

Bennington Board of Selectmen

March 4, 2024

Meeting Minutes – 6:00 pm

Selectboard: Chairman, James Cleary, Tony Parisi, Tom James

Staff: Deb Davidson, Town Administrator

Public: Heidi Christian, Diane Bergeron, Bethany Craig, Melissa Clark

Chairman Cleary opened the meeting at 6:02 pm

Appointments:

6:03 – Ms. Bergeron of 12 Dodge Road was before the board to discuss a problem she is having on her property. She explained she has a dug well in her basement, she has a problem with it flooding her basement. She has a sump pump running constantly. Matt Miller & Matt Blanchard have both met with Ms. Bergeron and identified where the pipe goes, it originates across the street at David Brooks property. Ms. Bergeron indicated she has met with Mr. Brooks, he has no interest in capping the line. Ms. Bergeron has tried to cap it in the basement of her home, it just leaks out elsewhere. She has spent hundreds of dollars on electricity with the sump pump and has lost hundreds of dollars of items that have been damaged from water.

Discussion followed. Chairman Cleary mentioned that the Board was understanding of her issues, but because this is a private well and in no way connected to the Towns water the Town cannot spend Town funds on private property. Ms. Bergeron understands this, but she did want to seek guidance regarding what to do.

Selectmen Parisi & Chairman Cleary both indicated they would go over to her house, as residents not as a public official, as a neighbor and see if they have any suggestions. Cleary stated he would bring his dad who is well acquainted with the properties involved and could have some good insight. Parisi & Cleary will stop by on Wednesday and visit with Ms. Bergeron to discuss this. Again, as a good neighbor, not as a Selectman.

Ms. Bergeron stated that if she caps the well, she doesn't want the responsibility if anything happens to the road.

6:15 – Tyler Howe, Melissa Clark & Dennis McKenney - Water/Sewer Commissioners

– Water Commissioners were before the board to discuss upcoming rate changes for the water and sewer users. Those who are not users are currently significantly supplementing the systems, the commissioners provided a spreadsheet of increases to be expected over the next six quarters. Selectmen reviewed a letter and the spreadsheet and understand the need for this increase.

Commissioner Howe mentioned that 7-8 million dollars will be needed in the next few years, (8-10 years). Starrett Road pump station is long overdue for an upgrade, these increases that are being proposed are not even close to what will actually be needed.

Commissioner McKenney stated the revenue from users should cover the costs, as a tax payer he is supportive of all tax payers supporting the infrastructure itself, but not the operating costs. Currently, the Town of Bennington is very far behind and after these proposed increases users will be closer to covering their operating costs. There are so few users, they could never cover the entire costs solely by user fees.

Commissioner Howe discussed water and sewer having their own, separate checking accounts. He further discussed setting up a new, specific Capital Reserve Fund in 2025. Bethany Craig discussed to set up a Capital Reserve Fund, she would recommend a plan.

Selectmen again reviewed and will get back to the Water/Sewer Commissioners regarding this letter to be mailed to users, as well as the increases. The increase is approximately triple on water rates and quadruple on sewer rates. It was mentioned this plan has been in the works, then Covid hit in 2020 and it has been set aside, it is time to revisit the user increases.

Capital Reserve Funds were again discussed. Mr. Howe discussed the no or low interest bond that is available. This will be an option down the road. Mr. McKenney discussed there is an asset management plan in place, user fees are being set to a more realistic fee schedule. The commissioners have introduced alternative well locations and have discussed these options with Mr. Verney and the Harris Center. Unfortunately, there are mandates from the State that cannot be ignored and it will be an expense.

Selectmen thanked the Commissioners for bringing this up and to the attention of the Board.

Selectmen will revisit this next week.

Minutes: Motion by Chairman Cleary to accept the February 26, 2024 minutes as written. Seconded by Selectmen Parisi & James. Voted affirmative 3-0

Financial: Weekly A/P & Payroll Manifests were signed.

Other:

- **Policy update complaints** – Motion by Chairman Cleary to accept the policy for complaints as written with changes that had been previously discussed at the February 26, 2024 Selectman’s Meeting. Seconded by Selectmen James & Parisi. Motion accepted 3-0.
- **New Facilities rental contract with updates** – Selectmen approved the new rental contract with changes previously discussed at the February 26, 2024 Selectman’s Meeting.
- **Veterans Tax Credit – Map 7 Lot 7, Castle** – Selectmen approved the application for tax credit.
- **Abatement – Map 10 Lot 54** – Selectmen approved the abatement
- **Newsletter** – Town Administrator stated that a timeline for the newsletter should be approved. After discussion, Selectmen agreed to move the date that articles need to be submitted to the office until March 25, 2024. This will allow for most spring activities to be addressed.
- **Hardwick Bond** – An amendment to the bond with TD Bank was presented for the Chairman of the Board to sign. The funds are being held by the attorney for the Hardwick’s.
- **Mondadnock Ledger** – A brief discussion as to the cost of advertising for the music followed. No decision was made at this time.

Adjournment:

With nothing further, Chairman Cleary motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:02 pm. Seconded by Parisi & James. All in favor.

The next Selectmen’s Meeting will be held on Monday, March 11, 2024 at 6:00 pm

2024-2025 Bennington

Water Sewer

Projected Rate Plan

	Antrim	Bennington	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1	2025 Q2	2025 Q3-GOAL
WATER - 0-5000 GAL	\$64.01	\$20.00	\$30.00	\$40.00	\$50.00	\$55.00	\$60.00	\$64.01
WATER 5000 GAL + PER 1000	\$9.59	\$3.78	\$4.59	\$5.59	\$6.59	\$7.59	\$8.59	\$9.59
SEWER 0-5000 GAL	\$87.79	\$20.00	\$30.00	\$40.00	\$55.00	\$65.00	\$75.00	\$87.79
SEWER 5000+ PER 1000	\$12.62	\$7.92	\$8.50	\$9.50	\$10.50	\$11.50	\$12.00	\$12.62

BENNINGTON W&S PROJECTED RATE PLAN

To Bennington Select Board:

The Bennington water and sewer commissioners have written a plan to increase rates in a manner that spreads out the increase over the next 19 months. It is no secret that a town's infrastructure is its most expensive asset. For decades, Bennington and Antrim have shared water and sewer infrastructure. We are each other's backup water source and Bennington owns 25% of the sewer plant in Antrim. The sewer is sent to Antrim via force main along Route 202. Not far in the future the federal requirements to update the sewer lagoon will be mandated. Current cost estimates for a new sewer plant are 37 million dollars, that equates Bennington's share to 9 million. The pump station on Starrett Road is due for rehabilitation and the commission needs to find a backup location for the water supply. Unfortunately, with the volatility in the market it has driven up the cost of annual maintenance and operation costs. Current rates are forcing nonusers (taxpayers) to pay for regular annual operations of the water & sewer system. Moving forward Bennington & Antrim commissioners will work together during the time that an increase is needed. Luckily in 2021 the Select Board supported the water meter upgrade project and it was fully paid for by ARPA Funding. Unfortunately, many users have not called to make an appointment which is extending the project length. With this project we were able to lower operation costs on the water side of things. The new meters are radio read like Eversource meters. We no longer need to pay someone to walk the entire system to manually read meters.

As we head toward sustainability of the water and sewer system, the water sewer board feels as though a separate checking account from the town's financials is crucial. We should be ready for that in 2025 quarter one.

James Cleary

Date

Tom James

Date

Tony Parisi

Date