



# Town of Bennington

## Communications Coordinator Report – Sept. 28, 2023

### **A Second Year**

Today as I write this marks my official two year anniversary working for the Town of Bennington. Coming from a thirty-plus year background as a small business owner in town, I had many opportunities to interact with the town, and through my volunteer work with various organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and BBC, I came to appreciate how important participation in Town government is for everyone in the community. Working for the Town felt like a perfect fit: to bring my practical career experience together with my desire to serve the public. I am grateful to the Town and the community for this opportunity and doing this work has been the most satisfying and rewarding work of my career. I love this work and I am always interested in learning how I can do this job better for the Town. I welcome your comments and suggestions!

### **Public Outreach**

How important is a website? A presence on social media? These days, it's vital. I spent hours every week writing posts, press releases, and doing updates on the website. Currently we have 5,500 followers but our reach is much greater. Over the last two years, the reach of our Facebook platform was over 196,000... that is a 756% increase over the two years prior to my coming on board. We launched a new unified town website with extensive content, expanded accessibility features, and an "e-notify" feature that allows you to subscribe to pages to be informed when there is new content or information. A powerful search feature and an intuitive navigational system helps users find the information they need quickly. Our news section includes all unique content that is shared on social media so you don't have to be on Facebook to be informed.

### **250th Anniversary Planning**

September is a reboot of activity on 250th planning. In addition to my work as a VT250 Commissioner, and chair of the VT250 Education and Teacher Outreach committee, I have been working with our local historical societies helping with planning for the 250th anniversary of the Capture of Fort Ticonderoga by Bennington's Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys. This effort also has a regional component and we are collaborating with New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut in developing programs and events around this shared history.... in which Bennington has very much a starring role! As part of the effort to build awareness, we have been organizing 250th events since 2021. This year is the anniversary of the land wars between New York and the Hampshire Grants. An 18th century "flash mob" event was held this past Friday re-enacting those political times, and included the "arrest" of Ethan Allen by our own Chief of Police Paul Doucette to educate about our history and promote the 250th anniversaries.

### **Current Projects**

It's time again to do our bi-annual citizen survey and I've begun work on that effort. This was one of the first projects I tackled as a new hire, and coming back to this again is both a pleasure and a useful exercise in learning about the needs and desires of our community. We ask tough questions and we expect tough answers. The views expressed in the survey influence and inform the policies and work of the Town. I encourage everyone to do the survey when it comes out in October.

I also assist Shannon Barsotti with her work marketing the town and we are exploring some new ideas and approaches on how to do so. In

addition, I'm helping on the Shared Use Path System Naming Committee, developing a formal communications policy, and helping with signage.

### IACP Report Followup

In an effort to chart how we are doing in terms of the 33 recommendations that came out of the 2019 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) report, I worked with town staff and the Bennington Police Department to review each of the task and report where we stand. Currently, we have implemented 30 tasks, partially implemented two, and one is still in progress.

We continue to welcome input on actions we have taken to get to this point. If there are additional things we can do to address any recommendation beyond what we have done so far, we would like your feedback. Our goal is to continue working on all of these tasks as we move forward.

While implementing these IACP recommendations is a milestone in our work towards building trust between the Bennington community and the Bennington Police Department, we

understand that this is only one part of our journey towards implementing the kind of community policing that we want. Our work continues and we welcome the ongoing conversation with all members of the community. For the full details, visit the Town website and search for IACP.

### Organizational Outreach

This past month I have worked with the Turning Point and the local historical societies as already mentioned. I'm also pursuing the idea of a new pathway on the old North Road right of way from the Battle Monument to the Corkscrew Railway overpass and I've had a number of meetings with the Village of Old Bennington Trustees to discuss that idea.

### By The Numbers

This past month I interacted with four citizens and I had twelve public records requests, mostly from the same three individuals. I also continue to meet with local business people and met with two this month.

### FACEBOOK POST OF THE MONTH: Fugitive Arrest

Our biggest post last month was about the search and capture of Zachary Dumas. The extensive search effort which included the use of drones, a helicopter, and road closures was very much a concern to the public.

Providing timely information and updates on our social media platforms helped alleviate that concern in the community and is an example of the Police Department implementing one of the IACP report recommendations.

Many thanks to our police officers who worked tirelessly to capture Dumas as quickly as possible!

