



Town of Bennington

Communications Coordinator Report — January 10, 2022

After three months on the job,

I now know enough about the town's inner workings to say how impressed I am with the level of pride and dedication shown by Town employees. No business or organization is perfect, but as someone coming from the outside and getting a full look “under the hood” at Town operations, there is ample reason for the citizens of this community to be proud of the team they have at the Town working on their behalf.

Citizen Outreach:

I've met with, emailed, messaged, or spoken with 18 citizens since my last report. In some ways, I'm the complaint department of last resort, and resolving issues between citizens and different Town departments is a regular theme in my work. Happily most of these efforts are positive, even if some of them are issues that defy a quick solution. Some individuals are now in regular contact from me regarding their ongoing issues and I will stay with them until we reach a resolution..

Business Outreach:

I've limited my outreach to businesses during the holiday season as that is not generally a good time to be dropping in for anything other than purchases! Having said that, I worked with Shannon and Jenny Dewar from the BBC to organize a meeting with a group of downtown merchants around the idea of helping market and promote our growing cluster of antique related businesses downtown. I've also personally delivered mask signage to one business and have worked with the BBC and Chamber to share the new mask rule and links to the signage.

Celebratory Events:

We had a very successful unveiling ceremony for 219 Pleasant Street that brought a number of state officials to town to celebrate, including Josh Hanford, Commissioner of Housing and Community Development and Caitlin Corkins, Department of Historic Preservation. We also had Melanie Paskevich from Neighborworks, as well as Kelley Legacy and Jim Brown from the Bank of Bennington and others.

Facebook and Social Media:

Facebook is our primary social media outlet. We are currently averaging 12,800 in our reach and over 5,000 in our engagement. Our most popular posts in the past month have been about the Pleasant Street ceremony, but by far the most attention was on the post about our municipal forests, with a whopping 8,200 reach for that post alone. Not far behind that was a post about a surplus D-7 tractor that the Town purchased with 6,500 reach. The posts telling stories about our town, our history, and community events, continue to be the types of post people are drawn to.

Riverwalk:

On December 6 the planned followup meeting of partners, collaborators, and stakeholders was held. It was an opportunity for all the groups to share what they had accomplished and it included a presentation by the BBC design committee on scoping plans for Riverwalk improvements. A press release on progress went to the Banner this week.

2021 Bennington Survey:

The survey was presented, along with a press release, and results were shared as appropriate with various departments and partners. This was a particularly useful exercise for me in my new role. We also learned a lot that will inform our next survey.

Website Update:

The RFP for the website redevelopment has been completed and will be sent this week as planned. The timeline is as follows:

- RFP issued January 6, 2022.
- RFP questions accepted up to and including January 24th, 2022. All questions and answers will be posted on the town website at <https://benningtonvt.org/website-RFP>.
- Proposals due January 31, 2022.

The goal is to finalize the chosen vendor on or around February 28th.

Community Newsletter:

This collaborative effort with the Bennington Banner is in the works and I am expecting to see a design sample from the Banner in the next day or two. I hope to see it in print later this month!

Cyber Security / IT:

Hacking attempts continue to be an ongoing problem. Over the last six weeks we have done a series of internal communications focused on educating staff on the most common email and phishing scam attempts in hopes that this will make such attempts less likely to succeed.

The IT/Security team has also had a couple of more meetings with RCS, our IT/technology vendor, regarding continued development of security protocols and policies for the Town.

250th Planning:

There were less 250th meetings at the State and Federal levels due to the holidays, but the VT250th Education sub committee did meet and continues to work on how to include more about our history in education to get our citizens more informed and excited in advance of the celebrations.

On the local educational front, I have been meeting with the SVSU about what we can do right here in Bennington to further that effort. I am participating in a follow up meeting on that later this week. There is a lot of support locally for this educational effort! I've also been involved with planning for our 250th event for this year, which will be the anniversary of the "Incident of Remember Baker's Thumb" ...stay tuned for more on that.

Departmental Outreach:

I've spent a fair amount of time working with R.J. Joly and Larry Gates at the Department of Public Works in order to first educate myself and then inform the community more about our infrastructure and the work that is being done... and it's a lot! Knowing the positive ways that our tax dollars are being spent is a key part of our effort of growing confidence in Town government as a whole.

Press and Community Outreach:

I already mentioned the 219 Pleasant Street unveiling, but want to note here how such work has collateral benefits. Namely that a story about the unveiling in VT Digger ended up in a developer inquiry from Burlington to ask about the Energizer property. Who knows if that will go anywhere, but it's an example of how promoting these stories can have unexpected positive benefits.

I was also involved in the setup for the Governor's press conference when he came to Bennington for the completion of the water system expansion.

Shannon Barsotti and I worked together to do a presentation at the Senior Center... the first in a series of presentations that we will be doing to various groups throughout the community. We have a presentation planned with the Bennington Rotary later this month, but there is a chance we may need to reschedule that due to COVID concerns.

Organizational Collaboration:

In addition to my work with the SVSU regarding 250th educational efforts, we will also be partnering with them on outreach for the Willow Park project that I will discuss below.

I've also been working with Shannon to do a collaborative project with Divine Bradley and Bennington College. Currently that effort is focused on how we can use that collaboration to benefit planning and outreach for the Benn High projects that Shannon is working on.

New Projects:

A big project on the horizon that we have already started planning on is Willow Park. The playground there is at the end of its useable life and I have been working with a team at the Town that includes numerous departments to work on this effort. A draft public outreach plan has been created and a draft RFP for the work is being developed now. A lot more will be coming about this in the next few months!

Another quick project was pivoting on the Dog Park to allow it to be used in the winter months. Our Facilities team worked very quickly to make that happen and will be meeting with the Dog Park founders later this month to assess how things are going and make plans for future improvements.

Most recently I've been asked by Larry Gates to assist with communications regarding the lead line project currently underway to reduce the number of households that are not responding to this effort. I'm working with MSK to help with that process.

Outreach by the numbers:

Looking at my calendar and email for the last month, here are some stats for you...

Number of FB Posts - 22

(not including simple announcements)

Number of emails sent - 640+/-

Number of meetings attended - 32