

TOWN OF BENNINGTON

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Minutes of the Meeting – February 23, 2021

Selectmen James Cleary, David Foster, and David Hardwick, Sr. were present as well as Town Administrator Kristie LaPlante. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

Emergency Management Director Keith Nason met with the Board of Selectmen to discuss Crotched Mountain Ski Area. Keith reported that on February 6, 2021, Crotched Mountain did not cap their ticket sales, resulting in major parking and traffic issues. Traffic coming from Frankestown was backed up all the way to School House Road in Frankestown and traffic coming from Bennington was at a stand still because staff did not close the parking lots when the lots were full. Fire and Police responded to the Ski Area, shut down the main parking lot, and managed vehicles in the Onset Road lot. Keith reported that over 150 vehicles illegally parked on private property and several hundred more cars were turned away. Once the parking lot was under control, Fire and Police left.

The Ski Area requires reservations for access to the Mountain and all guests are accounted for by lift personnel when accessing the lifts. The General Manager has been uncooperative with fact sharing about how the error occurred, if the error has been fixed, or with confirming the number of skiers present at the Mountain. Keith has heard from several Ski Area employees that there were between 3,200 and 3,600 skiers on the Mountain that day.

The Selectmen discussed the approved Site Plan which caps capacity at 2,500 and requires the Ski Area to provide parking for 901 vehicles. The Site Plan also discusses hiring details for high occupancy days if needed. The Selectmen will bill the Ski Area for all traffic related assistance this season. The Selectmen will continue to monitor the Ski Area for Site Plan compliance and re-evaluate in the spring when the ski season is done to determine if the Ski Area will need to go back before the Planning Board.

Keith also reported his presence at the Mountain on weekends enforcing Social Distancing and Emergency Order 74 (Masks). On an average weekend, approximately 75% of the vehicles are from Massachusetts, 10% are from New Hampshire, 10% are from Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, and the balance are from other locations. Keith has been in frequent contact with the Attorney General's Office discussing compliance concerns they receive and compliance issues Keith has observed.

Town Administrator reported to the Selectmen on the Joint Loss Management Committee's (JLMC) meeting earlier in the day where they discussed reopening Town Hall. From that meeting, the Committee established 4 Operational Phases: Phase I – completely closed to the public and no employees in the building. Phase II – building is closed to the public and employees are working in the building, Phase IIIA – employees are working in the building and open by appointment only, Phase IIIB – employees are working in the building and open by appointment some days and open for walk in business the remainder of the week, and Phase IV – employees are working in the building and the building is fully open for all customer services. Town Hall has been operating in a Phase II status since April 1, 2020.

The JLMC discussed the improvements that have been made to the building and final improvements that are scheduled to be completed (to separate the Office lobby from the Police Department entrance). The JLMC recommends a phased reopening starting April 1, 2021, opening in Phase IIIA for appointments only. The

Selectmen discussed the importance of maintaining healthy staff members and agreed with the JLMC recommendation to open in Phase IIIA starting April 1.

The Selectmen continue to receive complaints about the Highway Department and discussed the following:

- Selectmen Hardwick and Cleary continue to receive complaints from multiple residents about speed during inclement weather
- Selectmen Foster reported that for the last two storms the rear bay of the Fire Station was not plowed and several days later he used his personal vehicle to back drag and plow the snow. Similarly, during the last two storms snow has been piled in front of the fire escape, the fire escape has not been shoveled, and the piles have not been removed in a timely manner.
- Snow has not been fully cleared along the curb and from the handicapped parking spot for the Town Hall. The snow pile at the Acre Street end of the parking lot has not been removed after storms. It is the Selectmen's position that if the Town's snow removal vendor has not removed piles, then the Highway Department should prioritize that project once all snow is cleared from the roadways.
- The driveway behind the Police Department parking area has not been consistently cleared and the second entrance to the Police Department has not been maintained during storms.
- The portable sign the Library uses has been tossed to the side when their walkway is cleared and the sign has not been returned when done.

The Board voted to impose speed limit restrictions for Highway Department vehicles. In good weather, Highway Department vehicles should travel no greater than 5 mph under the posted speed limit; in inclement weather vehicles must be driven in a much more conservative manner for the road conditions. The Town Administrator was directed to communicate this new directive and the snow removal complaints to the Road Agent for immediate action.

The Board reviewed and acted on the following:

- Reviewed and approved Minutes of the Board's February 18, 2021 meeting.
- Gillis Hill Road resident Donald Trow stopped in to discuss the upcoming roadway weight limit posting. The date to post roads has not yet been set.
- Heard a report that two Solid Waste Operators did not renew their Solid Waste license in accordance with DES requirements. Matt Blanchard completed some training and should be able to submit renewal documentation immediately; Chris Davies did not complete any training and will be required to participate in the full Initial Solid Waste Operator training. DES is offering a prerecorded video training option for limited qualifying Operators. Chris will be required to complete the prerecorded video option by April 1, 2021.
- Reviewed a draft of the Selectmen's Message for the Town Report and approved the document for inclusion in the 2020 Town Report.
- Discussed the impact the Conval School District has on Bennington taxpayers and what the Board sees as a lack of a practical and sustainable business model. The Board conceptually discussed education options to mitigate these costs. No decisions were made.
- Selectman Dave Foster notified the Board that he will be out of Town for the Board's March 16th meeting but would be available to participate via Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kristie LaPlante, Town Administrator