

**Bennington Board of Selectmen**  
**Monday, July 15, 2024**  
**Meeting Minutes – 6:00 pm**

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

**Staff:** Deb Davidson, Town Administrator; Administrative Assistant, Cathy McGillicuddy

**Public:** Melissa Clark, Bethany Craig, John Manley, Joe McGregor, Leslie McGregor, Jill Wilmoth, Riche Colcombe, Bennington ConVal School Board Rep., Michael Hoyt

Chairman Cleary called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Selectmen Parisi & James.

**Appointments:**

**6:10 – Melissa Clark, Cemetery Trustee** – Melissa was scheduled for 6:45 pm, she was asked if she would like to go earlier, she indicated she would appreciate that. Melissa was before the Selectmen to discuss paving the holes in the roads at Evergreen Cemetery. She asked if the Cemetery Trustees purchase the material would the highway crew be able to do the repairs? Selectmen discussed this and will talk to Road Agent, Matt Blanchard. It is likely they can do the work. Melissa further stated there is a Trust Fund that was set up specifically for this purpose.

Chairman Cleary reported to Melissa that he had gone to the Cemetery and there are spruces and hemlocks that are dying and need to be removed. The Cemetery Trustees will get prices on removal of these trees.

Melissa reported that Rob Christian has been voted as the Chairman for the Cemetery Trustees.

Selectmen thanked Melissa for this update and further stated they will get in touch with her after speaking with the road agent about the roadwork at Evergreen Cemetery.

**6:15 – Jill Wilmoth** – Molly Eppig was unable to attend the meeting, Jill Wilmoth was present to represent the Rhubarb Festival Committee and to provide an update as to what went well, what can be improved upon. Jill reported that the vendors have

indicated they were much more successful and satisfied having the festival one day, instead of two. There were 34 vendors and they all did great. The food trucks sold out by 3:00 pm and there was over \$2,000.00 of profit raised as a fundraiser for the Library addition.

Items they discussed:

- **Parking** - Selectman Parisi discussed that there are plans to bring the town owned banking by the Wilson property down. Further stating, there are volunteers who have said they will help make a road and trees will be taken down in the outfield. This will create the ability to park an additional 60+ cars and have a safe roadway for traffic.

Discussion followed as to how extremely helpful it was that the Wilsons allowed parking on their property. It would not have been feasible to park in such an efficient manner without their help.

- **Volunteers**- The volunteers were very helpful, there can always be additional volunteers, however it was very successful as a result of so many helpers.
- **Length of Event** – The event will be kept to 1 day. This proved to be a much more successful event for everyone.
- **Porta Potties & Insurance** – The Committee appreciated the help with the cost of the porta potties & insurance being paid by the Town and would like to ask that remain the same in 2025. Selectmen approved this.

Selectmen thanked Jill for all the hard work that everyone put into this successful event. It seemed to be the most successful yet and the Selectmen further stated they look forward to 2025 being equally or more successful. Selectmen would like to meet before the first of the year to discuss a budget for 2025.

**6:20 - Bennington Education Committee** – Selectmen asked if the committee would like to speak at this time or wait until 6:30 as scheduled. Bethany Craig replied they would be happy to start a few minutes early. Present from the committee were Mike Hoyt, John Manley, Bethany Craig & Joe McGregor. Riche Colcombe arrived at 6:30 pm. Mike Hoyt started by discussing changes in the ConVal Administration.

- **ConVal Superintendent** – Superintendent, Kimberly Saunders is leaving in August. They have started a search for her replacement, however they are

going to be thorough so the search will take some time. Ann Forrest, the current Assistant Superintendent, will be the interim Superintendent until an appropriate replacement is found.

- **ConVal Business Administrator** – Business Administrator, Brian Cisneros is also leaving the first week of August. That position has also been advertised, interviews begin Wednesday. Mr. Hoyt reported that there have not been a lot of applicants.
- **Feasibility Committee** – Mike Hoyt went on to report the Feasibility Committee meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of each month. Chairman Cleary is the acting member for the Town of Bennington Selectboard. Currently, the committee is looking at the financial and educational results of Frankestown &/or Dublin withdrawing from the district. At the next meeting they will be summing up legal issues and firming up the many complications of a withdrawal, and the impact it will have on the remaining towns. There will be a meeting on August 8, 2024 with Frankestown & Dublin sub committees; it is hopeful there will be some concrete answers at that time. Hoyt continued to explain the process for the committee. The deadline for a decision is November 15. A plan needs to be written and sent to the State School Board. This should be firming up at the last meeting in July. The 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting in August will determine whether to accept a withdrawal or not. If they do withdraw it will not go into effect until July 2026. The State needs a decision and plan, the March 2025 town meeting will have a vote for all towns.

Potential costs are a huge factor. Hoyt realizes they need to be closer to real numbers, at this time they can provide percentages, but not dollars. If buildings are sold, the funds would be discussed and reported on the schools MS-25 as revenue, utilized to reduce the overall payments for all towns.

The subcommittee meets next on Tuesday, July 23, 2024 at 4:00 pm. The hope is to clarify numbers at the SAU level.

Until the State Board of Education & voters make a decision, the towns considering withdrawing cannot get a contract or any numbers from an alternative SAU.

Potential costs to voters are a huge factor. Hoyt indicated we need to get closer to real numbers.

Selectmen thanked everyone for attending and further thanked Mike Hoyt for his update.

**7:00 - David Foster, Fire Chief** – Fire Chief, Foster was before the Selectmen to provide an update as to the status of the fire department.

- **Department overall** – Chief Foster stated as far as he knows, everything is going ok and everyone seems happy. No one has voiced opinions otherwise.
- **Meetings** – There have not been any monthly/weekly meetings as vacations have caused an attendance problem for many. Foster stated that regular meetings will start next month (August 2024).
- **Trainings** – There have been several trainings that have gone well. Zack Anderson is in charge of the trainings and is doing a great job.

**Advanced Pump** – This training was held in New Ipswich – Zack Anderson & Matt Sandquist attended.

**Auto Extraction, sponsored by Mike's Auto** – This event was held in Antrim – Curtis Dude and Nick Lawrence attended.

**EMS Training** – Zack Anderson & Meredith Shepherd have continued to attend this training. Jennifer Sandquist is moving forward with her training.

- **CDL** – Selectmen and Chief Foster discussed how many department members have CDL. Foster reported 4-5 members have their CDL, however the State does not require fire personnel to have a CDL, Chief Foster indicated he doesn't just let anyone drive the fire equipment, and that he is confident when someone takes a vehicle they are comfortable driving the equipment.
- **New Truck** – Chief Foster reported assembly will begin anytime and we should take possession of the new truck in the fall. Foster further stated that he expects to receive \$60-\$75,000 for the old truck.
- **Maintenance Logs** – Selectmen asked about maintenance logs on the equipment. Chief Foster indicated that they are checked and initialed by the

person doing the inspections. Selectmen asked if these logs were available to review. Chief Foster said they were.

- **Tahoe** – Chief Foster stated that everyone loves it and all is going well with the vehicle.
- **New Applicant** – Chief Foster presented an application for Jeff Danforth to become a new member to the Fire Department. A brief discussion followed. Selectmen approved hiring Jeff Danforth. (3-0)
- **New Gear** – Chief Foster discussed the quote that was previously submitted for \$21,000 to be paid via CRF for new gear. Selectmen did approve this quote and items have been ordered.
- **Budgets** – Selectmen discussed the budgets and asked Chief Foster to keep a close eye on the budget. There were two lines that have gone over, both are results of invoices for 2023 that were not submitted until earlier in the year of 2024. Selectmen stated that if any line items go over, without a clear understanding and prior approval from the Selectboard, budgets will be frozen until year end. Chief Foster stated he understood.

With nothing further Selectmen thanked Chief Foster for the update.

**Minutes:** Selectmen all approved the public and non-public minutes for July 1, 2024.

**Financial:** A/P & Payroll Manifests were signed

### **Other**

- **Signatures** – Stantec Contract – Selectmen would like to have Dave Allwine attend the next meeting and discuss questions that have arisen. Town Administrator will set up the meeting.
- **Abatement** – Water bill, a new meter was installed, the Water Commissioners agreed to abate the original bill and submit a new bill with the new meter read.
- **Sawyer Field** – Selectmen discussed the request to install fencing in the outfield of Sawyer Field. The request was for 165' long and 8' high chain link in the outfield. Discussion followed that the upgrades to the field will be in phases. Before any fencing can be installed the Board would like to visit the field and see exactly what and where. Phase 1 fencing, Phase 2 road/parking

- **Playground equipment** – Selectmen unanimously agreed to pass on the school playground equipment. A warrant article for playground equipment would make more sense. Establishing a CRF specifically for this. If the school insurance deems the equipment unsafe, the town insurance likely would as well.
- **Mini splits** – Discussion regarding obtaining prices and installing mini splits in the Town Office followed. Chief Foster indicated he could help with this project. Administrative Assistant will get prices and follow up on this for the 2025 budget year.
- **Whittemore Lake** – Selectmen have heard positive feedback as to how the Whittemore Lake is being attended and residents are happy with the improvements. Selectman Parisi discussed getting a couple more tables, Selectman James stated there are more umbrellas in Newhall Field shed that could be used.

**Adjournment:**

With nothing further, Chairman Cleary motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:56 pm. 2<sup>nd</sup> by Selectmen Parisi & James. Meeting was adjourned. The next Selectmen's meeting will be Monday - August 5, 2024 at 6:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Debra Davidson, Town Administrator