

**SELECT BOARD
MINUTES**

November 22, 2021

Present: Jeanne Conner, V. Chair Jeannie Jenkins, Chair; Jim Carroll, Gary Corey, Tom Haley and Bruce Lee-Clark.

Absent: Sarah Perrin (excused)

Also present: Stuart Hurd, Town Manager, RJ Joly, DPW Director, Larry Gates, Assistant DPW Director and Jim Vires, CAT TV and six residents.

The meeting, a tour of the WWTF, was called to order by the Chair at 12:30 pm. The tour was led by Jon D'Amour, Chief Operator and by Larry Gates, assisted by Mike Lane, Assistant Chief Operator.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 1:43 pm.

Respectfully submitted,


Stuart A. Hurd

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING**

2 **130 RIVER STREET**

3 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

4 **NOVEMBER 22, 2021**

5 **MINUTES**

6 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Jeannie Jenkins-Chair; Jeanne Conner-Vice Chair; Bruce
7 Lee-Clark; Jim Carroll and Gary Corey.

8 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:** Sarah Perrin.

9 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan Monks-Assistant Town Manager; Shannon
10 Barsotti-Community Development Director; Jonah Spivak-Communications Coordinator; Jenny
11 Dewar-BBC Executive Director; Dr. Richard Dundas-Human Rights Day Proclamation; 1 citizen;
12 Jim Vires-CAT-TV; and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

13 At 6:00pm, Ms. Jenkins called the meeting to order and asked those not vaccinated to
14 wear a mask and social distance. There are wipes to wipe down the microphone if you wish to
15 speak.

16 **1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

17 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

18 **2. VISION STATEMENT**

19 Ms. Conner read the Town's Vision Statement that was adopted by the Select Board on
20 August 24, 2020:

21 "Bennington is a welcoming, engaged, inclusive, resilient community where everyone
22 regardless of identity shares in our vitality and benefits from an outstanding quality of life."

23 **3. CONSENT AGENDA**

24 **A. MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 1 AND 8, 2021**

25 **B. WARRANTS**

26 **C. PROCLAMATION ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

27 *Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jeanne Conner seconded to approve the Consent Agenda*
28 *Items*

29 *A. Minutes of November 1 and 8, 2021 and B. Warrants with the Minutes of November 8,*
30 *2021 amended as follows:*

31 *Lines 11 and 38, Change "Zadle" to "Tziadul"*

32 *The motion carried with Sarah Perrin absent.*

33 Ms. Conner read the Human Rights Day Proclamation 2021 as presented.

34 The Peace and Justice Center brought this Proclamation to the Board and Dr. Richard
35 Dundas, a member of the Greater Bennington Peace and Justice Center spoke on their behalf
36 noting that they meet regularly - the 1st Thursday of each month at 6:30pm at the UU
37 Meetinghouse at 108 School Street. They have sent what money they could raise to our sister
38 city - Somotillo, Nicaragua. The Proclamation observes the celebrating of the UN Declaration of
39 Human Rights on December 10th each year since its adoption in 1948. The Peace and Justice
40 Center will have a vigil at the Four Corners in Bennington on December 10th from noon to
41 1:00pm and everyone is invited.

42 Mr. Corey suggested that we recognize this every year and not limit it to 2021. The
43 Board concurred.

44 *Bruce Lee Clark moved and Tom Haley seconded to adopt the Proclamation amended*
45 *as follows:*

46 *Change the title, "HUMAN RIGHTS DAY PROCLAMATION 2021" to "HUMAN*
47 *RIGHTS DAY PROCLAMATION"*

48 *Change the Now, Therefore "December 10, 2021" to "December 10"*

49 *The motion carried with Sarah Perrin absent.*

50 4. PUBLIC COMMENT

51 The following Public Comment Practices to make the experience for all involved a
52 productive and informative use of the Public Comment period at Select Board meetings was
53 placed on the podium for those that wish to make Public Comments to reference:

- 54 1. Public Comment is to allow residents an opportunity to share information or
55 make announcements that benefit the community at large.
- 56 2. The topic should **not** be related to an agenda item. If a member of the public
57 wants to comment on an agenda item they can do so during the discussion of
58 that item.
- 59 3. Comments should be 3 minutes or less.
- 60 4. You are required to state your real name and town of residence.
- 61 5. Sharing comments, announcements and concerns are encouraged rather than
62 asking questions. Public Comment is not a time for discussion. If you have
63 specific questions it is best to call the Town Manager to get a full explanation
64 and accurate information.
- 65 6. If the topic requires much discussion the item will be considered as an agenda
66 item at a future meeting.

67

68 Jenny Dewar, Better Bennington Corporation (BBC) Executive Director, shared the
69 following information:

- 70 • Small Business Saturday is November 27th with Santa going in and out of stores and with
71 the Mt. Anthony Choir caroling up and down the street.
- 72 • Instagram and Facebook are both “being pumped up” at better bennington and
73 downtown bennington, and we are creating a new website.
- 74 • Mayfest will return in May 2022 and Harvestfest will be added in October 2022.
- 75 • There will be a series of events at the Splash Pad on Thursdays from 5:30pm-7:00pm.
- 76 • Santa will be in the BBC lobby on December 23rd during the later afternoon into the
77 early evening telling stories. There will be refreshments and children can give Santa
78 their letters but will not be sitting on his lap.

79 **5. UPCOMING MASK MANDATE**

80 Ms. Jenkins stated that the Legislature is allowing communities to institute a mask
81 mandate that can last for up to 30 days at a time. On one hand, this will allow communities to
82 tamp down on outbreaks by increasing mask indoor usage in public places, but on the other
83 hand, it creates frustrations around enforcement as was evident with our last mask mandate.
84 “Police are not going to come out and arrest people who are not wearing their masks. And it
85 can also bring out some uncivil behavior that has been directed toward the Town, store owners,
86 and other business owners.” It also brings up the need for vaccinations if we’re all wearing
87 masks. Everyone is encouraged to be aware of the increased cases and to read the article in
88 Vermont Digger.

89 The Board will revisit this Agenda Item at the December 13, 2021 meeting.

90 **6. VCRD COMMUNITY VISIT - 10 YEAR ANNIVERSATY UPDATE**

91 **A. VISION/IMAGE**

92 **B. DOWNTOWN AS A DESTINATION**

93 Ms. Barsotti did the following presentation:

- 94 ○ BCRC facilitated 3 meetings in Bennington that began in March 2012 with 400
95 community members participating.
- 96 ○ The report from that time is on the Town’s website under Government/Reports and
97 Documents/Special Reports, as well as, on the Vermont Council on Rural Development
98 (VCRD) website.
- 99 ○ To be done in 2012 -
 - 100 ■ Develop a Bennington Vision Statement - on August 5, 2020, our current Vision
101 Statement came from our Community Policing efforts with the police

- 102 department, town staff, and the community. This is read at the beginning of
103 every Select Board meeting.
- 104 ■ Advance Community Communications and a Positive Town Image - people on
105 the outside have a better image of Bennington than people on the inside. The
106 Town has recently hired a Communications Coordinator to get the image of
107 Bennington out there through the Bennington Community Newsletter, a
108 partnership with the Bennington Banner, the Vermont Begins Here marketing
109 campaign, and the improved programming at the Bennington Community Center
110 (formerly the Bennington Rec Center).
 - 111 ■ Making Downtown Bennington a Destination - the Better Bennington
112 Corporation and the Southwestern Vermont Chamber of Commerce have been
113 working diligently to make our downtown vibrant with new businesses opening
114 and doing well.
 - 115 ■ Build a New Bennington Town Green - the Splash Pad Park offers several
116 opportunities in the center of Town. SPARC (Spaces, Parks, Art, Recreation,
117 Community) will continue to explore and evaluate other spaces, as well.

118 Mr. Spivak added the following:

- 119 ➤ Many projects take a considerable amount of time so we have to remember
120 where/when they started. Some that have come to fruition are the Orchard Village to
121 Willowbrook Path, the monthly column done by Mr. Hurd, going out to bid to redo our
122 website in early 2022 for a cost not expected to exceed \$25,000, collaboration with
123 the Bennington Blog, the maintenance of 120 miles of roads and 41 miles of sidewalks,
124 and an Environmental Achievement Award presented to the Police Department for
125 purchasing electric cars and bikes.

126 Board members reflected on how far we've come and the community efforts that it has
127 taken to be where we are today. Kudos to all involved.

128 More to come at the December 13th Board meeting.

129 7. CITIZEN SURVEY PRESENTATION

130 Mr. Spivak did the following presentation on the 2021 Citizen Survey:

- 131 ❖ This is the 3rd Citizen Survey where 840 people started the survey and 638 completed it
132 which took them an average of 14 minutes and 26 seconds. If the survey was not
133 completed, the comments that were completed were not counted. However, questions
134 could be skipped and if you got the "Thank You" at the end, what was answered was
135 counted.
- 136 ❖ In 2016 there were 530 respondents, and in 2018 there were 984.
- 137 ❖ In 2021 we allowed 3 weeks for the survey when 4 weeks were allowed in 2018.

- 138 ❖ There was a “youth bubble” in 2018 due to a drive by the teachers to encourage the
 139 youth to participate, and we wonder how that has affected our survey comparisons.
- 140 ❖ This year we had a 4 point Likert Scale and in 2016 it was a 3 point Likert Scale. A 5
 141 point Likert Scale would be the best and what we will probably do the next time.
- 142 ❖ We had copies of the survey available on Facebook, the Banner, the Town’s website, the
 143 Town’s Front Porch Forum, as well as, hard copies at the Town offices, Senior Center,
 144 Community Center and in the Banner.
- 145 ❖ Some of the 2021 questions were:
- 146 ○ What is your age? - most were 30-64
 - 147 ○ What is your relationship to Bennington? - all but 7 live or work in Bennington
 - 148 ○ Do you rent or own your own home? - 5% more people owned their own homes
 149 than 2018
 - 150 ○ Rate the parks and recreation opportunities in Bennington. - the pandemic
 151 increased awareness of the recreational opportunities in Town
 - 152 ○ Which parks should the community prioritize in the upcoming budget session? -
 153 Willow Park and the Riverwalk were 1 and 2
 - 154 ○ Rate each aspects of your neighborhood. - people feel unsafe by a drop of 13%-
 155 14% from 2018
 - 156 ○ Rate the performance of the Bennington Police Department. - a polarization
 157 from 2018
 - 158 ○ Review the following aspects of Downtown Bennington. - high ratings for
 159 attractiveness and cleanliness. In 2018 vibrancy was 62% below expectations
 160 and in 2021 it was 55% below expectations which is actually an improvement
 - 161 ○ What features would improve the vibrancy of Downtown Bennington? - more
 162 retail businesses, more events and programming, a clothing store, and an
 163 outdoor goods store
 - 164 ○ What municipal investment would have the greatest impact on the community?
 165 - redevelopment of vacant or blighted properties, facilitate a downtown food
 166 market, facilitate new or restored housing, additional bike and pedestrian paths,
 167 a downtown hardware store, and enhanced recreational activities
 - 168 ○ Rate your overall quality of life in Bennington. - consistently 66% for all three
 169 surveys
 - 170 ○ Did you attend a public forum? - down due to COVID
 - 171 ○ Are you satisfied with the overall performance of Town government? - 50% said
 172 no
 - 173 ○ Rate the performance of the Select Board. - 30%-50% low
 - 174 ○ What is the best way for the Town of Bennington to share information with you?
 175 - town website and social media, CAT-TV, front porch forum, newspapers
 - 176 ○ Rate the Town of Bennington staff. - 73%-83% high
 - 177 ○ How do you think about the future of the Town, in general, over the next couple
 178 of years? - close to 70% are indifferent or optimistic

- 179 o For the next survey -
- 180 • Fewer questions to be completed in 10 minutes so more people will
 - 181 complete the survey
 - 182 • Fix the Likert Scale
 - 183 • Consider including geolocation information to verify people are really
 - 184 from where they say they're from
 - 185 • Improve outreach to include more people in a wider demographic
 - 186 • Shortening the survey and rejuvenating the appeal to the youth with
 - 187 questions that are age appropriate that would improve the number that
 - 188 respond
 - 189 • Thanks to the community for spending a collective 169 hours on the
 - 190 survey

191 *Board comments/questions:*

192 Ms. Jenkins: Noted how helpful the survey is for the Board for future planning.

193 Mr. Haley: Noted how polarization gives us a direction to work on.

194 Ms. Conner: Making the survey available when people are voting or at a large gathering, such as
195 Mayfest, may improve participation.

196 Ms. Conner: We are never going to be done with this process. We are always going to be in the
197 middle of it.

198 Ms. Conner: A question to add could be "Do you see yourself in Bennington in 5 years?"

199 **8. IMPLEMENTING THE TOWN VISION**

200 Ms. Jenkins presented the following:

- 201 ❖ Implementing the Town Vision is the new name for Community Policing since we've
- 202 outgrown Community Policing as it had existed.
- 203 ❖ The Procedures review closed on November 17th with 21 separate comments that were
- 204 sent to the Community Policing Group.
- 205 ❖ The comments were - 5 on Traffic Stops; 3 on Social Media; 3 on Special Events; 3 on
- 206 Collaborative Partnerships; 3 on Code of Conduct; 2 on Body Worn Cameras; 1 on
- 207 Nepotism and Fraternization; and 1 general comment on the police procedures and
- 208 department.
- 209 ❖ We don't know how quickly the turn-around will be but we do have a meeting with the
- 210 police coming up.
- 211 ❖ Once a month the Police Department has been giving the Select Board and the
- 212 community a written update on trainings and activities. We will have an in-person
- 213 update at a meeting in January.

- 214 ❖ Mr. Haley and Ms. Jenkins have been working on action steps for the Declaration of
215 Inclusion. We have had conversations with civic groups, business sectors, organizations
216 focused on equity and diversity, as well as, staff from two towns plus comments from
217 interested residents. Some recommendations are to engage key organizations such as
218 the Arts Council, the BBC, Rotary, Young Professionals, and SVSU, as well as, to work
219 with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns for trainings while always keeping those
220 with disabilities in mind. The experience has been uplifting with the number of people
221 that are willing to help and be involved.
- 222 ❖ The Safety and Equity Task Force meets every 2 weeks primarily via Zoom.
- 223 ❖ We recommend visiting the Bennington Police Department website as they have made
224 several fine improvements.

225 9. MANAGER'S REPORT

226 Mr. Hurd reported the following:

- 227 ✓ *Economic Development Strategy Update* - We are very close to receiving the report and
228 recommendations of White and Burke, the firm contracted to analyze the projects
229 provided by Town departments, BCRC staff, BBC staff, and the Select Board's Economic
230 Development and Infrastructure subcommittee. Available funding sources may be the
231 \$3.9 million ARPA funds, the TIF, CDBG funds, and perhaps funds from the recently
232 approved \$1 trillion infrastructure bill. Once this work is completed, public input will be
233 sought.
- 234
- 235 ✓ *Stormwater Permits and Homeowners Associations* - In February we need to take a
236 position on the Stormwater Permits and Homeowners Associations issue. We can
237 comply by controlling what residents do on their properties (not an ideal situation) or
238 we can, with the State's assistance, seek to have these developments form
239 Homeowners Associations and through that authority manage their own stormwater.
240 I've attached a letter of explanation.

241 10. UPCOMING AGENDA

242 December 6, 2021 - Executive Session only.

243 December 13, 2021 - Take up the other two VCRD topics - Advancing a Bennington
244 Community Center and Improving Recreation and Collaborating to Address Poverty and
245 Building a Working Group.

246 December 13, 2021 - The Community Development CARES Act Public Hearing for the
247 Closure of Those Grants - YMCA, Sunrise, and UCH.

248 December 27, 2021 - Short Business Meeting only.

249 January 2022 - Presentation on the Energizer Report.

250 January 2022 - Presentation on the White and Burke Report.

251 **11. OTHER BUSINESS**

252 Mr. Haley: Kudos to all involved in the Sewer Treatment Tour.

253 Ms. Conner: Congratulations to Lynn Sweet and all who performed in the concert on the
254 football field a couple of weeks ago.

255 Ms. Conner: Kudos to all of those involved in Window Dressers with over 200 volunteers.

256 Mr. Lee-Clark: Encouraged everyone to shop locally on Small Business Saturday, as well as,
257 every day.

258 Mr. Lee-Clark: Even though the slow delivery of mail is not just a local issue it does effect the
259 Banner delivery and medications among other things. Actions to take: Don't call the Select
260 Board; Don't blame the Post Office; Do call your Federal Representatives; Do call the
261 Bennington Banner ownership; and you can file a complaint at the Post Office.

262 Mr. Lee-Clark: The first night of Hanukkah is November 28th. Happy Hanukkah. Also, the
263 downtown lights are beautiful - day or night.

264

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266 *At 7:37pm, Tom Haley and Bruce Lee-Clark seconded the adjournment of the meeting.*
267 *The motion carried with Sarah Perrin absent.*

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269

270 Respectfully submitted,

271 Nancy H. Lively

272 Secretary

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