

1 **BENNINGTON SELECT BOARD MEETING**

2 **130 RIVER STREET**

3 **BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201**

4 **AUGUST 28, 2023**

5 **MINUTES**

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

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-Communication Coordinator; Jack
11 Rossiter-Munley-ECDC Update; Scott Davis; Sam Restino; Sharon Stepp; Chloe Harris; 10
12 citizens; Josh Boucher-CAT-TV; and Nancy H. Lively-Secretary.

13 At 6:02pm, Chair Jeannie Jenkins called the meeting to order.

14 **1. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

15 The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

16 **2. VISION STATEMENT**

17 Ms. Conner read the Town’s Vision Statement that was adopted by the Select Board on
18 August 24, 2020:

19 “Bennington is a welcoming, engaged, inclusive, resilient community where everyone
20 regardless of identity shares in our vitality and benefits from an outstanding quality of life.”

21 Mr. Carroll issued a public apology to Sarah Perrin and all others present for what he felt
22 were inappropriate comments that he had made to Ms. Perrin at the last Select Board meeting.
23 Ms. Perrin, although absent tonight, had previously told Mr. Carroll that she didn’t feel it was
24 necessary to do so.

25 **3. CONSENT AGENDA**

26 **A. MINUTES OF AUGUST 14, 2023**

27 **B. WARRANTS**

28 **C. LIQUOR LICENSE**

29 *Jim Carroll moved and Jeanne Conner seconded to approve the Consent Agenda*
30 *amended as follows:*

31 ***Minutes of August 14, 2023, Lines 13 and 229, Change “Rhonda Maki”***
32 ***to “Martha Mackey”***

33 ***Minutes of August 14, 2023, Line 333, Change “would like” to “asked”***

34 Mr. Woods asked Mr. Hurd if the Doxsee Roofing Repair to the Town Office roof was
35 just a repair, and Mr. Hurd answered yes.

36 Mr. Woods asked Mr. Hurd if the 2 industrial refrigerators from Hollisters Appliance
37 were new or repairs, and Mr. Hurd responded that they were replacements for the Fire Facility.

38 Ms. Jenkins asked Mr. Hurd about the Casella Waste invoice for trash from MAU, and
39 Mr. Hurd answered that we will be reimbursed for that.

40 ***The motion carried with Sarah Perrin absent.***

41 **4. PUBLIC COMMENT**

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

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

56 _____

57 Scott Davis: Noted that federal and state laws classify e-bikes as bicycles and that their usage
58 has recently increased. He has found the e-bike riders to not be rude and encourages the
59 Select Board to consider posting a speed limit for all bicycles of no more than 15 mph and to
60 require signaling when passing in lieu of completely banning them on the pathways. He also
61 requested that the Town pursue a grant for lighting - similar to the one for the Riverwalk - for
62 the Rail Trail.

63 Sam Restino: 1. The following should be future agenda items - CTC fire; EPA meeting on the Jard
64 site; Skate Park update; and a Benn Hi update. 2. Urges the Select Board to approach
65 businesses and ask them how they're doing. 3. Get information out to those who are not able
66 to acquire it via the methods that we are currently using.

67 Sharon Stepp: Stated that the traffic on South Stream Road is dangerous, and even with the
68 speed limits of 25mph to 35mph, it needs to slow down. *Mr. Hurd: Said for her to send her*
69 *ideas on how to slow traffic to him.*

70 Chloe Harris: Reiterated Ms. Stepp's concerns about the speed of traffic on South Stream Road
71 and cited her personal experience of nearly being hit by a speeding car. *Ms. Jenkins: Also*
72 *encouraged her and others to send their ideas for a solution to the speed to Mr. Hurd.*

73 **5. ECDC UPDATE**

74 Jack Rossiter-Munley did the following presentation:

- 75 • ECDC - the Ethiopian Community Development Council - is one of the 10 agencies for
76 refugee resettlement throughout the United States.
- 77 • Their Vermont offices are in Brattleboro and Bennington.
- 78 • A person is a refugee if they are forced to leave their country involuntarily due to the
79 threat of war, persecution, or violence.
- 80 • Prior to leaving they have gone through an intense international process to be
81 designated as a refugee by the United Nations before coming to the United States.
- 82 • This process involves security and background checking followed by another round of
83 security and background checking when it has been decided what country they will be
84 going to.
- 85 • The first refugees came to Bennington in 2021 for resettlement via ECDC and the
86 volunteers from the Bennington County Open Arms Committee.
- 87 • The Town of Bennington was designated as a resettlement site in October 2022 and the
88 Bennington ECDC Office opened in February 2023 with direct resettlement beginning in
89 July 2023.
- 90 • Since July 2023 we have had 14 people come to Bennington (2 have moved to Virginia
91 to be close to family), a family of 6 tomorrow, and 1 more in early September.
- 92 • Most are Afghan and some are Congolese.
- 93 • Even though there is government involvement, resettling is a community effort.
- 94 • The main focus of resettling is within the first 90 days to see that they have a warm
95 welcome, a place to stay, and be on a path to independence within the community.
- 96 • Housing is our top issue - as it is with everyone in Bennington - and we do much work in
97 setting up the apartments for their arrival which includes furnishings, appropriately
98 cultural food in the pantry, and an appropriately cultural hot meal for when they step in
99 the door.

- 100 • We have shared a list of what the State has determined must be in an apartment, as
101 well as, a list of what is not mandatory, but helpful, of commonly used daily items. Cash
102 donations are also accepted to purchase items that cannot be donated second hand.
- 103 • We also have a list of people called the Mattress Squad who may be able to donate a
104 new mattress or the dollars for us to get one.
- 105 • We then have the refugees sign up for services from our many partners, enroll in levels
106 of education as needed, and find a job that matches their skills. Some were doctors,
107 lawyers, carpenters, cooks, bakers, and business people in their homeland.
- 108 • Each refugee is given \$1,075 to use for food, rent, and other necessities until they start
109 working.
- 110 • We are always working for resettlement to become a part of the community for the
111 refugees, as well as, all community members. We had a gathering at the Bennington
112 Free Library where refugees shared their stories and much culturally appropriate food
113 was served. The Library has been very active in many ways to welcome the refugees,
114 including a line of books in Dari.
- 115 • If interested in this effort, contact jrossitermunley@ecdCUS.org .

116 *Board comments/questions answered by Mr. Rossiter-Munley:*

117 Mr. Woods: Where does the “Ethiopian” come from in the ECDC? *It goes back to the origin of*
118 *the ECDC when most of the refugees were from Ethiopia. In the future, the acronym will remain*
119 *the same but stand for something else.*

120 Mr. Woods: Do you still see Ethiopian refugees? *Some are still coming to southern Vermont but*
121 *not to Bennington at this time.*

122 Ms. Conner: We must remember that although the refugees are glad to be here, their
123 preference would be to be in their homeland. The whole process must be “traumatizing” to
124 them. *Most of the refugees still have friends and family in Afghanistan that they may support*
125 *and are concerned about.*

126 Ms. Conner: Do the refugees now consider the United States their permanent home or do they
127 hope to go back to Afghanistan? *It varies from person to person and they may not be able to*
128 *think that far ahead when they arrive.*

129 **6. MANAGER’S REPORT**

130 Mr. Hurd did the following report.

131 VLCT Annual Meeting -

132 ***Jim Carroll moved and Ed Woods seconded to appoint the Town Manager as the***
133 ***voting delegate for the Town of Bennington at the VLCT Annual Meeting on September 26,***
134 ***2023. The motion carried with Sarah Perrin absent.***

135 We will be releasing the report on the police website that shows our progress on the 33
136 tasks with 24-25 recommendations made by the International Association of Chiefs of Police
137 (IACP).

138 The Better Bennington Corporation (BBC) will be awarded a \$25,000 grant from the
139 Downtown Vibrancy Fund. This requires a Letter of Support from the Select Board that will be
140 available at the Town Office for a majority of the Select Board members to sign tomorrow.

141 **7. UPCOMING AGENDAS**

142 September 11, 2023 - Benn Hi Update Presentation

143 September 11, 2023 - Department of Health Update

144 September 25, 2023 - Housing for Those in Motels

145 September 25, 2023 or October 9, 2023 - Skate Park Update

146 **8. OTHER BUSINESS**

147 Ms. Conner: The Rec Center is currently closed for their annual maintenance and will
148 reopen on September 11, 2023.

149 Mr. Woods: Today is the 45th Anniversary of Bennington Project Independence
150 providing adult day services to the area.

151 Mr. Woods: Will be attending the Bennington Rescue Squad Finance Meeting this week.

152 Mr. Woods: Was asked by a Benmont Avenue resident to ask the Select Board if there
153 could be additional signage for those turning left into the vegetable stand on Benmont Avenue.
154 He will forward this e-mail to Mr. Hurd.

155 **9. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

156 **A. PERSONNEL**

157 **B. CONTRACTS**

158 *At 7:05pm, Ed Woods moved and Jim Carroll seconded that the meeting was*
159 *adjourned finding that an Executive Session be held on Personnel and Contracts as premature*
160 *public knowledge would place a person involved in the subject matter at a substantial*
161 *disadvantage. No action will be taken when going back into Open Session. The motion*
162 *carried with Sarah Perrin absent.*

163

164 Respectfully submitted,

165 Nancy H. Lively

166 Secretary