

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING**

2 **130 RIVER STREET**

3 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

4 **MARCH 25, 2022**

5 **MINUTES**

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

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

9 **ALSO PRESENT:** Stuart Hurd-Town Manager; Jonah Spivak-Communication Coordinator; Joan  
10 Pinsonneault-Treasurer; Michael McDonough-Planning Commission and Historic Preservation  
11 Commission Chair; Ted Brady-VLCT Executive Director; Mary Rogers-Village of North  
12 Bennington Trustee; Colleen Harrington; 5 citizens; Jim Vires-CAT-TV; and Nancy H. Lively-  
13 Secretary.

14 At 3:00pm, Chair Jeannie Jenkins called the meeting to order.

15 **1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

16 Ted Brady, Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) Executive Director introduced  
17 himself as did the Board and those present.

18 **2. VLCT OVERVIEW/STRATEGIC PLAN DISCUSSION**

19 Mr. Brady did the following presentation:

- 20 • Been Executive Director for a year and, because of the pandemic, has just gone on the  
21 road to meet as many select boards as possible.
- 22 • VLCT is a non-profit organization made up of all Vermont cities and towns - 246 - as  
23 members and 30 villages and 110 special districts as associate members.
- 24 • The 5 Core Benefits of Membership and purpose of the VLCT are:
  - 25 ➤ SUPPORT -
    - 26 ✓ Legal issues which Bennington has contacted VLCT 30 times in the last 5  
27 years for.
    - 28 ✓ All municipalities appreciate our Municipal Assistance Center. We have  
29 increased our staff by 25% - hired a new attorney and - for the first time -  
30 a finance professional.
  - 31 ➤ KNOWLEDGE -
    - 32 ✓ We have an entire book that tells a select board how to deal with dog  
33 issues, complaints, ordinances, etc.

- 34 ✓ We have several other books that tell you how to be a select board  
 35 member, model policies, etc.
- 36 ➤ REPRESENTATION -
- 37 ✓ We are a collective voice in the State House representing the voices of  
 38 the local select boards.
- 39 ✓ We have a Municipal Authority Bill in the Legislature now that would give  
 40 more local authority for select boards to exercise.
- 41 ✓ We also have been working on a Bill to champion \$50M of ARPA money  
 42 to municipalities in the term of assessment and \$250,000 for  
 43 implementation of energy efficiency and fuel upgrades to municipal  
 44 facilities.
- 45 ➤ INSURANCE -
- 46 ✓ Our trusts, thanks to Mr. Hurd, are in the best shape they've been in in a  
 47 decade.
- 48 ✓ In all insurance areas, they are financially sound and ready to protect you  
 49 in a way that doesn't threaten your membership or insurance rates going  
 50 forward.
- 51 ✓ This year rates were nearly level with a decimal point increase and we  
 52 were able to return \$3.4M in equity which essentially has reduced your  
 53 insurance premium.
- 54 ✓ Bennington spent 30 hours with our loss control program staff, had 37  
 55 participants in our drug and alcohol testing program, received a \$1,500  
 56 grant for Hazwoper Training, received a \$2,200 grant for Public Works  
 57 Safety Equipment, and have 54 people enrolled in the Pacif Learning  
 58 Program.
- 59 ➤ CONNECTION -
- 60 ✓ We connect municipalities to a variety of networks, agencies,  
 61 organizations, colleagues, and experts.
- 62 ✓ Our goal is to make select board members jobs easier, more effective,  
 63 and more enjoyable.
- 64 • We did a survey of 300 members that indicated the most prevalent municipality needs  
 65 were housing, financing and IT.
- 66 • The #1 thing the VLCT offers is training with the Select Board Institute and various other  
 67 leadership trainings and retreats that led us to four key areas of our Strategic Plan:
- 68 1. We need to grow a sustainable role for this organization to evolve and provide  
 69 municipalities services at a reasonable cost and to show our value.
- 70 1. We need to strengthen the capacity of local government.
- 71 2. We discussed developing and tracking outstanding talent for local  
 72 governments. There are select board and other town positions that are vacant  
 73 throughout the State.

74 3. Champion inclusive and resilient communities.

75 **3. TOP ISSUES FACING BENNINGTON**

76 *Board questions/comments answered by Mr. Brady:*

77 Mr. Carroll: Give an example of what you can do for us. You can call our Assistance Center for  
78 advice on how to handle any issue you have been presented with by citing an ordinance,  
79 referring you to our library, advising on HR issues, police issues, or insurance issues among  
80 others.

81 Mr. Carroll: Speak to Local Option Tax. We have tried to present a bill that includes things like  
82 the local option tax recognizing that often legislature and local government have the same  
83 goals.

84 Ms. Jenkins: Three ideas to help us with are: Board trainings to keep us up-to-date; Equity and  
85 Diversity trainings; and updating the Town's ADA plan. I will let you know what we have for  
86 policies on ADA.

87 Ms. Conner and Mr. Lee-Clark: Guidance for the Community Policing Review Board which was  
88 supposed to review personnel issues in law enforcement but there isn't any language in the  
89 statutes that would allow it to do that. It would seem that the legislature should allow the  
90 towns that wish to give this oversight authority to civilians - under the select boards - to them.  
91 It would be helpful if the VLCT could reach out to other municipalities and provide resources to  
92 us that would give us clarity. The VLCT has a prospective on policing reform that was published  
93 in 2020 that recognizes that we need to hold police accountable, and our position is that civilian  
94 oversight occurs through the select board. The State is telling the towns that they shouldn't  
95 need another piece of civilian oversight. We will further discuss this with the Town's counsel.

96 Ms. Perrin: The safety of our Town and Town officials has been impacted in the past couple of  
97 years such as a masked man with a gun on the Four Corners. What types of things can we do  
98 with that? 8 out of 10 elected officials have been impacted by some form of hate speech.  
99 Every two years we review our policies as to what should be brought to the legislature or  
100 nationally and public safety is a topic that is discussed. We're doing this in August where this  
101 could be brought up and we will be asking for volunteers to participate in July.

102 Ms. Conner: Are there trainings for elected officials on de-escalating threatening situations and  
103 being able to create our own mental health boundaries in general and not just at meetings?  
104 Social media has played a large role in this to many. We don't have any specific trainings to  
105 that but how to handle difficult situations at a meeting is covered in our select board trainings.

106 Mr. Lee-Clark: Added that we have a Social Media Policy for the police but not for any elected  
107 or town officials. Not sure, but the VLCT Assistance Center may have a model policy on this.

108 Mr. Hurd also noted that the Town is working on updating our personnel policies.

109 Mr. Carroll: Have there been any municipalities that have tried to “mend fences” with the 2 or 3  
110 individuals that find issues with everything? No example but the various personalities of select  
111 board members have found interesting ways to “convene people”. Will follow up with our  
112 team and get back to you.

113 *Public questions/comments answered by Mr. Brady:*

114 Mary Rogers, North Bennington Village Trustee: Does the VLCT have any information/guidance  
115 for those that want to set up a marijuana dispensary? There were 42 communities that had the  
116 sale of Cannabis on the ballot - Bennington was one of them - and 37 voted yes. Since this is  
117 done by private citizens and not the towns we haven’t created a guidebook on it. There is a  
118 statewide Cannabis Board that has published such a guide that is still incomplete but is a good  
119 start. Ms. Rogers added that as a new trustee, she uses the VLCT Resource Library and Model  
120 Policies a lot.

121 Colleen Harrington: What is entailed in the VLCT membership and how much does Bennington  
122 pay for it? The answers to the membership question is in the 2022 Member Guide that had  
123 been passed out earlier in the meeting. Bennington pays \$18,000-\$20,000 for dues and every  
124 town pays dues based on their population and a base fee.

125 Colleen Harrington: Concerning the local option tax discussion earlier, would the select board  
126 be able to invoke that without it being approved by the voters? That was one example of a  
127 series of authorities trying to get the legislature to give to the Town instead of requiring the  
128 Town to go to the legislature. The towns will still have to go to the voters for approval.

129 Jonah Spivak, Bennington Communications Coordinator: We have 261 years of record keeping  
130 that we have just begun digitalizing. We have also been solicited by outside companies that  
131 want us to pay for social media postings, however, we have utilized our website for keeping a  
132 record of these. With the increased social media activity/presence, it would be helpful to  
133 municipalities if the VLCT could provide guidelines for us regarding social media. I will get back  
134 to you on that.

135 Ms. Conner: Does VLCT get involved with the statewide issues of homelessness, the hotel  
136 situation, the opioid crisis, etc.? We have through our Assistance Center and advocating for  
137 policies and information that work for municipalities.

138 Mr. Lee-Clark: Thanked Trevor Whipple for his assistance primarily when working on police  
139 policies.

140 Mr. Carroll: Thanked Mick Led for his assistance in the past.

141 The Board thanked Mr. Brady for his visit and discussion.

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143 Mr. Hurd took the opportunity to inform the public who may be solicited to sell their  
144 property for the assessed value - which is unrelated to today's agenda - that our Grand List is  
145 on the website and available for anyone to see as a matter of public record.

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149 ***At 4:04pm, Bruce Lee-Clark moved and Jim Carroll seconded the adjournment of the***  
150 ***meeting. The motion carried unanimously.***

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153

154 Respectfully submitted,

155 Nancy H. Lively

156 Secretary