

1 TOWN OF BENNINGTON
2 2021 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING
3 MEETING HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM WEBINAR
4 MARCH 1, 2021
5 MINUTES

6 **MODERATOR:** Jason Morrissey

7 **ALSO PRESENT:** Bennington Select Board Members - Donald Campbell-Chair; Jeannie Jenkins-
8 Vice Chair; Jim Carroll; Bruce Lee-Clark; Sarah Perrin and Jeanne Conner; Stuart Hurd-Town
9 Manager; Dan Monks-Assistant Town Manager; Joan Pinsonneault-Treasurer; Cassandra
10 Barbeau-Town Clerk; Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director; Alicia Youngman
11 and Kristal Hier-Interpreters; Representative Mary Morrissey; Jenna Caslin; Suzanne Fitzpatrick;
12 Lenora Volkmer; Tom Donahue; Lynn Mazza; Chris Adams; Peter Fish; Linda Wichlac; Charlie
13 Gingo; Jonathan Cooper; Christine Hoard; Ed Barbeau; Susan Borden; CAT-TV and Nancy H.
14 Lively-Secretary.

15 **1. MODERATOR OPEN MEETING; READS WARNING**

16 At 7:30 p.m., Moderator Jason Morrissey called the meeting to order.

17 Bennington Select Board Chair, Donald Campbell, explained the process of how the
18 meeting will be run via Zoom Webinar. There will not be any voting taking place this evening.
19 All voting will be done on March 2, 2021.

20 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all.

21 Mr. Morrissey read the following Warning:

22 **WARNING**

23 **TOWN OF BENNINGTON**

24 **2021 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

25 **VIA ZOOM**

26 *The residents of the Town of Bennington qualified by law to vote in Town Meeting are hereby*
27 *notified and warned to meet (via Zoom) in said Town on Monday, March 1, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.,*
28 *(or immediately following the Southwest Vermont Union Elementary School District's Annual*
29 *meeting should that run over) to transact the business specified to be done from the floor.*

30 *If you are a resident of the Town of Bennington, intend to be present at the meeting (via Zoom)*
31 *and are hearing impaired, arrangements will be made for a sign interpreter to be present at this*
32 *meeting. For necessary arrangements, please contact Stuart A. Hurd, Town Manager at the*
33 *Bennington Town Offices, 205 South Street, P.O. Box 469, Bennington, VT - (802) 442-1037 no*
34 *later than Friday, February 12, 2021.*

35 Following the completion of such business, the Meeting will stand adjourned to Tuesday, March
36 2, 2021, at The Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance). The polls are
37 open from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. for the election of officers and voting on all ballot articles
38 specified. Those on the checklist to vote in the Village of North Bennington shall vote for the
39 election of officers and on all ballot articles at the Bennington Fire Facility. The Bennington Fire
40 Facility above mentioned, is hereby established as the central polling place for those on the
41 checklist to vote in said Bennington. Residents of Bennington and North Bennington may
42 register to vote at the Town Clerk's Office, 205 South Street, Bennington, Vermont. Eligible
43 residents registering on Election Day must do so at the polling place where they will cast their
44 Town Meeting ballot.

45 BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED FROM THE "FLOOR"

46 Monday, March 1, 2021 7:30
47 P.M.

48 ARTICLE 1. TOWN REPORT: To hear the report of Town officers.

49 ARTICLE 2. OTHER BUSINESS: To transact such other proper business when met.

50 BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED BY BALLOT

51 TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2021

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

53 AT THE POLLING PLACES SPECIFIED ABOVE

54 SELECT BOARD ELECTION. Two Select Board Members residing in the Town shall be
55 elected for term of three (3) years, One Select Board Member residing in the town shall be
56 elected for term of one (1) year.

57 TOWN CLERK ELECTION. A Town Clerk residing in the Town shall be elected for a term of
58 three (3) years.

59 ARTICLE 1. Shall the Town appropriate for the next fiscal year, July 1, 2021 through June
60 30, 2022, the total sum of \$14,275,440.00 consisting of the following: \$4,148,910.00 for the
61 laying out, maintaining, and repairing of the highways and bridges of the Town; and
62 \$10,126,530.00 for the payment of the following: Any indebtedness not otherwise specifically
63 provided for, interest on indebtedness, legally authorized State and County taxes, the
64 prosecution and defense of the common rights and interests of the inhabitants of the Town,
65 and for other necessary incidental expenses?

66 The proposed budget includes \$25,000.00 for fire equipment, \$5,000.00 for fire
67 facilities, \$13,000.00 for parking improvements, and \$400,680.00 for healthcare reserve and
68 workers compensation insurance, \$40,000.00 for marketing, \$100,000.00 for bridges and

69 \$2,000.00 for well maintenance, any unexpended portion of which will be reserved to
70 subsequent years for that purpose.

71 ARTICLE 2. Shall the Town of Bennington add \$0.01 to the General Fund tax rate for the
72 purpose of creating a reserve to support Parks, so Designated as "A Penny for Parks"?

73 ARTICLE 3. §103-407. Mayoral form of government

74 (a) In lieu of a town manager, the voters may adopt a mayoral form of government, by
75 vote at a duly-warned annual meeting, warned pursuant to a petition signed by five percent of
76 the voters or on the Select board's own motion. Once a vote in favor of this form of
77 government is successful, the voters shall elect a mayor at the next annual meeting for a three-
78 year term. Once the mayor takes office, the Town Manager system of governance shall end for
79 Bennington.

80 (b) The mayor shall be responsible for the management of the administrative affairs of
81 the Town, in the same manner and with the same powers and responsibilities as the Town
82 Manager, as stated in statute and this charter.

83 (c) The mayor shall have the power to veto any action of the Select board.

84 (d) The Select board shall have the authority to override the mayor's veto by a vote of
85 five members of the board taken at a regular meeting. Within 30 days of the vote to override,
86 voters may petition for a binding referendum on the issue by a petition signed by five percent
87 of the voters. At a special meeting held within 60 days of the receipt of the petition, the voters
88 shall decide whether to uphold the mayor's veto.

89 (e) The compensation for the mayor shall be set by the Select board based on
90 comparable salaries and benefits for a town manager.

91 (f) The mayor shall serve as the voice of the Town of Bennington, taking responsibility
92 for implementing the policies of the Select board, leading the Town toward greater prosperity
93 and a healthy economy, and a better life for all its residents.

94 ARTICLE 4. Shall the town authorize cannabis retailers in town pursuant to 7 V.S.A. §
95 863? "Cannabis retailer" means a person licensed by the state Cannabis Control Board to sell
96 cannabis and cannabis products to adults 21 years of age and older for off-site consumption.

97 ARTICLE 5. Shall the town authorize integrated licensees in town pursuant to 7 V.S.A. §
98 863? "Integrated licensee" means a person licensed by the state Cannabis Control Board to
99 engage in the activities of a cultivator, wholesaler, product manufacturer, retailer, and testing
100 laboratory in accordance with state law.

101 ARTICLE 6. Shall the voters decrease the Select Board's pay by \$100.00 to \$1,300.00
102 annually?
103

104 **2. YEAR IN REVIEW PRESENTATION**

105

106 Community Development Director Shannon Barsotti shared a slide show presentation on some
107 of the achievements in the Town during 2020 and highlighting the affected areas and
108 departments:

- 109 • Thanks to the Southwest Vermont Health Center, the Vermont Department of Health,
110 First Responders, and all Essential Workers for their work during this pandemic year.
- 111 • A Vision and Mission Statement for the Town was created with community members,
112 Select Board members, the Police Department, and Town Staff as follows:
 - 113 ○ Vision Statement - "Bennington is a welcoming, engaged, inclusive and resilient
114 community where everyone, regardless of identity, shares in our vitality and
115 benefits from an outstanding quality of life."
 - 116 ○ Mission Statement - "We serve people through teamwork. We do that by
117 providing a safe community, by providing opportunities for recreation,
118 encouraging development and growth, enhancing the quality of life, and
119 improving infrastructure."
- 120 • Putnam Block - coming to completion
- 121 • Bennington Recreation Center - United Counseling Service expansion progressing
- 122 • Southwest Vermont Health Center - purchase of Southern Vermont College
- 123 • Town Garage - opening soon as the Village Garage Distillery
- 124 • Merchants Park Splash Pad - complete with a soft opening
- 125 • Stark Street Playground - renovated
- 126 • Former Bennington High School - to be opening for housing and recreation
- 127 • Police Department - trainings with Vermont Partnership for Fairness and Diversity, as
128 well as, trainings on Community Policing
- 129 • Department of Public Works - Highway, Water, and Sewer - to remove and replace all
130 lead service lines
- 131 • Buildings and Grounds
- 132 • Planning and Permitting - bike and pedestrian pathways
- 133 • Appalachian Trail Designation
- 134 • Office of Community Development - Loans, Block Grants, Housing Rehabilitation
- 135 • Berkshire Family YMCA Management Agreement for the Bennington Recreation Center
136 and Senior Center
- 137 • Town Clerk's Office

138 Thanks to Donald Campbell for his leadership as Chair of the Select Board as he will not
139 be running for re-election.

140

141 **3. OTHER BUSINESS/BALLOT ITEM DISCUSSION**

142 **A. PROCLAMATION - RE: TOM JACOBS**

143 Representative Mary Morrissey read a Vermont State Proclamation to honor Tom
144 Jacobs for his commitment and dedication to our community. Mr. Jacobs passed away this past
145 year.

146 **B. AGENCY PRESENTATIONS**

147 *ARTICLE 7. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for*
148 *Bennington County Association Against Child Abuse?*

149 Jenna Caslin spoke to the work of the Bennington County Association Against Child
150 Abuse in that they provide counseling, family assistance, and protection in any area that is
151 needed. They also educate for prevention in the community and schools and corroborate with
152 municipalities, police, prosecutors, medical and mental health.

153 *ARTICLE 8. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for*
154 *Project Against Violent Encounters?*

155 Suzanne Fitzpatrick stated that they are celebrating their 40th year anniversary for their
156 service to Bennington County. PAVE started as a hot line and now does education in the
157 schools, court advocacy, supervised visitation for non-custodial parents, etc., and this year, we
158 are adding grant funded transitional housing. In 2020, we provided shelter to 65 adults and 39
159 children and continue to grow.

160 *ARTICLE 9. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$5,500.00 for*
161 *Green Mountain Retired and Senior Volunteer Program?*

162 Lenora Volkmer cited all of the beneficial work that the volunteers do for the
163 community, such as, Meals on Wheels, Stuff the Bus, food drives, friendly phone calls, tax
164 assistance, lead the virtual book club, companionship, fraud awareness, and more.

165 *ARTICLE 10. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$6,750.00 for*
166 *BROC - Community Action in Southwestern Vermont?*

167 Tom Donahue stated that "the foundation of a community is only as strong as how we
168 treat our most vulnerable". BROC helps people in crisis and then provides a sustainable path
169 forward. We have spent \$500,000 to provide community members with food, lodging, heat,
170 electricity, and more to prevent homelessness to those in need.

171 *ARTICLE 11. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$7,000.00 for*
172 *Vermont Center for Independent Living?*

173 Lynn Mazza noted that the Vermont Center for Independent Living helps people with
174 disabilities to have "accessibility, inclusion, dignity and self-direction". We have served 194

175 residents this past year and run the Meals on Wheels Program, the Home Access Program, the
176 Agrability Program, Sue Williams Freedom Fund, the Youth Transition Program, Peer Advocacy
177 Program, the Vermont Equipment and Distribution Program, American Signing Interpreters, and
178 more.

179 *ARTICLE 12. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for*
180 *Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging, Inc.?*

181 Chris Adams stated that our goal is for seniors to maintain maximum independence and
182 quality of life. The various services provided by the Council on Aging are case management,
183 Meals on Wheels, meals on location, counseling, social gatherings, and more.

184 *ARTICLE 13. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$10,000.00 for*
185 *The Tutorial Center?*

186 Peter Fish noted that The Tutorial Center is celebrating their 50th anniversary this year.
187 They have adapted well to remote learning while in person instruction is also available. We
188 offer adult education and tutoring, digital literacy, develop personal and interpersonal skills, as
189 well as, critical thinking and problem solving skills. Our courses will provide a high school
190 education and/or GED and prepare the student for post-secondary education.

191 *ARTICLE 14. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$11,000.00*
192 *Bennington Project Independence?*

193 Linda Wichlac stated that BPI offers non-residential community services to assist older
194 adults and younger persons with disabilities. They also provide valuable support and respite to
195 family members and care givers. They continued to provide services via telehealth and
196 telephonic means with virtual activities during this past year. Meals and activities were
197 delivered to the homes during this time.

198 *ARTICLE 15. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$12,500.00 for*
199 *Bennington Free Clinic?*

200 Charlie Gingo shared that the Bennington Free Clinic has been in operation for over 12
201 years. They work with patients that either have no insurance or are under insured and are
202 staffed by volunteer doctors and nurses. Everyone is screened - physically and mentally - with
203 treatment provided to those with substance abuse issues and/or depression. The dental clinic
204 at Molly Stark School provides dental work to the children with referrals onto dentists for more
205 serious problems. The town funding helps us to pay for lab work and prescriptions.

206 *ARTICLE 16. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$15,000.00 for*
207 *Sunrise Family Resource Center?*

208 Jonathan Cooper stated that the Sunrise Family Resource Center is a State designated
209 parent/child center with the primary goal of working with families and their children. This past

210 year grant funding has enabled them to renovate facilities on Union Street to suit their needs
211 for learning and education during a difficult pandemic year.

212 *ARTICLE 17. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$21,600.00 for*
213 *Bennington Area Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice?*

214 Christine Hoard noted that the VNA & Hospice care for people from birth to death and
215 will be celebrating their 75th anniversary this year. Home health care became busier this past
216 year when many were afraid to go to health care facilities. Medicare and Medicaid are our
217 primary sources of funding and we don't get paid what we bill them. We employ 290 people
218 between Bennington and Rutland counties.

219 *ARTICLE 18. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2022 General Fund by the sum of \$25,000.00 for*
220 *Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless?*

221 Ed Barbeau stated that the Coalition has been serving the homeless for over 20 years.
222 We currently have two year round shelters - one for families (up to 9 families) and one for
223 individuals (up to 16 individuals). We also provide case management and skills training to
224 people to help them be able to provide themselves permanent housing and remain
225 independent.

226 All that spoke on Article 7 through Article 18 thanked the Town for their support.
227

228 **C. OTHER BUSINESS**

229

230 Susan Borden thanked all health care workers, all of the agencies that presented tonight, our
231 town leadership and their colleagues, CAT-TV, the Select Board - especially Donald Campbell -
232 and all others that have helped us get through this past year.

233 Donald Campbell thanked the Select Board members for their support and the town
234 staff for the work they do, and expressed his sentiments to the memories of Tom Jacobs and
235 Bill Scully.

236 *At 8:35 p.m., Jason Morrissey declared the meeting adjourned until tomorrow, March*
237 *2, 2021, at 7:00 a.m. when the polling place at the Bennington Fire Facility will be open for*
238 *voting.*

239 Respectfully submitted,

240 Nancy H. Lively

241 Secretary