explain
231 what she is asking for.

232 Mr. Campbell: Enjoys the audio books that are available through the library.

233

234 **E. JOHN MCCULLOUGH LIBRARY**

235 *Jenny Rozycki did the following presentation:*

- 236 • Her mantra for this difficult year has been "no pressure, no diamonds".
- 237 • Book pickup is "huge" with 60-70 people picking up multiple books all at once. This will
238 continue on throughout the year.
- 239 • We have an online book request form in addition to the catalogue and online library
240 account activation.
- 241 • 60% of our new 248 patrons were Bennington residents.
- 242 • We were the first library in Vermont to have Linda.com through the Fund for North
243 Bennington. This is a job skills training program for tech jobs among others, and is
244 available in your Linkedon profile.
- 245 • We are bringing on Canopy, a video streaming service for independent and foreign films
246 and educational programing for children.
- 247 • We have a demonstration garden and are planning a food pantry when we reopen.

- 248 • We were awarded a \$10,000 educational facilities grant and will be redoing both of our
- 249 bathrooms so they will be ADA compliant. The remainder of the cost has been covered
- 250 with fundraising and donations.
- 251 • Additional maintenance will also be done such as replacing some doors. We will be 100
- 252 years old in August and some repairs are overdue.

253 *Board questions/comments:*

254 Mr. Lee-Clark: Why wasn't an application done to pursue the heat pumps? Ms. Rozycki
 255 answered the she was too late in applying for the grant and the bathrooms were part of their
 256 strategic plan. However, the new furnace that was installed in November is very efficient and
 257 the heat pumps are still a consideration for a later time.

258 Ms. Conner: Congratulations on what you have done over the past few years - "you've done an
 259 amazing job", and kudos on your monthly newsletter. "It is a bright spot in my e-mail every
 260 month - I just love it."

261 Ms. Perrin: Thought it was worth mentioning the possibility of the Library getting on a grants
 262 list that the Town could offer. Perhaps Ms. Barsotti would have some suggestions.

263

264 Discussion ensued as to the Board's responsibilities vis-à-vis COVID and tax rates:

- 265 ✓ Should we support a budget that has a tax rate higher (2.76%) than inflation (estimated
- 266 1.4%)?
- 267 ✓ Should we ask the Town Manager to come back with a "radical one year budget" while
- 268 we continue to provide the best service possible?
- 269 ✓ Many people in our Town are suffering.
- 270 ✓ This is a lean budget but is also a difficult year for individuals and businesses.
- 271 ✓ Our experience with property taxes has been "pretty decent" this time around but the
- 272 concern is it's going to get worse next year.
- 273 ✓ We should look to staff to lower the budget by decreasing the amount we put into
- 274 reserve.
- 275 ✓ Mr. Hurd will be a "miracle worker" if he can come up with just a 1.5% tax increase.
- 276 ✓ This is a "perilous time for tax payers" when there is a projected 9% increase in the
- 277 education budget.
- 278 ✓ "This is a time of crisis when we can't afford to be spendthrifts."
- 279 ✓ The Town has worked very hard with people that can't pay their taxes with payment
- 280 plans and the waiving of penalties.
- 281 ✓ To keep our tax payers here, we should consider level funding, or a bit higher, and
- 282 increase them next year.
- 283 ✓ As a business owner, we didn't work this year.
- 284 ✓ We have increases that we have no control over such as health insurance and contracts.

- 285 ✓ There is concern about lowering the marketing dollars because that was requested by
286 the businesses and it is a time to promote ourselves to remind people that we're here.
287 ✓ We need to maintain our website and look at potential savings in the senior budget to
288 be sure we are not duplicating services.
289 ✓ "This is the leanest budget we've ever seen."
290 ✓ "We would have to cut \$350,000 from the budget to get down to the rate of inflation"
291 and cut \$600,000 to level fund.
292 ✓ "We all need to sacrifice" and the community needs to understand that things may not
293 happen as quickly as they had hoped.
294 ✓ The Board should give Mr. Hurd the range they're looking for and the staff will find
295 where to make the cuts. "Give us the goal and we'll try to get there."
296 ✓ "2% is possible." We would look at reserves, highway, fire, and a higher Grand List
297 number. We had used the lowest number of the range given to us for the Grand List.
298 ✓ The only place salaries are related to longevity is in the police department.
299 ✓ We must maintain public safety.
300 ✓ "Things will have to be taken care of at one point or another in the future."
301 ✓ "We don't want to lose ground as to who we are as a community."
302 ✓ Mr. Monks: It's appropriate for the Board to ask the Town Manager for the impact of
303 the cuts, however, it is "irresponsible" to cut reserves.
304 ✓ Ms. Currier: "Echo's Dan's perspective but appreciates trying to find out what the
305 alternatives are."

306 *It was the consensus of the Board to have the Town Manager redo a budget proposal*
307 *that looks at no more than a 2% increase in the tax rate with the backup to show where cuts*
308 *were made.*

309

310 ***At 11:32am, Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Sarah Perrin seconded the adjournment of the***
311 ***meeting. The motion carried unanimously.***

312

313 Respectfully submitted,

314 Nancy H. Lively

315 Secretary