



Town of Bennington

Communications Coordinator Report — February 27, 2023

Spring Already?

Let's hope not! While the sugaring season has already begun, we would prefer that mother nature not get too far ahead of herself so we won't risk fooling trees into budding and flowering too early.

Elections, Town Meeting, and Bond Votes

The slate of candidates on the ballot for the Select Board and school boards have now been set and ballots are available for early voting as we speak. A ballot will not be mailed to you unless you request one. You can request a ballot by contacting the town clerk to have one mailed to you. Simply go to the Town website and under Government select "Town Clerk." Sample ballots are also available there as well as instructions on where to vote.

Town meeting is a time honored tradition in Vermont and just six other states. Town meeting this year is on March 6, at 7 pm and will be held at the multi-purpose room on the third floor of the Fire Department on River Street. Park in the lot off Lincoln Street and enter through the back. The site is handicap accessible and there will be sign language interpreters present.

Voting day is always the day after, on March 7. Voting will be open from 7 am to 7 pm at the Fire Department on River Street on the first floor.

Two Bond votes for improving our water system are on the ballot. Two areas of our town suffer from low water pressure during high usage events; the central downtown area around Gage Street and the south end area around Jefferson Heights and Crescent Boulevard. Improving those water lines are a requirement of our water permit with the state, and we have been slowly plugging away at the project to the tune of \$400,000 per year. The total cost of these needed infrastructure improvements is \$5.8 million and the town is asking residents to approve bonds for that purpose. Making these improvements to the water system are a requirement of the town by the

State. We have no choice about doing it, but HOW we do it can have a big impact on how much we pay both in the short term and long run.

The cost to our town budget is less per year if we do the work by using a bond. If approved by voters, the bond would be funded through a "Drinking Water State Revolving Funding" loan which is a 30 year repayment plan with only 2% interest. The result is an annual combined payment of just \$259,000 per year vs. the current \$400,000 a year we are currently paying to do the work piecemeal. Other advantages include having the work done quickly and avoiding future increases in project costs that are inevitable when doing the work slowly over time. And of course those sections of town with water pressure issues will no longer have those problems.

Community Outreach

Work is progressing on planning for improvements at the Y woods with RJ Joly, director of Public Works, Cory Creagan, county forester, and Eric Bishop, forestry teacher at Southwest Tech. A public meeting to solicit input from the community on a forest management plan for the property is planned for March 9. I've also been coordinating with local groups around Earth Day, and Green Up Day activities. Planning has also begun for a 2nd annual Bennington Trailfest. I've also met with representatives from a number of organizations including GBCS, the Turning Point, the Fire Department, SVSU, and the Bike Hub on various projects and efforts.

Citizen Outreach and Public Record Requests:

I met with citizens seventeen times over this past month on a variety of issues, ideas, and concerns. There were two public record requests to my office.

250th Anniversary Planning:

Work has started on a website for the Bennington 250th Anniversary Committee. I've also begun helping with early planning for Battle Day activities for this

year. I have been chosen by the State 250th commission to be one of two representatives from Vermont to a convening of state 250th planners that is happening in Williamsburg, Virginia later this month. I will be taking advantage of that meeting to connect in person with the several regional states (NY, MA, CT, VT, and RI) with whom I have been doing collaborative work around the 250th over the past year. Very exciting to see all these efforts beginning to bear fruit!

Website Development

A major piece of work is now complete... namely the relaunch of a newly designed unified town website that combined three town sites that had not had an overhaul since 2013. I am thankful to all the department heads and fellow staff who have spent hundreds of hours collectively updating old content and then helping move content to the new site. My thanks to the many beta testers in the community who donated many hours of their time working with me to

fine tune the navigation and whose suggestions were invaluable in making the site more user friendly. We have now been “live” for almost three weeks and there have been no major failures or problems. I continue to work on improving the site daily to keep it current and fulfil its role as a valuable information resource for the community. I welcome input and suggestions and I ask your patience for the things that still may need fixing or updating that we have missed.

Community Based Learning (CBL) Intern

I am working with our Town Clerks Office to host an intern from the SVSU Community Based Learning program. We are pleased to have Thomas Scheetz working with us for the rest of this school year. His primary focus is digitization of Town records, and his focus currently is digitizing our cemetery map records, starting with the Chapel Road cemetery.

Facebook POST OF THE MONTH:

This month our biggest post was about the visit of Miss United States to Meals on Wheels and the Senior Center.

Also known as Lily Donaldson, Miss United States was visiting to distribute Valentines Day cards that had been created by students from her “Arts Technically” non profit that teaches kids to create code that generates the images used on the cards.

The screenshot shows a Facebook post titled "Thank you to Miss United States who visited Meals on Wheels and the Senior..." dated February 16, 2023 at 3:23 PM. The post ID is 2594892647328103. It has 283 reactions, 19 comments, and 9 shares. Below the post is a "Performance" section with three panels: "Reach" (Total 11,007), "Reactions, comments and shares" (Total 311), and "Results" (Total link clicks). Each panel includes a bar chart comparing the post's performance to the top 50 most recent posts and stories, showing 100% performance in all categories.