

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING**
2 **130 RIVER STREET**
3 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**
4 **OCTOBER 19, 2022**
5 **MINUTES**

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

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

9 **ALSO PRESENT:** Dan Monks-Assistant Town Manager; Shannon Barsotti-Community
10 Development Director; Jonah Spivak-Communications Coordinator; Jeff Goldstone-Goldstone
11 Architecture; Zak Hale-Hale Resources, LLC; Ron Hachey; Donald Washum; Chloe Viner Collins;
12 Laurie Mulhern; Judy Beckwith; Laura Boudreau; Kirk McVay; Sam Restino; Nancy White; Kayla
13 Becker; Ned Perkins; Michael McDonough; Mike Bethel; John Ryan; Lilly West Williams; Cat
14 Bryars and Madison Cramer-Shires Housing; Ilsa Svoboda-Meals on Wheels; Heather Starzynski-
15 NeighborWorks; 70 citizens; Jim Therrien-Bennington Banner; CAT-TV; and Nancy H. Lively-
16 Secretary.

17 At 5:30pm, Chair Jeannie Jenkins called the meeting to order and explained that the
18 parties responsible for the work done on the redevelopment of BennHi will do their
19 presentation first, those signed up to speak will make their comments/ask their questions, and
20 then anyone not signed up to speak will then be called upon to make their comments/ask their
21 questions. Each speaker will have 3 minutes to do so and the only topic to be discussed is the
22 BennHi redevelopment. Ms. Conner will be the timekeeper. If there are additional questions,
23 this will be continued at the Select Board Meeting on October 24, 2022.

24 **1. PUBLIC PRESENTATION ON BENNHI REDEVELOPMENT**

25 Dan Monks-Assistant Town Manager, Shannon Barsotti-Community Development
26 Director, Jeff Goldstone-Goldstone Architecture, and Zak Hal-Hale Resources, LLC did the
27 following presentation:

28 Dan Monks -

- 29 • Bennington was allocated \$3.9M from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) that came
30 with certain parameters and, the Select Board was proactive in developing a list of
31 projects that fit within those parameters and make an impact on our community.
- 32 • Indoor recreation and housing were on the top of the list and redeveloping BennHi
33 would address both.

34 Shannon Barsotti -

- 35 ➤ BennHi was built in 1913 and was the public high school from 1914-1967 and the Junior
36 High from 1967-2004. Renovations were done in 1939, 1958, and 1974 but it has been
37 vacant since 2004.
- 38 ➤ It is on the National Register of Historic Places.
- 39 ➤ The current owner bought it in early 2020, has done much clean-up, and put a new floor
40 in the gymnasium. The Town worked with the YMCA and they were able to hold more
41 classes during the pandemic, as well as, the Farmer's Market using it in the winter.
- 42 ➤ The Town would be redeveloping 30,000 square feet of space for the community that
43 would house the Senior Center, Meals on Wheels, and indoor recreation areas for youth
44 and seniors.
- 45 ➤ Both Main Street and Pleasant Street will benefit from the redevelopment as the old
46 workshops on Pleasant Street will be utilized by community partners.

47 Dan Monks -

- 48 • This would be a public/private partnership where the Town would develop the
49 community areas - Senior Center, Meals on Wheels, and gymnasium in 30,000 square
50 feet - and Hale Resources would be responsible for finding the funding and
51 constructing the 44 residential apartments in 70,000 square feet.
- 52 • We hired environmental consultants to look at the environmental issues and the
53 building is clean of PCB's with only minor asbestos issues that we are dealing with.
54 "No show stoppers."
- 55 • We had a structural analysis done and there are no structural issues with the building.
- 56 • We hired a mechanical engineer to look at the HVAC system as that is the most costly
57 part of any old building renovation. For energy efficiency, we will be all electric and
58 not use any fossil fuels.
- 59 • We also looked into other energy efficiencies, such as insulation, air sealing, windows,
60 etc.
- 61 • We also looked into 'architectural programming', or meeting with all of the tenants of
62 a building to understand their needs and then translating that to a design. We were
63 able to meet all of their needs.
- 64 • We envision this as a Phase 1 (Senior Center, Meals on Wheels, and occupancy
65 requirements) and Phase 2 (the gymnasium, locker rooms, changing rooms, and the
66 Workshop space) project.
- 67 • Similar analyses are being done by Hale Resources on their 70,000 square feet of the
68 building.

69 Jeff Goldstone -

- 70 ✓ Goldstone Architecture will be working for the Town and Hale Resources
71 independently from each other.
- 72 ✓ He has been working with the building with the various owners for ~20 years.

- 73 ✓ All of the Town's 30,000 square feet is on the first floor, and even though the building
- 74 is structurally sound, the interior finishes are in poor shape and need to be redone, as
- 75 does the plumbing and electrical.
- 76 ✓ Some of the roof was replaced 15 years ago but much needs to be replaced. It does
- 77 currently "keep the water out".
- 78 ✓ There will be a common area staffed by the YMCA where people will be directed to go
- 79 to the Senior Center, Meals on Wheels, the Workshops, or the YMCA.
- 80 ✓ The Meals on Wheels commercial kitchen will have walk in coolers and seating will be
- 81 in the auditorium when they're serving food but can be transformed back to an
- 82 auditorium with the stage to accommodate evening events.
- 83 ✓ The YMCA has the gym, exercise room, fitness room, locker rooms, changing rooms
- 84 and showers.
- 85 ✓ There are two public rest rooms plus a rest room in the Senior Center.
- 86 ✓ There will be 67 parking spaces divided into three areas - the main parking lot, a back
- 87 parking space open to Pleasant Street, and diagonal parking off of Pleasant Street
- 88 behind the building - with access to both the community spaces on grade and the
- 89 higher residential spaces with a ramp.
- 90 ✓ There will also be a delivery truck zone.

91 Zak Hale -

- 92 ❖ Our vision for this project is to build 17 professionally affordable housing units in one
- 93 portion of the building and 27 market rate units in another portion which will include
- 94 14 units of affordable units for 5 years after the project is complete.
- 95 ❖ We also have another 3,600 square feet that we plan on using for commercial space.
- 96 We have spoken to Jackie Myers and Michelle Prouty concerning a daycare and also
- 97 spoken to the Tutorial Center.
- 98 ❖ 56% of the housing in Bennington are single family homes and only 5% are structures
- 99 with 20-49 units in them.
- 100 ❖ 75% of the housing in Bennington was built before 1990, and from 2010-2019, housing
- 101 only increased by 1% - from 6,650 tenants to 6,723- while seasonal housing increased
- 102 by 310%.
- 103 ❖ Since COVID, there has been an increase in the need for housing across all income
- 104 levels, an increase in short term rentals, an increase in building costs, and an increase
- 105 in people that want to move to Vermont.
- 106 ❖ This project will not only add housing units, but will revitalize the area (Pleasant Street
- 107 has the highest crime rate in the community) and remove a "blight" on Main Street.
- 108 ❖ Our history with BennHi is that we managed it for 10 years, cleaned it out after it was
- 109 abandoned by the school, with 2018 being our last attempt to bring it back to life.
- 110 ❖ With the Town as the "anchor tenant" and leveraging the ARPA funds, banks and
- 111 investors are more open to funding the project.
- 112 ❖ We will be maintaining the building's historical designation which limits some changes.

113 ❖ How the units will be organized throughout the building was pointed out on the map.

114 Shannon Barsotti -

115 ➤ Funding sources are ARPA, tax credits (for Town and Hale Resources), Designated
116 Downton credits, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (for Hale
117 Resources), Green Mountain Power Efficiency Vermont rebates (for Town and Hale
118 Resources), HVAC tax credits, Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Vermont Community
119 Foundation, AARP grants, State Building Community grants, and others.

120 Dan Monks -

- 121 • All this information - and more - is on the Town’s website that will be regularly
122 updated.
- 123 • We will ask the Select Board -
 - 124 ○ 1. To authorize us to continue our efforts to make this project a reality by
125 authorizing the use of the ARPA funds for the project “with the proviso that no
126 construction funds will be spent until all the funding sources are secured”. This
127 commitment will help both the Town and Hale Resources to leverage other
128 funding.
 - 129 ○ 2. Allow us to formalize our agreement with Hale Resources, LLC by putting
130 together a Development Agreement where it is very clear what Hale Resources
131 does, what the Town does, and who is responsible for what. This will also help
132 with our TIF Funding so we know how much the assessed value will be and how
133 much tax revenue will be generated to pay for the bond without any impact on
134 the tax payers.
 - 135 ○ 3. Allow us to evaluate cost savings and seek additional funding.
- 136 • If all this happens, we will be back before the public in 90-120 days.

137 **2. PUBLIC QUESTION AND ANSWER WITH DEVELOPER, ARCHITECTS, AND TOWN STAFF**

138 *Board questions/comments answered by the Presenters:*

139 Mr. Carroll: Is the roof strong enough for solar panels? Mr. Goldstone: We believe so and have
140 talked about the possibility.

141 *Public questions/comments answered by the Presenters:*

142 Ron Hachey-Council on Aging: The Council on Aging is interested in relocating to the BennHi
143 and noted the importance of face-to-face interactions with the seniors that would be in the
144 same building. The Town’s positive attitude on this project is an important resource.

145 Chloe Viner Collins-Homeless Shelter: Supports any affordable housing. The Shelter is turning
146 away 9 people a days and 2-3 families a week. Everyone should ask themselves “Why is a gym
147 more important than an Emergency Shelter?”

148 Donald Washum: Are there specifications to how the federal funding is spent and who
149 determines that? Even with all of the information that we just got, there is still a lot more to
150 expose. *Mr. Monks: Most federal and state funding comes with specific criteria on how they are*
151 *to be used. The ARPA funding, however, has very few, and yes, there is more to come.*

152 Kayla Becker-YMCA: The YMCA has been running programming at BennHi for a year and a half,
153 and the more people that are in the building, the safer it will feel.

154 Laurie Mulhern: What agencies were contacted for occupancy? Where is the ARPA application?
155 Who provided the estimates? What is the breakdown of the funding sources and what tax
156 credits are anticipated? Are all of these documents available hard copy to those that would like
157 them? How is the public/private relationship work for grounds keeping, building maintenance,
158 etc.? Where is the community needs assessment? *Mr. Monks: Anyone can send questions to*
159 *info@benningtonvt.org to be answered if the answers are not already on the website. ARPA*
160 *funding came directly to the communities based on population and we only had to formally*
161 *accept the funds - we did not apply for it. The Select Board had several public meetings to come*
162 *up with the several projects to allocate the funds to, i.e., Willow Park, Skate Park, infrastructure*
163 *projects, BennHi, etc. Most of the money has been allocated but not yet expended. On the*
164 *website, go to BennHi attachments and the estimates were done by ECIS, a large firm from*
165 *Colchester, VT. We hired a mechanical engineer that recommended how to heat, ventilate, and*
166 *cool the space. The Historic Preservation federal and state tax credits are ~30% of the project*
167 *and composite tax credits are ~28% of the project. Both Mr. Hale and Ms. Barsotti are working*
168 *on these and others. The Town will be happy to print out the documents online for those that*
169 *would like to see them. All of the responsibilities of both the public and private partner will be*
170 *defined in the Development Agreement. Ms. Barsotti: For the Workshops we have talked to the*
171 *Vermont Arts Exchange, the Council on Aging, the Bennington Area Makers, and the UVM*
172 *Extension. Mr. Hale: Referenced the Community Needs Study done for the Energizer building -*
173 *different building, same needs.*

174 Laura Boudreau-SVSU: The SVSU supports more space where children can be active and
175 community space for clubs and activities. We employ 750 people with 75-100 new employees
176 hired each year. Many of these new hires are relocating and looking for homes to purchase or
177 to rent. The lack of housing has caused some of those that accepted positions to withdraw
178 because they couldn't find a place to live. We look forward to additional units being built.

179 Kirk McVay-655 Main Street: Is concerned about enough parking spaces for the redevelopment
180 so his parking spaces are not used like they were when the junior high was there. *Mr. Monks:*
181 *There are 67 parking spaces and we anticipate using the Town owned greenspace between*
182 *Stewart's for overflow parking. We know parking is an issue and we will address it before we*
183 *proceed with the project.*

184 Ned Perkins: How can we transform Pleasant Street with Section 8 housing? We need housing
185 for workers and the Energizer study said there was no housing available for those making

186 \$60,000/year. *Mr. Hale: 17 units will be professional affordable and 27 units will be market rate*
187 *housing. Half of the 27 will be affordable for the first 5 years and market rate after that. We*
188 *have seen where the presence of nicer properties in the area will encourage other investments*
189 *for improvement to take place, and therefore, make "Pleasant Street pleasant again". Mr.*
190 *Monks: Affordable housing is for a spectrum of people, not just for people at the poverty level.*
191 *Mr. Goldstone: The back of BennHi that faces Pleasant Street will be cleaned up, repaired, and*
192 *lighting added, as well as, resurrecting the Pleasant Street entrance to the building that has*
193 *awning.*

194 Michael McDonough-Planning Commission/Historic Preservation/Better Bennington
195 Corporation/Vermont Downtown Board: Spoke to the fact that BennHi is a "legacy building"
196 that the community cannot allow "to crumble". The project proposal is "in tune with our Town
197 Plan" as it calls for vitality, businesses, agencies, and housing in the Downtown. I ask the
198 community to keep an open mind on this proposal and realize that there are not going to be
199 many more opportunities like this to bring this building back to life. *Mr. Hale: A law was*
200 *recently passed that, if you're in a designated downtown and have mixed income housing and*
201 *mixed use, you can be exempt from Act 250 and be considered a priority housing project.*

202 Mike Bethel: Feels this needs to go to a vote of the people and that it isn't a good time for
203 Bennington to take on a project of this magnitude. Why electric heat? What is the total cost of
204 the building? How much will Hale Resources be paying for 70%? How can someone pay
205 \$146,000 for a building and we're going to give him \$1.1m plus the Senior Center? *Mr. Monks:*
206 *We will be back to the public with the funding sources and whether or not this is a feasible*
207 *project. Electric heat with heat pumps, geothermal power by electricity are by far the most*
208 *efficient heat sources and, with Efficiency Vermont rebates, no more expensive to install than*
209 *fossil fuel sources that are "yesterday's news". With funding sources and tax credits, the*
210 *building may be owned by Hale Resources but the Town will retain control of our portion of the*
211 *building with a multi-generational lease or option. We have a cost estimate online for the*
212 *Town's portion and Mr. Hale added that we are at \$250,000/unit cost making it \$9M-\$10M for*
213 *the residential portion at this time.*

214 John Ryan: What is the trade of the building where Meals on Wheels is located? What is the
215 value of the current Senior Center building? *Ms. Barsotti: We have a lease agreement with the*
216 *current owner of BennHi with an option to purchase and he would take over the current Senior*
217 *Center building valued at ~\$400,000. This will only happen if we proceed with this*
218 *redevelopment of BennHi. We have a range of \$4M-\$9M for the entire project.*

219 Nancy White: Encouraged everyone to go online and see the Select Board meeting of
220 12/28/2020 when the public first started hearing something about BennHi. "Parking will be a
221 nightmare" with 44 housing units and all of the activities. Bennington has paid for the Senior
222 Center for 45 years and provide services to all of Bennington County as does Meals on Wheels.
223 Will other towns contribute to the payment of the BennHi project? Why hasn't the lease
224 agreement been posted online? If this is approved, citizens have 30 days to get signatures on a

225 petition. *Mr. Monks: We discussed the parking plan earlier and the lease agreement has been*
226 *posted online for months and is now posted again on our BennHi website. When we have*
227 *secured the funding sources we will bring them to the public. Our attorney drafted the*
228 *documents on the sale of the Senior Center building so we are confident that was done*
229 *correctly.*

230 Sam Restino: Encouraged Bennington to educate themselves as to all of the projects that are
231 going on in Bennington.

232 Lilly West Williamson-Real Estate Company Owner: Kudos to those that have/are working on
233 the project to get funding sources that are not on the taxpayer, additional housing, spaces
234 dedicated to our fast growing senior population, and money coming into the Town from this
235 project. By seniors paying the affordable rent in the new units, their homes then can be sold to
236 the teachers, etc. looking to buy a house. She supports the project 100% and has some ideas
237 on the parking situation.

238 Heather Starzynski-NeighborWorks: Supports the housing initiative as we lack housing
239 throughout the State. We have worked with Hale Resources on rental rehabs in Bennington
240 and we support their quality of work resulting in safe housing units.

241 Ilsa Svoboda-Meals on Wheels: Supports the project but is concerned about the parking. We
242 have 60-80 seniors coming in every day for meals. Six years ago we were delivering 400
243 meals/week and now we are delivering over 1,000/week. Meals on Wheels would be willing to
244 wait for their move to BennHi so that housing can go in first to have more housing available for
245 seniors - some have been waiting 4 years for housing that they could afford with an average of
246 \$15,000/year income. *Ms. Barsotti: The Senior Center and Meals on Wheels at BennHi is going*
247 *to be happening at the same time as the housing. Mr. Hale: The Town needs us to do their part*
248 *and we need them to do our part.*

249 Cat Bryars and Madison Cramer-Shires Housing: Kudos to the Town and Hale Resources for
250 taking on this project.

251 **3. INFORMAL DISCUSSION TO ANSWER QUESTIONS WITH ANYONE INTERESTED IN PROJECT**

252 The Town set up in one area of the room, Goldstone Architecture set up in another area
253 of the room, and Hale Resources, LLC set up in a third area of the room for the public to come
254 and ask any additional questions that they may have.

255 ***At 7:37pm, the formal portion of the meeting adjourned to go into the informal***
256 ***breakout session.***

257 Respectfully submitted,

258 Nancy H. Lively
259 Secretary