

DRAFT

MINUTES – SPECIAL BUILDING COMMITTEE MEETING TOWN OF BARNET, VERMONT WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2019

Meeting convened at 6:30 p.m. in the conference room of the Barnet Fire & Rescue Station.

Committee members present: William Biddle, Dylan Ford, William Graves, Benjamin Heisholt, Mark Jefferson, Stanley Robinson, Catherine Roy, David Warden, and Dana Young.

Members of the public present: Steven Adler, Dakota Butterfield, Jonathan Carpenter, Arthur Cheney, John Cook, Sarah Cook, Jennifer Crown, Annette Dauscher, Bruce Denio, Kenneth Faris, Mary Faris, Barry Fudim, Clara Heisholt, Claudia Heisholt, Luisa Heisholt, Frank Jannarone, Rachel Kittredge, Ramona Letourneau, Dennis McLam, Kathleen Monroe, Amy Nixon (Caledonian-Record), Janice Parsons, Kathryn Roosa, Charles Smith, Charles Somers, Hez Somers, Bill Vermuelen, Shirley Warden, and Gail Warnaar.

1. Call to order

- Chair William Graves called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.
- Mr. Graves led the Committee and members of the public present in a moment of silence in memory of the events of September 11, 2001.
- Mr. Graves led the Committee and members of the public present in a moment of silence in memory of Paul Keenan, a respected member of the community who died the day of this meeting.
- Mr. Graves gave introductory remarks. These reviewed the Committee's work on the municipal office project, proposed the scope of this meeting, and set forth expectations for the meeting of respect and orderliness, and hope for positive engagement and information.

2. Consideration of approval of prior meeting minutes

- Mr. Robinson moved to approve as presented the minutes of the special meeting held August 29, 2019. Seconded by Mr. Biddle and approved by voice vote.
- Mr. Robinson moved to approve as presented the minutes of the special meeting held April 29, 2019. Seconded by Ms. Ford and approved by voice vote.
- It was noted that there are no official minutes of the special meeting held September 7, 2019, as there was not a quorum of the Committee at that meeting.

3. Hear public comment

Mr. Graves opened the floor to public comment, which was heard as summarized below:

- Zoning Administrative Officer Shirley Warden spoke, as summarized: There have been public comments suggesting that Town zoning records are maintained at the home of the Zoning Administrative Officer. This is inaccurate. All permanent and public-access zoning records are maintained at the Town Clerk's Office. Only reference materials and copies of official documents are kept at the Zoning Administrative Officer's home.

4. Municipal Building Project Survey Report – Cynthia Stuart, Project Consultant

Ms. Stuart made a presentation regarding the results of the public survey on the municipal building project. A slideshow presentation was made, of which printed copies were provided. Ms. Stuart's presentation was as summarized below:

- Intentions behind outreach and community input, including survey.
- Totals with regard to survey responses (227 total surveys).
- Listing and description of community outreach methods.
- Review of survey responses, with regard to:
 - Average visits to Town Clerk's Office.
 - Current town office building functionality.
 - Importance of town office considerations.
 - Importance of aspects of new construction.
 - Importance of aspects of McIndoe Falls Academy renovation.
 - Community choice between two options (build a new facility – 34.30%; renovate McIndoe Falls Academy – 65.7%).
 - Analysis of results.
 - Individual community member comments and questions.

Mr. Graves asked for Committee response to Ms. Stuart's presentation. This was given, as summarized below:

- Several members thanked Ms. Stuart for her organized, thoughtful and competent assistance with this project.
- Several members indicated that they were ready to suggest to the Selectboard that an option be put forward for the voters to vote on.
- Two members, William Biddle and Catherine Roy, indicated that they were torn about what direction to take with the the project.
- Mr. Graves spoke about the need to know the full budget for any proposed project, but also to understand the difference between the full budget and the actual Barnet tax revenue to be raised. Discussion was had about logistics of warning a vote, including the question of whether the article would consider the budget cost or the tax revenue to be raised.

5. Hear public comment

Mr. Graves opened the floor to public comment, which was heard, as summarized below:

- Bruce Denio asked if the Committee had considered using the Fire & Rescue Station property for new construction. Discussion ensued.
- Discussion was had about the Committee's investigation of the Town Garage property as a site for new construction.
- Bill Vermuelen asked about the possibility of using the former Barnet Village Store as a site for a developer to renovate and lease space to the Town. Discussion ensued.
- Dennis McLam suggested the Town take a slow-build or phased approach to a non-borrowing project, given that the current Town Clerk's Office continues to be somewhat functional. Discussion ensued.
 - Mr. Graves indicated that consultant Stephen Pitkin did not seem to be in favor of a phased construction approach, citing added complications with a municipal project in contrast to a private project.
 - Mr. Young indicated that it may be possible to do a phased construction project with a renovation; the Town of St. Johnsbury did this when renovating its current office building.
- Discussion was had about the location of municipal offices in a village center versus the geographic center of town.

- Hez Somers asked if the Committee considered the Barnet School property as a potential location for new construction. Discussion ensued. Mr. Graves noted that the school property is currently owned by an entity not consisting entirely of Barnet voters.
- Sarah Cook spoke in support of providing the voters a choice between concrete options with all requisite facts and data available.
- Charles Smith asked if the current Town Clerk, Benjamin Heisholt, had an opinion regarding the municipal building project. Mr. Heisholt responded, indicating he was satisfied that the Committee had heard his opinions and insight throughout the process, and that although he did not wish to endorse one of the two options, he believes either option could be successful. He also indicated that the current Town Clerk's Office is not a good site for renovations.
- Bruce Denio spoke about the potential failure of the Moore or Comerford Dams, which would be catastrophic for the village of McIndoe Falls.
- Barry Fudim spoke about the costs of both projects, which he regards to be high in terms of affordability, particularly in the case of the McIndoe Falls Academy; he highlighted financing costs. He suggested that the survey should have included a "neither" or "no" option for preference of action to take. Discussion ensued. Mr. Graves indicated that costs to taxpayers in new property tax revenue are expected to be well below the published budget costs.
- Town Attorney Steven Adler spoke about the logistics of moving toward a vote on the project. He indicated that the Committee is expected to make a recommendation to the Selectboard. Thereafter, in order to move forward, the Selectboard would need to make a finding of public necessity for new or renovated municipal offices. Then, the Selectboard would warn an election of all the voters on a single "yes" or "no" question. Assuming that question would involve borrowing with a term longer than five years, an Australian ballot election would be held.
- Charles Smith asked about structural and other possible problems with the McIndoe Falls Academy building. Mr. Graves responded, indicating that a feasibility study was conducted to uncover these concerns. There are issues to be addressed, but the building is structurally sound.

6. Consideration of, and take any action on, recommendation to the Selectboard regarding article to be warned for special town meeting

Discussion was had among the Committee regarding how to frame a recommendation to the Selectboard.

- Mr. Warden moved to recommend to the Selectboard that they warn a special Town Meeting/Australian ballot vote on authorization to accept the gift of the McIndoe Falls Academy property and renovate the McIndoe Falls Academy building into municipal offices. Seconded by Mr. Robinson. Discussion ensued. Voice vote was had, with following results: seven (7) ayes, zero (0) nays, two (2) abstentions (two Selectboard members, due to their Selectboard roles) – motion approved.

7. Other business

- Gail Warnaar asked about the Committee's involvement with other Town buildings and properties, suggesting that the Town has a number of properties that are not well maintained or used. Mr. Graves responded, indicating that the Selectboard had directed the Committee to focus its current efforts on the municipal office project. Mr. Graves indicated that the Committee did make recommendations to the Selectboard a few years ago regarding the maintenance of other Town property – on which the Selectboard did not take adequate action.

8. Adjournment

- Mr. Biddle moved to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Robinson and approved by voice vote. Meeting adjourned at 8:22 p.m.

A true copy.

Attest: _____
Town Clerk