

Proposal for a Process to Create a Community Safety and Equity Board

The goal of this work is to create a structure for a single Town board that provides meaningful community involvement in **Safety and Equity decision-making**.

The first step is the formation of a taskforce that will make recommendations to the Bennington Select Board. The Select Board's charge to the Taskforce is as follows.

Charge: *The Safety and Equity Taskforce shall develop recommendations for the name, scope, structure, membership and responsibilities of a community safety and equity board. Areas of focus will include the following: 1. Recommendations on police department training and community collaboration efforts 2. Review of complaints against the BPD 3. Development and review of proposed critical Bennington Police Department policies and procedures 4. Analysis of safety and equity data.*

The outcome of this work, a Safety and Equity Board (working title), will build on this past year's community policing efforts and move this work forward. The work, along with the addition of some new responsibilities, will become the charge of the dedicated Board. It is our belief that a single integrated structure, rather than multiple separate compartmentalized boards or committees, will allow our community a more holistic and collaborative approach to safety and equity concerns.

The work of the Community Safety and Equity Board is to ensure safety, accountability, transparency and trust in the community and to move Bennington toward achieving its vision of becoming "a welcoming, engaged, inclusive, and resilient community where everyone, regardless of identity, shares in our vitality and benefits from an outstanding quality of life".

Taskforce Creation and Development of community safety and equity board

We propose that a taskforce comprised of up to 11 community members be established. Staff from the National Organization for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE) will provide technical assistance to the Taskforce through regularly scheduled in-person and online Zoom meetings. In addition, NACOLE will provide six-hours of training to the Taskforce as outlined in the Scope of Work.

Using professional facilitation through NACOLE, the Taskforce will examine all aspects of their charge. A Town of Bennington staff person will be assigned to assist the Taskforce. The Taskforce will elect two co-chairs of the Taskforce to set the agenda, run the meetings, and assure compliance with all requirements of an official board. The Taskforce will complete the work within a six-month timeframe to include training, development of recommendations, presentation of recommendations, and any requested follow up to recommendations from the Select Board.

While it is not possible to know with certainty the time commitment for this Taskforce, what the Select Board's Community Policing work group understands from other communities, is that members should assume that the work will require focused attention and a high likelihood for at least twice-monthly meetings. However, the Taskforce will determine how often the Taskforce meets, and the time and length of meetings needed to complete the work within the established timeframe. The Taskforce may also consider utilizing smaller subcommittees within the Taskforce, community discussions, and other elements that will facilitate successful completion of their work.

The Select Board, as the duly elected legislative body of the Town of Bennington, will review and consider the recommendations of the Taskforce. The final decision regarding the community safety and equity board remains at the sole discretion of the Select Board.

The Select Board is committed to a Taskforce that is socio-economically diverse and reflects a range of ages and backgrounds. We are also committed to membership that reflects those who will be most impacted by the work of a safety and equity board. Applicants are encouraged to identify potential barriers to assist fellow Taskforce members in developing formats, meeting times, and structures that will allow the highest level of inclusivity.

To assist in attracting diverse applicants, the Select Board particularly encourages applications from individuals with the following areas of expertise and experience.

1. Mental Health
2. K-12 Education
3. Lived Experience
4. Active BPD officer
5. Law
6. BIPOC
7. Business
8. Recent HS/College grad
9. Domestic Violence
10. Interfaith
11. Disabilities
12. LGBTQ
13. Migrant Labor

The Taskforce will be an official committee of the Town of Bennington with a charge not to exceed six-months and will abide by appropriate processes and procedures of governmental bodies including open meeting law, agenda setting, recording of minutes, and other requirements as determined.

The Bennington Select Board will review applications, interview appropriate applicants and make the final selection of Taskforce members.

Criminal Justice Training

All Taskforce members will be required to complete 7.5 hours of criminal justice training. The purpose of this training is to familiarize Taskforce members with the responsibilities and obligations of different entities comprising the criminal justice system. This will provide all Taskforce members with important baseline information for their deliberations. Portions of the trainings may be offered in person or over Zoom.

The training will consist of three 2.5-hour sessions. The first two sessions will provide an overview of the criminal justice system including goals, agencies and institutions. The third session will be conducted by the Bennington Police Department and focus on the current day-to-day activities and roles of staff including officers, investigators, and dispatchers within the department; an overview of policy and procedures; and existing collaborations with local programs.

Written Recommendations to the Select Board

At the completion of the Taskforce's committee work, a written record of recommendations will be forwarded to the Select Board.

Presentation of Findings to the Select Board and Community

The Taskforce recommendations will be shared at a warned Town of Bennington Select Board meeting at the earliest convenience of the Taskforce and the Select Board.

Public Comment Period

There will be a formal comment period on the Taskforce recommendations of no less than 10 days.

Final Consideration by the Select Board

The Select Board will review the recommendations of the Taskforce and public comments in determining the name, scope, structure, membership and responsibilities of a community safety and equity board.

Establishment of Board

The Select Board will create a safety and equity board to be part of the Town's Boards and Commissions to be established and have membership terms that coincide with other town board and commission appointments.

Draft Timeline

Select Board approval of Proposal for a Safety and Equity Board and NACOLE contract

July 15 – Opening online Zoom meeting with Select Board and NACOLE outlining process and reviewing oversight models /applications open for Taskforce membership

August 20 – Applications close for Taskforce membership

September 7 – 17 – Interviews for Taskforce members

Week of September 20 – Taskforce established

September 28, 29, 30 – Criminal Justice Overview for Taskforce members (5 -7:30 pm)

October 4 – Taskforce begin meeting this week to accomplish charge

January 30 – Deadline for Taskforce written report to SB

February – Recommendations presented at a Select Board meeting/public comment period begins

February/March – Public comment period on recommendations ends

March – Recommendations are taken up by board at regular SB meeting

May – Establishment of Safety and Equity Board

Adopted June 14, 2021 by the Bennington Select Board