

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD BUDGET MEETING**

2 **BENNINGTON FIRE FACILITY**

3 **MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM - 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR**

4 **130 RIVER STREET**

5 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

6 **JANUARY 3, 2022**

7 **MINUTES**

8 **SELECT BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Jeannie Jenkins-Chair; Jeanne Conner-Vice Chair; Jim  
9 Carroll; Bruce Lee-Clark; Sarah Perrin; Gary Corey and Tom Haley.

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

11 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan Monks-Zoning Administrator and Assistant  
12 Town Manager; Melissa Currier-Finance Director; Michele Johnson-Human Resources and  
13 Contracts Administrator; R.J. Joly-Public Works Director; Police Chief Paul Doucette; Police  
14 Lieutenant Cam Grande; Fire Chief James Wright; Kevin Hoyt; Nancy White; Donald Washum;  
15 Jim Therrien-Bennington Banner; Jim Vires-CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

16 At 5:00pm, Chair Jeannie Jenkins called the meeting to order.

17 The purpose of this meeting is for the Board and public to gather information and ask  
18 questions on the Police Budget, Fire Budget, and Highway Budget. No decisions will be made  
19 this evening.

20 First we will open Public Comments to take general questions from the public that can  
21 be reviewed and answered at the next budget meeting:

22 Kevin Hoyt made the following comments:

- 23 • Was surprised that anyone would be asking for a budget increase.
- 24 • Asked if anyone knew why the Vermont Christmas Tree Assn., Turning Point, CRJ,  
25 Sunrise Daycare, and the Vermont Sheriff’s Assn. all had matching EIN numbers with the  
26 Mt. Anthony Preservation Society noting that the Secretary of State was in charge of  
27 this.

28 **1. F.Y. 23 BUDGET WORK SESSION**

29 **B. FIRE BUDGET**

30 *Police Chief Doucette and Fire Chief Wright did the following presentation:*

- 31 • There is a 15% increase in the budget primarily because of the ladder truck that  
32 the voters had approved to buy. The truck hasn't been delivered yet due to COVID  
33 caused factory shut down, however, we have been assured it will be delivered in  
34 February or March 2022.
- 35 • The first payment on the truck will occur in FY23 for \$73,490.
- 36 • #03-4580-650 Lease Payments - \$74,410 for the rescue pumper truck obtained in  
37 2014 at \$49,910 and the 25 SCBA system units obtained in 2018 at \$24,500.
- 38 • #03-4570.810 Building Improvements - \$50,000 to install heat pumps in the 3<sup>rd</sup>  
39 floor public space reducing the noise of operations and potentially some of the cost to  
40 heat and cool the room. They are used by many organizations.
- 41 • #03-4540.230 Small Tools and Equipment - \$19,220 to replace 8 Motorola radios  
42 at \$2,140 each.
- 43 • #03-4580.840 Transfer to Reserve Fund - \$25,000 which is reduced from last  
44 year because we have purchased the new console.

45 *Board questions/comments answered by Chief Doucette and Chief Wright:*

46 Ms. Jenkins: Do we replace a certain number of radios each year? Our goal is to try and get  
47 them to last 5-7 years and they are consistent with what the police department is using.

48 Ms. Jenkins: Why did we need a new ladder truck? The new truck will be much safer because it  
49 is controlled from the ground and is/will be a necessity with all of the projects that we have  
50 going on in Bennington such as the Putnam Block. We also work closely with other towns and it  
51 will serve for the mutual aid calls.

52 Ms. Perrin: Reiterated that the ladder truck had already been approved by the voters and  
53 thanked the volunteer Fire Department for their service.

54 Ms. Conner: Is there anything else that you know of that is coming for future budgets or even  
55 next year? Two of our pumper trucks are over 20 years old but we will wait until the ladder  
56 truck has been paid down a bit. We are building our reserve to replace Engine 935 to minimize  
57 the tax burden, as well as, preparing to sell our current certified ladder truck with the proceeds  
58 of the sale being put into our reserve.

59 Ms. Conner: Is #03-4510.410 Educational for training? Yes.

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61 **A. POLICE BUDGET**

62 *Police Chief Doucette and Police Lt. Grande did the following presentation:*

- 63 • #01-4180.830 Machinery & Equipment - \$121,900. Proposed purchase of 2 new  
64 Interceptor Ford SUV Hybrids at \$52,750 each - including all ancillary equipment  
65 installed - to replace two other vehicles with high mileage.

- 66 • Our current hybrids are getting 5.5 to 6 more mpg than our other regular SUV's  
67 mostly because they shut off at a crash scene and the lights run on batteries.
- 68 • We are also proposing to purchase 2 Honda ATV's at \$8,200 each to provide  
69 coverage in our parks, trails, and at events. We have had increased complaints about  
70 ATV's and dirt bikes and we need to get to where they are.
- 71 • #01-4130.410 Educational - \$18,500. We have been working with the Vermont  
72 League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) and the Chief and Lt. Grande will complete the FBI  
73 Leader Training in the middle of February with more traditional leadership trainings for  
74 supervisors, as well as, community relations trainings. This line item has increased by  
75 \$5,000.
- 76 • #01-4100.670 Safety - \$7,300. We are instituting an annual mandatory mental  
77 health visit and bringing in instructors on nutrition and sleep deprivation which has  
78 increased this line item by \$2,960.
- 79 • #01-4180.650 - Lease/Purchase Payments - \$48,010. Our body worn and  
80 vehicles cameras are starting to fail and we are proposing to replace them with the  
81 newest technology - that is 7 systems meaning 7 vehicle cameras and 23 body worn  
82 cameras that are synced with each other. It is a 5-year agreement which provides  
83 replacement of body worn cameras in the third year at no additional cost. Total cost is  
84 \$175,300 with the 1<sup>st</sup> year expense \$48,010.
- 85 • #01-4140.340 Communications - \$10,500. This is level funded from FY22 and is  
86 for cell phones, mobile data terminals, air cards, etc.
- 87 • #01-4100.100 Salaries and Wages - \$2,325,730. Increased only 1.67% due to the  
88 number of new officers replacing longer serving officers at a lower rate.
- 89 • #01-4100.110 Overtime Wages - \$209,000. We are down 3 officers with 3  
90 graduating from the Academy in February 2022 and 1 entering in March 2022. We are  
91 working with Jonah in the hopes of recruiting 3 more to enter the Academy in August  
92 2022 and graduate in January 2023. With this scenario, the original ask was for 12%  
93 which Mr. Hurd lowered to 9%, or \$209,000. Chief Doucette is now requesting that it be  
94 raised to the 12%, or \$230,000. We were asked to keep our overall budget increase  
95 under 3% and came in at 1.94%. We are now asking for an additional \$21,000 for  
96 potential overtime to be sure that we are prepared with adequate coverage as needed.
- 97 • #01-4100.340 Communication - \$28,500. This is level funded from FY22 and is  
98 for guardian employee tracking, e-mails, anti-virus software, global data terminal  
99 licenses, secure ID software, etc. to stay in compliance with the State of Vermont.

100 *Board questions/comments answered by Chief Doucette and Lt. Grande:*

101 Mr. Carroll: Do you have to be licensed to drive an ATV? The ATV's are required to be  
102 registered but the operators are not required to be licensed. However, we will be trained to  
103 operate them by the Vermont Department of Fish and Game.

104 Ms. Conner: Where will the ATV's be stored? Probably at our storage facility on Burgess Road.

105 Ms. Jenkins: Why 2 ATV's? For safety reasons, no one ever goes out alone.

106 Ms. Jenkins: Can covering these areas be done with e-bikes? No, because e-bikes were meant  
107 for use on the streets and not on rough terrain.

108 Mr. Corey: Why is #01-4170.680 Repair & Maintenance at \$10,400 - a reduction of \$25,600?  
109 This is because we got the generator last year.

110 Mr. Haley: Why the ATV's? We have a John Deere side-by-side that can travel 25-28mph but is  
111 too wide for the more remote trails, not easy to maneuver, and does not have power steering.

112 Mr. Haley: How will these help enforcement? By having presence at the destinations where the  
113 violators are headed.

114 Mr. Carroll: What was the cost and top speed of the e-bikes? They cost ~\$3,200/each and the  
115 helmets were \$300/each. They can go 28-29mph.

116 Mr. Carroll: How long do the batteries last? About three 8-hour shifts.

117 Mr. Lee-Clark: Are you keeping track of charging costs vs gasoline costs, and if not, will you in  
118 the future? The batteries are charging as they are operating so we do not charge them by  
119 plugging them in and we will do more official tracking of gasoline consumption comparisons  
120 this upcoming year.

121 Ms. Perrin: Do you have enough staff to operate the ATV's? We're good there.

122 Ms. Conner: Was happy to see the mandatory wellness visits for mental health and nutrition.

123 Ms. Conner: Do you need a trailer to transport the ATV's between locations? Yes, we have a  
124 trailer that we use to move the side-by-side as needed.

125 Ms. Conner: Is there a market for used police vehicles? Yes, we have moved two vehicles to the  
126 used car dealership and we are keeping the side-by-side for buildings and grounds usage.

127 Ms. Jenkins: How does it work with \$200 in mileage for trainings and an increase of \$2,750 to  
128 \$7,500 in meals and lodging? The mileage dollars are only if someone has to use their personal  
129 vehicle to go to a training.

130 Ms. Jenkins: Have you budgeted enough for the additional trainings? We believe so because  
131 some supervisors have expressed an interest in becoming instructors which will be a savings.

132 Ms. Perrin: How long are the body cameras good for? Our current ones that are 5 years old  
133 were outdated in 2 years so we need to get up-to-date.

134 Mr. Carroll: What is the average shelf life of the body cameras and are they water proof? 3  
135 years and they are water resistant, not water proof.

136 *Public questions/comments:*

137 Donald Washum: Are the previous 3 years of budgets available? Ms. Jenkins answered they are  
138 on line and recommended contacting the Library to have them printed out, if needed.

139 Nancy White: How can Community Policing start in late spring/early summer if it hasn't been  
140 "wrapped up" yet after 2 ½ years? Ms. Jenkins answered that what we've been doing the last 2  
141 years is not "a thing, it's more of a process" for police presence in the community, trainings,  
142 functioning equipment, etc. are all related to community policing. Ms. Conner added that  
143 community policing is "an ongoing initiative".

144 Nancy White: Was it said that Bennington won't be using the phrase Community Policing? Ms.  
145 Jenkins responded that what was said was that the work the Board is doing has outgrown the  
146 phrase Community Policing because it is too narrow for the work that is being done. We are  
147 now referring to it as Implementing the Town Vision. Ms. White hopes that safety is  
148 maintained within the Town Vision Statement. Chief Doucette added that they prefer to refer  
149 to it as Community Engaged Policing, and not just Community Policing.

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### 151 C. HIGHWAY BUDGET

152 Mr. Hurd stated that the Highway Budget is greatly impacted by what State aid may be  
153 available so the taxpayer burden could be potentially reduced by grants that we may receive,  
154 primarily for the larger projects.

155 *R.J. Joly, Public Works Director, did the following presentation:*

- 156 ○ The hope is to get the dollars Mr. Hurd has referenced because the \$175K from  
157 the State for bridges doesn't go very far.
- 158 ○ The Depot Street bridge has increased to over \$545K - an increase of \$105K since  
159 2018 - and the Mt. Anthony Road bridge has increased \$72K since 2020.
- 160 ○ We are paying \$110-\$160/hour for labor on vehicle maintenance. Beside fire  
161 equipment, the Town owns 38 vehicles <1 ton, 14 vehicles >1 ton, 23 pieces of  
162 heavy equipment, and 25 trailers.
- 163 ○ We have no one in-house to oversee a maintenance plan for our vehicles and  
164 there is a trust issue with the outside contractors.
- 165 ○ Even though it isn't listed in the budget, it is time to get a full time maintenance  
166 person, and it would be cost effective. The big jobs would still be outsourced.
- 167 ○ We would also like to add two additional laborers based on the amount of work  
168 that we do, an aging crew, and maintenance jobs being delayed.
- 169 ○ There are no Class 2 roads in the budget
- 170 ○ There has been a 40%-50% increase in price of products with some increased by  
171 100%.

172 *Board questions/comments answered by Mr. Joly and Mr. Hurd:*

173 Ms. Conner: Do you know the cost efficiencies of an in-house maintenance position and will you  
174 need to buy equipment for that individual to do his/her job? This is still in the discussion phase  
175 so we don't know what the actual savings would be at this time. We will continue to work on  
176 this and hopefully come up with a plan that will fit into the budget as presented.

177 Mr. Corey: Are you short staffed only in the summer? There is no more down time when we  
178 used to do equipment maintenance to transition from one season to the next so it is a year  
179 round situation.

180 Ms. Jenkins: What is causing the labor shortage? We're asked to do more projects - 5,500'-  
181 5,800' of sidewalk that was typically 2,800'; PFOA; stormwater management; and staying  
182 compliant with the State. Over the years we have become more of a construction crew than  
183 just a maintenance crew somewhat due to contractor availability and cost.

184 Mr. Lee-Clark: We wouldn't be able to get the quality or quantity from anywhere else for the  
185 same price. Kudos to the "exceptionally skilled and exceptionally caring crew".

186 Ms. Conner: Even though these positions are not in the budget, it is good that an awareness of  
187 the need for more help has been made - there is a benefit to hiring new people to keep the  
188 existing staff. Mr. Joly's concern is that pay rates have increased substantially with many  
189 businesses looking for help, however, we haven't lost anyone yet to "moving on".

190 Ms. Jenkins: Do you feel that this year will be an easier year? It's probably going to be as busy  
191 as last year.

192 Mr. Corey: What is #02-5110.221 Winter Maintenance Supplies - \$278,600 for? This is mainly  
193 due to the salt costs increase of \$9.00/ton and we propose to purchase 3,400 tons - the same  
194 as last year. (Last year's cost was \$238,000). Remaining funds are for deicer and winter sand  
195 noting that the covered sand storage has reduced the amount used.

196 Mr. Corey: What is #02-5200.560 Other Purchased Services - \$237,060 for? We will be using  
197 more expensive concrete. Concrete went up over 3 times this summer going from \$139 to  
198 \$154 so far. Proposed for this year is East Main Street and North Branch Street to Gage Street  
199 with both projects including drainage work.

200 *Public questions/comments:*

201 Nancy White: It shouldn't have taken 30 years for Maple Street to be fixed or 25 years to get a  
202 priority list of street replacements. Mr. Joly responded that there is a sidewalk list that is  
203 updated every year with Mr. Monks, however, we don't go out 5 years because of what  
204 unknowns may come up during those years. Ms. Jenkins added that we always need to  
205 consider what we can do with what we have.

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

207 **D. OTHER BUDGETS AS TIME ALLOWS**

208            There were no other budget discussions this evening. Mr. Hurd stated that on January  
209 8, 2022 at 9:00am the Agenda would include the following budget items:

- 210            1. Recreation
- 211            2. General Fund
- 212            3. The Remainder of the Budget
- 213            4. Bennington Free Library
- 214            5. John G. McCullough Free Library
- 215            6. Bennington Rescue Squad
- 216            7. EXECUTIVE SESSION - Set salaries for the Town Manager, Town Clerk, and Treasurer
- 217            8. Finalize Budget

218            ***At 7:15pm, Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded the adjournment of the***  
219 ***meeting. The motion carried unanimously.***

220

221    Respectfully submitted,

222    Nancy H. Lively

223    Secretary