

1 TOWN OF BENNINGTON
2 2019 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
3 BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY
4 130 RIVER STREET
5 BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201
6 MARCH 2, 2020
7 MINUTES

8 MODERATOR: Jason Morrissey

9 ALSO PRESENT: Bennington Select Board Members - Donald Campbell-Chair; Jeannie Jenkins-Vice
10 Chair; Jim Carroll; Bruce Lee-Clark; Chad Gordon and Jeanne Conner; Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan
11 Monks-Assistant Town Manager; Joan Pinsonneault-Treasurer; Cassandra Barbeau-Town Clerk;
12 Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director; Representative Mary Morrissey; Elizabeth
13 Fredlund-Council on Aging; Charlie Murphy; Peter Fish; Joy Kitchell; Sandy Bissett; Catherine Albert;
14 Ken Swierad; Ned Perkins; Sam Restino; Nancy White; Jason Flanders; Beth Artistry; Jason Erikson; Joe
15 Hall; Rosa VanWeet; Al Bashevkin; Suzanne Fitzpatrick; Linda Putney; Janice Lerrigo; Dan Lucy; 100
16 citizens; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

17 At 7:10 p.m., Moderator Jason Morrissey called the meeting to order.

18 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

19 Mr. Morrissey read the following Warning:

20 WARNING

21 TOWN OF BENNINGTON

22 2020 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

23 *The residents of the Town of Bennington qualified by law to vote in Town Meeting are hereby notified*
24 *and warned to meet at the Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance) in said*
25 *Town on Monday, March 2, 2020 at 7:00 p.m., or immediately following the Southwest Vermont Union*
26 *Elementary School District's Annual meeting should that run over, to transact the business specified to*
27 *be done from the floor.*

28 *If you are a resident of the Town of Bennington, intend to be present at the meeting and are hearing*
29 *impaired, arrangements will be made for a sign interpreter to be present at this meeting. For necessary*
30 *arrangements, please contact Stuart A. Hurd, Town Manager at the Bennington Town Offices, 205*
31 *South Street, P.O. Box 469, Bennington, VT - (802) 442-1037 no later than Friday, February 14, 2020.*

32 *Following the completion of such business, the Meeting will stand adjourned to Tuesday, March 3,*
33 *2020, at The Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance). The polls are open from*
34 *7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. for the election of officers and voting on all ballot articles specified. However,*

35 those on the checklist to vote in the Village of North Bennington shall vote for the election of officers
36 and on all ballot articles at the North Bennington Village Office on Main Street in North Bennington.
37 The Bennington Fire Facility above mentioned, is hereby established as the central polling place for
38 those on the checklist to vote in said Bennington. Residents of Bennington and North Bennington may
39 register to vote at the Town Clerk's Office, 205 South Street, Bennington, Vermont. Eligible residents
40 registering on Election Day must do so at the polling place where they will cast their Town Meeting
41 ballot.

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43 Jim Carroll read a letter of congratulations from Governor Philip B. Scott to the Mt. Anthony
44 Wrestling Team for their 32nd Consecutive Vermont High School Wrestling Championship. The team
45 received a well deserve standing ovation from those present.

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47 Treasurer Joan Pinsonneault reminded everyone to file their State of Vermont Homestead tax
48 forms, HS144 and HS122, even if you have filed for an extension.

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50 Representative Mary Morrissey read a Proclamation from Governor Philip B. Scott to recognize
51 March 2020 as Multiple Myeloma Cancer Month in the State of Vermont, with special mention to Jim
52 Markenthal, a national advocate for the disease who passed away this past fall. Ken Swierad shared
53 that he had contacted the disease from Agent Orange in Vietnam.

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55 *BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED FROM THE FLOOR*

56 *Monday, March 2, 2020*

7:00 P.M.

57 *ARTICLE 1. TOWN REPORT: To hear the report of Town officers and to take appropriate action thereon.*

58 Community Development Director Shannon Barsotti shared a slide show presentation on some
59 of the achievements in the Town during 2019 that have affected the following areas and departments:

- 60 • Putnam Block
- 61 • United Counseling Service expansion of the Bennington Recreation Center
- 62 • Town Garage sale to become a distillery
- 63 • Development of Bicycle and Pedestrian Network
- 64 • Department of Public Works - Highway Division
- 65 • Water Department - Lead Line Replacement
- 66 • Sewer Department - Waste Water Treatment Plant
- 67 • Merchants Park - Splash Pad
- 68 • Stark Street Playground
- 69 • Office of Community Development - Loans, Block Grants, Housing Rehabilitation
- Town of Bennington Marketing - www.VermontBeginsHere.com

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- Berkshire Family YMCA Management Agreement for the Bennington Recreation Center and Senior Center
- Police Department
- Fire Department

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Ned Perkins asked what properties were purchased by the BCIC, and Mr. Hurd answered that some funds were used for the former Plasan Building on Shields Drive. Other funds went into the Putnam Block, the Ramunto building, and the Taco Bell building. The commitment by the investor in the Opportunity Zones is to spend twice as much in redeveloping the building as it cost to purchase it.

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Mr. Perkins further asked about, and Mr. Hurd responded to, the following budget line items:

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- Permit-Plan-Code Enforce - \$86,000 increase, due to moving a Rec Center full time employee to the Town offices.
- Buildings & Grounds - \$63,000 increase, due to the health insurance 11% increase and vehicle purchase.
- Police - \$365,000 increase, due to the contract with the School Superintendent to have a resource officer in every elementary school. 2/3 of their expense will be paid for by the school district and 1/3 paid by the Town so the town has gained 3 officers when they are not in the schools.
- Senior Citizens - \$55,000 increase. Not addressed.

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Nancy White inquired if the Town had looked into purchasing the Southern Vermont College property, and Mr. Hurd answered that we had briefly, however, a private individual may purchase it which would put it back on the tax rolls.

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Ms. White expressed her concern for the initiative by the BCRC to bring individuals to Bennington from other countries and feels that this should be discussed as a town at public hearings before this moves forward. Mr. Hurd stated that this is not a town initiative and our contract with the BCRC is only for economic development. Ms. Jenkins added that BCIC and the Windham County Economic Development successfully obtained a grant to do some planning to look at the possibility of various ways to repopulate southern Vermont. It is anticipated that as part of this planning process, the towns will be given the opportunity for their voices to be heard.

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Jason Flanders had the following comments:

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- ✓ He doesn't understand the partnership with the out-of-town YMCA when our community used to operate that Rec Center. Mr. Hurd stated that the three managers at the Rec Center are all Bennington residents.
- ✓ He doesn't understand the UCS Daycare at the Rec Center. Mr. Hurd explained that there are no town dollars paying for the UCS Daycare. It is a program of Headstart that has been at a rented facility in North Bennington for decades. The Town bears no responsibility to finance or maintain the UCS addition to the Rec Center.

- 109 ✓ When grant monies run out, does that project stop or do the taxpayers then pay for the rest
110 of the project?
111 ✓ As a retired senior citizen living on a fixed income, he cannot support the Local Option Tax.
112 ✓ The Town should live within their means.

113 Jason Erikson clarified what the local option tax allocations were set at for this year, and Mr.
114 Hurd answered 40% property tax and debt reduction, 35% economic development, 15% marketing,
115 and 10% Willow Park Community Park.

116 *It was moved and seconded to accept ARTICLE 1. TOWN REPORT as presented. The motion*
117 *carried unanimously.*

118 *ARTICLE 2. SELECT BOARD MEMBERS COMPENSATION: To determine what compensation shall be paid*
119 *to the Town Select Board Members.*

120 Sam Restino spoke in favor of increasing the Select Board members' compensation by
121 decreasing the salaries of the Town Manager and Town Clerk.

122 Joe Hall spoke in favor of the compensation remaining the same because those that run don't
123 run for what they'll be paid, but rather as a community service.

124 A citizen asked about the history of the compensation, and Mr. Morrissey stated that the
125 amount has been the same for about 15 years.

126 *Joe Hall moved and it was seconded to accept ARTICLE 2. SELECT BOARD MEMBERS*
127 *COMPENSATION with the compensation to remain at \$1,400/year/member from April 1, 2020*
128 *through March 31, 2021. The motion carried with two opposed.*

129 *ARTICLE 3. OTHER BUSINESS. To transact such other proper business when met.*

130 *BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED BY BALLOT*

131 *TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2020*

132 *THE POLLS TO BE OPEN FROM 7:00 A.M. TO 7:00 P.M.*

133 *AT THE POLLING PLACES SPECIFIED ABOVE*

134 *SELECT BOARD ELECTION. Two Select Board Members residing in the Town shall be elected for*
135 *terms of three (3) years.*

136 *ARTICLE 1. Shall the Town appropriate for the next fiscal year, July 1, 2020 through June 30, 2021, the*
137 *total sum of \$13,921,440.00 consisting of the following: \$4,135,250.00 for the laying out, maintaining,*
138 *and repairing of the highways and bridges of the Town; and \$9,786,190.00 for the payment of the*
139 *following: Any indebtedness not otherwise specifically provided for, interest on indebtedness, legally*
140 *authorized State and County taxes, the prosecution and defense of the common rights and interests of*
141 *the inhabitants of the Town, and for other necessary incidental expenses?*

142 *The proposed budget includes \$60,000.00 for fire equipment, \$13,000.00 for parking improvements,*
143 *and \$411,540.00 for healthcare reserve and workers compensation insurance, \$50,000 for marketing,*

144 \$50,000 for bridges, any unexpended portion of which will be reserved to subsequent years for that
145 purpose.

147 *ARTICLE 2. Shall the bonds of the Town of Bennington in an amount not to exceed \$9.5 million be issued
148 for the purpose of replacing lead service lines throughout the Town such monies expended to be fully
reimbursed from State and Federal grant funds?*

149 *ARTICLE 3. Shall the voters assess a 1% local option tax as provided in Section 511 (a) of the Bennington
150 Town Charter*

- 151 1. A one percent rooms tax;
- 152 2. A one percent rooms tax;
- 153 3. A one percent alcoholic beverage tax; and
- 154 4. A one percent sales tax?

155 Rosa VanWeet began speaking on State Legislation on reproduction and was ruled out of order.

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157 *ARTICLE 4. Shall the Town of Bennington join the Southern Vermont Communications Union District?*

158 Beth Artisty, a resident of North Bennington, encouraged voters to vote yes to joining the
159 Southern Vermont Communications Union District to avail rural residents of high speed internet
160 service. By State law, the cost will be borne by those that wish to participate and no local taxes can be
161 used for this project.

162 *ARTICLE 5. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for Bennington
163 County Association Against Child Abuse?*

164 Joy Kitchell spoke to the work of the Bennington County Association Against Child Abuse in that
165 they provide counseling, family assistance, and whatever supports people of all ages need, not just
166 children. They are also the home for the Bike Drives to provide transportation to those in need.

167 *ARTICLE 6. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for Project
168 Against Violent Encounters?*

169 Suzanne Fitzpatrick read a letter from the PAVE Executive Director that highlighted the services
170 that PAVE provides, such as a 24-hour hotline, legal services, financial support, emergency housing,
171 parenting support, supervised visitation, and school based education. PAVE has served many more
172 individuals this year than last.

173 *ARTICLE 7. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$5,500.00 for Green
174 Mountain Retired and Senior Volunteer Program?*

175 Catherine Albert cited all of the beneficial work that the 88 volunteers do for the community,
176 such as, Meals on Wheels, food drives, tax assistance, companionship, and more.

177 *ARTICLE 8. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$6,750.00 for BROCC -*
178 *Community Action in Southwestern Vermont?*

180 Sandy Bissett stated that BROCC has served 1,460 community members with food and aid to
181 prevent homelessness. They also provide tax preparation, food shelf, lodging, heat, electric, job
182 training and help starting a business.

183 *ARTICLE 9. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$7,000.00 for Vermont*
184 *Center for Independent Living?*

185 Charlie Murphy noted that the Vermont Center for Independent Living has offices throughout
186 the State. They help people to live with all kinds of disabilities that include counseling, finding
187 resources, financing, home access program, Sue Williams Freedom Fund, Vermont Equipment and
188 Distribution Program, Meals on Wheels, American signing classes, and more.

189 *ARTICLE 10. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for*
190 *Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging, Inc.?*

191 Elizabeth Fredlund stated the various services provided by the Council on Aging, such as, case
192 management, Meals on Wheels, counseling, etc., and requested the continued support from the Town.

193 *ARTICLE 11. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$10,000.00 for The*
194 *Tutorial Center?*

195 Peter Fish noted that everyone that needs tutoring gets it, as well as, job skills and computer
196 skills trainings throughout Bennington and Woodford.

197 *ARTICLE 12. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$11,000.00 Bennington*
198 *Project Independence?*

199 Linda Putney stated that they provide adult day services to individuals and respite to their
200 families. She, personally, has utilized the services from BPI for two years for her mother who had
201 Alzheimer's and shared similar stories from others. They provide mental and physical stimulating
202 activities, nutritious meals, art induced therapy, and much more.

203 *ARTICLE 13. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$12,500.00 for*
204 *Bennington Free Clinic?*

205 Janice Lerrigo, a Board member of GBICS, who host the Bennington Free Clinic, stated that they
206 served over 300 uninsured adults with a nearly all volunteer staff this past year. The dental clinic at
207 Molly Stark School, which ranks at the bottom of dental health in schools within the State, saw 93
208 students last year with 85 of those referred onto dentists for more serious problems. As funding
209 allows, we will expand our dental clinic to Bennington Elementary.

210 *ARTICLE 14. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$15,000.00 for Sunrise*
211 *Family Resource Center?*

211 Al Bashevkin spoke to the work of Sunrise Family Resource Center and that their primary goal is
212 working with families with young children. They offer free services for housing, child care, economic
213 development, and the prevention of child abuse with over 950 families coming from Bennington.

214 *ARTICLE 15. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$21,600.00 for*
215 *Bennington Area Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice?*

216 There was no representative to speak on behalf of the Bennington Area Visiting Nurse
217 Association & Hospice.

218 *ARTICLE 16. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2021 General Fund by the sum of \$25,000.00 for*
219 *Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless?*

220 Dan Lucy stated that the Coalition has been serving the homeless for over 20 years. We
221 currently have two facilities - one for families and one for individuals. This past year we housed 197
222 individuals, 29 families, and over 1,000 for drop-in services. We also provide case management and
223 skills training to people to help them be able to provide themselves permanent housing. In addition,
224 we have sponsored the Warm the Children program that provided over 200 coats to needy children.

225 All that spoke on Article 5 through Article 16 thanked the Town for their support.

226 *At 8:36 p.m., it was moved and seconded to adjourn the meeting until tomorrow, March 3,*
227 *2020, at 7:00 a.m. The motion carried unanimously.*

228 Respectfully submitted, Nancy H. Lively, Secretary