

1 **TOWN OF BENNINGTON**
2 **2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**
3 **MEETING HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM WEBINAR**
4 **FEBRUARY 28, 2022**
5 **MINUTES**

6 **MODERATOR:** Jason Morrissey

7 **ALSO PRESENT:** Bennington Select Board Members - Jeannie Jenkins-Chair; Jeanne Conner-Vice Chair;
8 Jim Carroll; Bruce Lee-Clark; Sarah Perrin; Tom Haley; Gary Corey; Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Dan
9 Monks-Assistant Town Manager; Joan Pinsonneault-Treasurer; Cassandra Barbeau-Town Clerk;
10 Shannon Barsotti-Community Development Director; Jonah Spivak-Communication Coordinator; Kristal
11 Hier- ASL Interpreter; Stephanie Lane-Shires Housing Executive Director; Jenna Caslin; Lindsey Brillon;
12 Lenora Volkmer; Tom Donahue; Lynn Mazza; Chris Adams; Sean-Marie Oller; Linda Putney; Charlie
13 Gingo; Jonathan Cooper; Bernadette Robin; Chloe Viner Collins; Representative Mary Morrissey; Nancy
14 White; Jenny Rozyki; Madison Kramer; Tina Cook; David Silver; CAT-TV and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

15 1. MODERATOR OPENS MEETING; READS WARNING

16 At 7:30 p.m., Moderator Jason Morrissey called the meeting to order and explained the process
17 of how the meeting will be run via Zoom Webinar.

18 Mr. Morrissey read the following Warning:

19 **WARNING**

20 **TOWN OF BENNINGTON**

21 **2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

22 **VIA ZOOM**

23 *The residents of the Town of Bennington qualified by law to vote in Town Meeting are hereby notified*
24 *and warned to meet (via Zoom) in said Town on Monday, February 28, 2022 at 7:30 p.m., (or*
25 *immediately following the Southwest Vermont Union Elementary School District's Annual meeting*
26 *should that run over) to transact the business specified to be done from the floor. Provisions for the*
27 *hearing impaired will be in place for this meeting.*

28 *Following the completion of such business, the Meeting will stand adjourned to Tuesday, March 1,*
29 *2022, at The Bennington Fire Facility on River Street (Lincoln Street entrance). The polls are open from*
30 *7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. for the election of officers and voting on all ballot articles specified. However,*
31 *those on the checklist to vote in the Village of North Bennington shall vote for the election of officers*
32 *and on all ballot articles at the North Bennington Village Office on Main Street in North Bennington.*
33 *The Bennington Fire Facility above mentioned, is hereby established as the central polling place for*

34 those on the checklist to vote in said Bennington. Residents of Bennington and North Bennington may
35 register to vote at the Town Clerk's Office, 205 South Street, Bennington, Vermont. Eligible residents
36 registering on Election Day must do so at the polling place where they will cast their Town Meeting
37 ballot.

38 The Select Board members introduced themselves and all staff present were acknowledged.

39 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

40 *BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED FROM THE "FLOOR"*

41 *Monday, February 28, 2022*

7:30 P.M.

42 *ARTICLE 1. TOWN REPORT: To hear the report of Town Officers.*

43 Jonah Spivak and Shannon Barsotti presented the following Town Reports:

- 44 • Bennington is Vermont's first town, chartered in 1749 and settled in 1761. The original charter,
45 signed by Benning Wentworth, is housed in our original town records vault.
- 46 • This is Bennington's 260th Town Meeting.
- 47 • Thank you to all who have kept us safe and well informed during the COVID pandemic.
- 48 • The Town's Vision Statement is:
 - 49 ➤ "Bennington is a welcoming, engaged, inclusive, resilient community where everyone
50 regardless of identity shares in our vitality and benefits from an outstanding quality of
51 life."
- 52 • BENNINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT -
 - 53 ➤ Responded to 10,800 calls and participated with Southwest Vermont Health Care in the
54 Drug Take Back Program and COVID Safety.
 - 55 ➤ Community Policing initiatives were taken on by updating police policies and procedures
56 and working with the Safety and Equity Task Force.
 - 57 ➤ Received an award for replacing fossil fueled vehicles with hybrid vehicles and other
58 energy efficiency measures.
 - 59 ➤ Hosted summer camps and events where the community and police co-mingled.
- 60 • FIRE DEPARTMENT -
 - 61 ➤ The all-volunteer department of men and women respond to hundreds of calls each
62 year that include fires, vehicle crashes, police and medical assists among others.
 - 63 ➤ They have made the Bennington Battle Day weekend a town tradition for 57 years.
 - 64 ➤ Provided fire prevention training in 6 of our area schools.
 - 65 ➤ Anyone interested in becoming a member should contact an existing member for
66 information.
- 67 • DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS -
 - 68 ✓ Highway Department maintain all roads (128 miles), curbs, sidewalks (41 miles),
69 and vegetation along the road, as well as, hundreds of miles of ditches, culverts,
70 and swales.

- 71 ✓ Projects included building a sidewalk and retaining wall along Imperial Avenue,
 72 repaving the road, rebuilding curbs, and repairing stormwater damage along
 73 Washington Avenue, capping the old Furnace Brook landfill, and managing town
 74 forest land in Pownal and Woodford.
- 75 ✓ The Town owns 445 acres of land mostly not in Bennington. Forest
 76 management has earned the Town \$40,000 and is expected to reach \$100,000
 77 before the project is done.
- 78
- 79 ✓ The Water Department's ability to harness water was a major factor in the early
 80 industrialization of Bennington.
- 81 ✓ Our water is now a revenue stream as we now sell out excess Morgan Spring
 82 water to water bottling companies.
- 83 ✓ We treat and deliver an average of 1.4M gallons of water/day to Bennington
 84 residents.
- 85 ✓ Residents may have a flat rate or a metered rate for their water, whereas, all
 86 commercial users are required to be metered.
- 87
- 88 ✓ The Sewer Department treats an average of 3.1M gallons/day before it is
 89 released into the Walloomsac River.
- 90 ✓ Residents pay ~\$3.00/day for combined water and sewer which is ~\$30/month
 91 below the national average.
- 92 • PLANNING DEPARTMENT -
- 93 ➤ Works with the Planning Commission and Development Review Board to develop the
 94 Town Plan and Land Use and Development Regulations.
- 95 ➤ The Land Use and Development Regulations have been updated to include Form Based
 96 Design Standards.
- 97 ➤ After 20 years, the Rail/Trail Project from Bennington Station to Northside Drive is finally
 98 underway.
- 99 ➤ The Orchard Village Willowbrook Pathway has been completed.
- 100 • COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT -
- 101 ➤ Tasks include:
- 102 ✓ Making Downtown a destination and enhancing development with support from
 103 Federal and State grants.
- 104 ✓ Partner with the Better Bennington Corporation (BBC) for Mayfest, the Chamber
 105 of Commerce for Garlic Town, USA, and the Vermont Begins Here marketing
 106 campaign.
- 107 ✓ Other partnering takes place with the YMCA at the Bennington Community
 108 Center and several other locations with several activities.
- 109 ✓ There have been many new businesses opening in the Downtown, as well as, the
 110 completion of the Putnam Block redevelopment and the Splash Pad.

- 111 ✓ Community Block Grant funding is managed for affordable housing in several
- 112 locations.
- 113 ✓ Our new Communication Coordinator ensures that everyone is kept abreast of
- 114 what is happening in the Town including the associated special events, designing
- 115 a new more user friendly website that combines our other 3 websites, and
- 116 conducting the citizens survey.
- 117 ✓ Active planning has begun for the Vermont 250th celebration in 2027.
- 118 • OTHERS -
- 119 ➤ Buildings and Grounds manages all of the multiple parks and fields throughout the Town
- 120 including our new Dog Park.
- 121 ➤ The Town Office was built in 1944 and donated to the Town for municipal use in 1920
- 122 and is the root of our Town Government.
- 123 ➤ Our several Boards and Commissions are made up of many citizens who are
- 124 volunteering their time to serve in these areas.

125

126 Jeanne Conner highlighted the incredible work and contributions that Shires Housing, their
127 Executive Director, Stephanie Lane, their entire staff, and Board of Directors have done for our Town.
128 The list of how Shires positively impacts our community is long and includes hiring local contractors
129 when possible, building energy efficient housing while maintaining historic preservation, participating
130 in food distribution and other health and wellness programs, partnering with other agencies and the
131 Town in building the Orchard Village Pathway. We are honored to bestow the following Resolution:

132 "TOWN OF BENNINGTON

133 RESOLUTION

134 HONORING STEPHANIE LANE AND SHIRES HOUSING

135 Whereas, Stephanie Lane has been the Executive Director for Shires Housing since 2015, and with her
136 leadership has helped to increase the number of affordable housing units from 225 to more than 400
137 in her tenure; and

138 Whereas, she has improved the SASH program which serves 375 Medicare eligible individuals and
139 improved the overall health and wellness of low and moderate income families; and

140 Whereas, under Stephanie's leadership, Shires Housing has created more diverse housing
141 opportunities while investing more than \$46 million in Bennington County; and

142 Whereas, she is now working with various community partners to develop solutions for workforce
143 housing, recovery housing, senior housing, and emergency housing while supporting historic
144 preservation and energy conservation.

145 Now therefore, be it Resolved that the Bennington Select Board hereby recognizes and honors
146 Stephanie Lane and Shires Housing for the commitment to provide affordable housing, to provide
147 health and wellness services to families, and to enrich the communities of Bennington County.

148 Dated at Bennington, Vermont this 28th day of February, 2022

149 Bennington Select Board, Town of Bennington, Vermont”

150 Stephanie Lane thanked the Town for this honor and all those involved with Shires Housing for
151 their continued support.

152

153 Mr. Morrissey read the following ARTICLES:

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

155 BUSINESS TO BE TRANSACTED BY BALLOT

156 TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2022

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

158 AT THE POLLING PLACES SPECIFIED ABOVE

159 SELECT BOARD ELECTION. Three Select Board Members residing in the Town shall be elected
160 for a term of three (3) years.

161 TOWN MODERATOR ELECTION. Town Moderator, an individual residing in the Town shall be
162 elected for a term of three (3) years.

163 TOWN TREASURER ELECTION. Town Treasurer, an individual residing in the Town shall be
164 elected for a term of three (3) years.

165 ARTICLE 1. Shall the Town appropriate for the next fiscal year, July 1, 2022 through June 30,
166 2023, the total sum of \$14,718.930.00 consisting of the following: \$4,336,020.00 for the laying out,
167 maintaining, and repairing of the highways and bridges of the Town; and \$10,382,910.00 for the
168 payment of the following: Any indebtedness not otherwise specifically provided for, interest on
169 indebtedness, legally authorized State and County taxes, the prosecution and defense of the common
170 rights and interests of the inhabitants of the Town, and for other necessary incidental expenses?

171 The proposed budget includes \$25,000.00 for fire equipment, \$5,000.00 for fire facilities,
172 \$5,000.00 for technology improvements, \$13,000 for parking improvements, and \$393,200.00 for
173 healthcare reserve and workers compensation insurance, \$40,000.00 for marketing, \$100,000.00 for
174 bridges and \$2,000.00 for well maintenance, any unexpended portion of which will be reserved to
175 subsequent years for that purpose.

176 ARTICLE 2. Shall the voters set the Select Board’s pay at \$1,400.00 annually?

177 *ARTICLE 3. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for Bennington*
178 *County Association Against Child Abuse?*

179 Jenna Caslin spoke to the work that the Bennington County Association Against Child Abuse
180 does by serving victims of sexual abuse and child victims of egregious physical abuse and neglect with
181 coordinated case management, forensic interviews and advocacy for victims and family members.
182 They also provide education for prevention, outreach, and support groups.

183 *ARTICLE 4. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$5,000.00 for Project*
184 *Against Violent Encounters?*

185 Lindsey Brillon stated that PAVE has been providing services to survivors of domestic and sexual
186 abuse in Bennington for over 40 years and have built a relationship of trust in the community. There
187 were over 1,000 calls during COVID to help those that could not come in person, however, our shelter
188 remained open to over 1,000 survivors. Teaching healthy relationships in our schools has become a
189 priority in the prevention of abuse.

190 *ARTICLE 5. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$5,500.00 for Green*
191 *Mountain Retired and Senior Volunteer Program?*

192 Lenora Volkmer cited all of the beneficial work that the volunteers do for the community, such
193 as, Meals on Wheels, support the American Red Cross blood drives, quilting and knitting projects, food
194 drives, friendly phone calls, tax assistance, support to the Bennington Free Library (virtual and books
195 on wheels), the Senior Center (bone builders), Bennington Museum, and assisting at the Sacred Heart
196 and BROCC food pantries, as well as, collaboration with many other organizations.

197 *ARTICLE 6. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$6,750.00 for BROCC -*
198 *Community Action in Southwestern Vermont?*

199 Tom Donahue stated that “the foundation of a community is only as strong as how we treat our
200 most vulnerable”. BROCC helps people in crisis and then provides a sustainable path forward. Due to
201 the prolonged pandemic, we have provided cold weather clothing to 20 families, hundreds of cloth
202 masks, increased operations from 3-5 days/week feeding hundreds of families, and added a senior
203 hour. We also provided \$50,000 of fuel assistance and \$153,000 to house the homeless, plus business
204 relief funding, and home weatherization services.

205 *ARTICLE 7. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$7,000.00 for Vermont*
206 *Center for Independent Living?*

207 Lynn Mazza noted that the Vermont Center for Independent Living is a disabilities and rights
208 advocacy organization that believes that people with disabilities have the right to live with dignity and
209 appropriate supports in their own homes. We offer straight information and referral, the Home Access
210 Program, the Sue Williams Freedom Fund, an equipment distribution program, the Peer Advocacy
211 Program, Meals on Wheels, and our Youth Transition Program. We are again meeting with people
212 face-to-face but by appointment only.

213 *ARTICLE 8. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$7,500.00 for*
214 *Southwestern Vermont Council on Aging, Inc.?*

215 Chris Adams stated that our mission is to be a community force for seniors to maintain
216 maximum independence and quality of life. Our various services include nutrition and case
217 management, Meals on Wheels (27,000 meals to 170 elders), senior help line with Medicare and
218 health benefit counseling, legal service assistance, senior companion program, transportation
219 assistance, caregiver support, and a money management program.

220 *ARTICLE 9. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$10,000.00 for The*
221 *Tutorial Center?*

222 Sean-Marie Oller noted that The Tutorial Center is in its 51st year. We offer a pathway to a high
223 school diploma or GED, English as a second language, work readiness skills in literacy, math, and
224 technology. We also help our students with employment, housing, and social skills, as well as, working
225 closely with the schools.

226 *ARTICLE 10. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$11,000.00 Bennington*
227 *Project Independence?*

228 Linda Putney stated that BPI offers non-residential community services to assist older adults
229 and younger persons with disabilities. They also provide valuable support and respite to family
230 members and care givers. We provide nursing care, dignified personal care, social contact, mental and
231 physical activities, nutritious meals, art therapy, music, trips, and transportation to and from home - all
232 of which help keep older adults out of nursing homes.

233 *ARTICLE 11. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$12,500.00 for*
234 *Bennington Free Clinic?*

235 Charlie Gingo shared that the Bennington Free Clinic has been in operation for 13 years. We
236 serve people that have no insurance because they can't afford it or have very high deductible
237 insurance. We have a team of volunteer doctors and nurses and refer patients to specialists as
238 needed. We also help patients get enrolled in one of Vermont's health insurance programs, we screen
239 everyone for substance abuse, depression, and other mental health issues, as well as, dental care. The
240 dental clinic at Molly Stark School provides dental work to the children with referrals to dentists for
241 more serious problems. The town funding helps us to pay for lab work, diagnostic tests, medical
242 supplies, and equipment.

243 *ARTICLE 12. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$15,000.00 for Sunrise*
244 *Family Resource Center?*

245 Jonathan Cooper stated that the Sunrise Family Resource Center is a State designated
246 parent/child center with the primary goal of working with families and their children. We have served
247 1,000 families and done 3,000 home visits this past year which included housing, mental health, and
248 stress management. We had 7 young parents receive their high school diplomas, provide 40 new born

249 bags/month, and have a 22-slot child care operation. Town funding allows our workers to be able to
250 collaborate with several other agencies and go a little beyond their normal work responsibilities.

251 *ARTICLE 13. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$21,600.00 for*
252 *Bennington Area Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice?*

253 Bernadette Robin noted that Town support enables VNA & Hospice to receive the care they
254 deserve in the comfort of their home regardless of their financial situation. Last year we made over
255 160,580 visits to 3,298 patients in Bennington and Rutland counties. Thousands of hours of skilled
256 nursing care is made possible from the funding we receive from the towns that we serve.

257 *ARTICLE 14. Shall the voters increase the F.Y. 2023 General Fund by the sum of \$25,000.00 for*
258 *Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless?*

259 Chloe Viner Collins stated that the Coalition has been serving the homeless for over 20 years.
260 We currently have two year round shelters - one for families (up to 9 families) and one for individuals
261 (up to 16 individuals). We are now working with Shires Housing to open a new shelter this summer. In
262 addition to housing, we also have drop-in services for clothing, food, or a shower for those in need.
263 We provide case management services to everyone and food services to those in motels.

264 *ARTICLE 15. Shall the Town of Bennington grant tax exempt status as provided in T.32 §3840 to the*
265 *Bennington Rescue Squad, Inc. for its property #49514600 for tax listing years April 1, 2022 through and*
266 *including March 31, 2027?*

267 No one from the Rescue Squad came to speak.

268 All that spoke on Article 3 through Article 14 thanked the Town for their support.

269

270 **C. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

271 Jenny Rozyki, Director of the John G. McCullough Library: People can become members of the
272 library on our website, www.mcculloughlibrary.org . Currently the library building is closed due to
273 extensive renovations and much needed repairs that will give us family friendly accessible rest rooms
274 on all floors, rewiring, fire safety improvements, an HVAC system, a water fountain, a meeting room,
275 and an accessible back door. Construction should be completed in late June. The project was not
276 funded with local dollars.

277 Madison Kramer, Window Dressers: This is a program that builds low cost, window inserts to
278 help insulate the old, drafty buildings. We built ~400 inserts last year and are embarking on ir second
279 year. Our volunteers measure the windows, we receive kits to build them, and have received funding
280 to cover the cost of \$42/window for those that can't afford it.

281 Tina Cook, President of National New Media Corporation: My Corporation assists low to
282 moderate income BIPOC and marginalized community members. I have enjoyed this experience and

283 the opportunity to speak and recommend closed captioning for the next meeting. Also, a moment of
284 silence recognized Sandy Sumner passing, as well as, all of those who are dear to us that have passed
285 in the last year.

286 David Silver, Attorney: Is with the law firm that represents the PFOA class action suit against St.
287 Gobain that has recently settled for cash payments to community members who are in the class - or
288 people that owned property in the Zone of Concern in March 2016 or free medical monitoring if they
289 had consumed water from a contaminated well during this period. The Zone of Concern is made up of
290 large sections of Bennington and North Bennington and a little bit of Shaftsbury. The southern border
291 of the Zone is Main Street in Bennington from the intersection of 79 west to Gypsy Lane and onto
292 Walloomsac Road; the western border is Airport Road up to but not including Whipstock Road onto
293 Ore Bed Road, Harrington Road, River Road, and onto Route 67 in Shaftsbury; the northern border is
294 Route 67, parts of White Creek Road, Lamb Road, Harvest Hill Drive, parts of Matteson Road, McCarthy
295 Acres, Town Line Road over to Atwater Road, Chapel Road and the beginning of Spur Road; and the
296 eastern border is Route 79 including Bedrock Road down to Route 9 and a little triangle along Burgess
297 Road and Main Street to the intersection of Route 279. If you're in the Zone, even if you've always had
298 town water, or your well was not contaminated, or it had less than 20 part/trillion, you are eligible for
299 a cash payment. Any questions, call Mr. Silver at 802-442-6341.

300 This settlement has been approved preliminarily by the court and there will be a final hearing
301 on April 18, 2022. Minimum payments are \$1,000 for vacant lots, \$4,000 for homes always on town
302 water, \$10,000 for homes less than 20 parts/trillion, \$20,000 for home above 20 parts/trillion, and
303 \$30,000 for homes above 20 parts/trillion unfeasible to connect to town water. Payments may be
304 higher depending on the value of your property.

305 Also, a \$6M fund was created for medical monitoring if you had high levels of PFOA - more than
306 2.1 part/billion - in your blood. Free blood tests will be available after May 2022.

307 To get the payments you must file a claim with the correct supporting documents by the
308 deadline which is probably going to be August 22, 2022. Claims can be filed at
309 www.benningtonvtclassaction.com or download a claim form, fill it out, and mail it. Call Mr. Silver's
310 office if you do not know how to use a computer to get a claim form.

311 Representative Mary Morrissey: Verified that the total town budget is \$14,718,930 and includes
312 the General Fund, Highway Fund, and the Bennington Village Fire Department.

313 Nancy White: Verified that, if the budget passes and all of the agency requests pass, our taxes
314 will increase by 5%. She encouraged people to vote down the budget.

315 Nancy White: We should already know everything the Select Board is going to allow the
316 community police oversight committee to do including how much their budget will be and where the
317 money is going to come from. We should have also heard from the Police Department and she is
318 concerned that the Committee will make it harder to hire police officers. Ms. Jenkins added that the
319 budget hasn't been decided yet, there has been a month long written comment period that ends on

320 March 7th followed by two more meetings where oral public comment will still be taken. A decision
321 will be made after the Board hears from the residents of the community.

322 Nancy White: The YMCA has not provided any financial information in the Town Report. Mr.
323 Hurd responded that, as a contracted service, they're not required to provide their budget information
324 in the Town Report. However, they haven't billed the Town for the last 3 months and they haven't bill
325 us for July through February of this year because they had received sufficient funding elsewhere. This
326 saves us \$5,000-\$6,000/month.

327 ***At 9:13 p.m., Jason Morrissey declared the meeting adjourned until tomorrow, March 1, 2022,***
328 ***at 7:00 a.m. when the polling places at the Bennington Fire Facility and the Village Town Office in***
329 ***North Bennington will be open for voting.***

330

331 Respectfully submitted,

332 Nancy H. Lively

333 Secretary