

Village of Old Bennington  
Special Trustees' Meeting Minutes  
Feb. 2, 2026

The Trustees held a special meeting at the Barn and on Zoom to gather public opinion on a proposed Conditional Use Permit for Hendricks Churchill, doing business as Walloomsac Property LLC, the architectural design firm that's planning to restore the Walloomsac Inn. Here's a link to the Zoom recording of the meeting:

[https://zoom.us/rec/share/QIwYncrJkTc8sWBllcgx7kuNOaa6V9gWTcvJSn3FkbPf-GKq5UJla-SoKRPg4HC2.lz7RefkAGumS\\_iSR?startTime=1770073208000](https://zoom.us/rec/share/QIwYncrJkTc8sWBllcgx7kuNOaa6V9gWTcvJSn3FkbPf-GKq5UJla-SoKRPg4HC2.lz7RefkAGumS_iSR?startTime=1770073208000)

Passcode: @%MH%J5s

Officials present: Presiding Officer Ed Woods; Trustees Than Marcoux, Jim Thatch, Tom Woodward and Susan Wright; Treasurer Ron Rabideau; Auditor Kathy Wagenknecht; Clerk Mary Walsh; Zoning administrator David Kiernan; Zoom operator Mckinley Keaffaber.

Residents who appeared in person to speak to the Trustees: Bob Bullington, Richard Caswell, Nancy Coseo, Kate Gobel, Galen Jones, Colleen Kelley, Renny Ponvert, Johnny Randel, Brian Scheetz, Wendy York; resident who spoke on Zoom: Marc Baetens. [David Kiernan also has the names of residents who attended but didn't speak, if needed, since he asked people to sign in at the door. Attendance will be prerequisite to any subsequent appeals.]

Representatives of the applicant and business partners who spoke on Zoom: David Cooper, Jess Rizzio, Casey Sutherland.

EW called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. MK noted that the meeting was being recorded.

EW said that the Trustees were making a decision on the Conditional Use Permit sought by Walloomsac Property LLC, and wanted to gather public opinion first.

He laid out the order in which different groups of people would speak and read the Warning for the hearing. He repeated that attendance at this meeting would be prerequisite to any appeals, so people should sign in.

EW explained that the Village's new Interim Bylaw (enacted in January) gave the Trustees the power to issue Conditional Use Permits, something that would otherwise be impossible because the Village's required Economic Development Plan has lapsed. Under the Interim Bylaw, the Trustees can approve Conditional Use Permits as long as the applicant's plans are consistent with the health, safety and welfare of the municipality. The Trustees are also supposed to consider the planned use of the property relative to the existing capacity of local facilities; the patterns of development in the area; possible environmental limitations; and municipal bylaws or ordinances already in effect.

[Clerk's note: The above is just a quick summary of the requirements. The actual interim Bylaw can be read [here](#).]

Walloomsac Property LLC's application for the permit, and an addendum providing more detail on the project, have been available on the Village website for several weeks. A one-page site plan sketch was added on the day of this hearing; MK put a copy of it on the Zoom screen so that everyone could see it. DK said the site plan was necessarily rudimentary, and it would be developed further in the coming interactions with the Planning Commission. EW checked with the Trustees to make sure all had reviewed the application and addendum.

EW then opened the floor to questions and comments from residents.

Marc Baetens, of 21 West Road, said he didn't see an official Village signature on the site plan, which he thought it should have. Also, he said, the Walloomsac Inn currently has a driveway opening onto Monument Avenue from along the North side of the Inn, but the site plan seemed to also show a driveway on the South side of the Inn.

EW said that the site plan was indeed an official document, as were the application and the addendum. He said discussions about driveways involved a level of detail beyond what the Trustees were doing at the current meeting. The Trustees were just hearing public opinion on whether they should approve the applicant's Conditional Use Permit. If they did, the project would move forward to the Planning Commission, which would conduct its detailed review of the project design (including any driveways).

Richard Caswell, of 69 Monument Ave., said he wanted to offer his full support to the Walloomsac Inn restoration. He said he might be the only resident who was born in Old Bennington and had lived here ever since. He said he wanted to know how the three smaller buildings behind the Walloomsac Inn would be treated by the restoration project. He also asked what the hours of construction were going to be.

EW said it was premature to discuss the plans for the three smaller buildings. He said the question of construction hours was a legitimate inquiry, and the Trustees would support a good working arrangement.

Nancy Coseo, of 3 Monument Circle, asked what plans had been made for parking. JT said they were at a very early stage. NC said the Trustees were considering a “change of use” from residential to commercial, and for that to happen there ought to be an approved parking plan that would be acceptable to the Village. She said she thought the question of parking was the residents’ biggest concern.

Renny Ponvert, of 11 Monument Ave., a member of the Planning Commission, said he wanted to know if the Village could secure the developers’ agreement to three conditions: 1) that the developer would be required to submit a parking plan, including employee parking, prior to the effective date; 2) that the use permit be for an inn with no more than 30 guest rooms, since plans with more rooms plus a restaurant and bar might lead to inflated financial projections; and 3) that the developer provide a site plan with trash and delivery routes within 60 days. RP also said that the Walloomsac Inn would be the first commercial project in the Village in a long time, and he wondered if the developers were going to follow the Town’s rules for water and sewer standards.

EW said the developers could answer questions once all the residents who wanted to speak had done so.

Wendy York, of 77 Monument Ave., said she had just moved to Old Bennington in October, and she was in favor the restoration but was concerned about parking. Her house, next door to Richard Caswell’s, has a semicircular driveway in front. Just since she moved in, cars had parked in front of her driveway four or five times, and that’s without the renovated inn.

RR, of 363 Elm St., wanted to know, in procedural terms, if the Trustees had the authority to approve a Conditional Use Permit that included additional conditions.

EW said that tonight's hearing was in response to an Interim Bylaw that had already been approved; it called for the Trustees consult the Planning and Zoning experts before approving any final use of the site.

RR said he also wanted to know how commercial matters like hours of operation would be addressed if this plan moved forward.

NC said the current bylaws do have some elements pertaining to commercial operations. For example, Sec. 55 has the requirements one would expect for the numbers of parking places.

Kate Gobel, 21 West Road, said she hoped there would be a traffic feasibility study done, because the Walloomsac Inn stands on a very precarious turn, and the lines of sight aren't good there.

DK said there were 22 requirements for a final site plan, and those would be addressed at the right time. He said the State of Vermont will have to approve the lines of sight for traffic passing the Inn. It's important that this issue be scrutinized, and it will be.

EW said that when the State of Vermont was involved, there would be a portal provided, so citizens could follow what the State was doing.

Johnny Randall, of 11 West Road, said he wanted to know at what point the Village would have a sense of whether the planned restoration was going to work or not. He said he understood that the Conditional Use Permit under consideration was just for getting the project started, but what would happen if farther along it became clear that it wasn't going to work?

EW said that a Conditional Use Permit could have contingencies, and when the Board made a subsequent decision on the project, it could base the decision on whether all the contingencies had been met.

Bob Bullington, 4 Fairview Street, asked if the Board of Trustees knew whether the applicants had the necessary financing.

EW said financing was outside of the Board's jurisdiction.

Bob Bullington said in that case, tonight's decision was not being based on the knowledge that the applicant could really achieve its plan. He said the Town of Bennington had had a lot of problems of that nature.

EW said there were certain issues that the Board of Trustees needed to deal with at the current hearing, but financing was not one of them.

Next, EW said it was time for the Trustees to speak. EW said the Board had heard a lot of concerns about parking, and he thought his vote would require a parking plan as a contingency. He also said that the Board understood that the potential for parking problems needed to be addressed. Wendy York and Rich Caswell said they would be happy to serve as deputies of the Board on this issue, if needed.

EW said there had also been questions about the Inn's capacity, but it wasn't up to the Board to decide how many rooms the Inn should have. He said that compliance with fire, safety, egress and access codes were under the State of Vermont's jurisdiction, and the applicants would be turning to the State on those matters.

Rich Caswell said he had additional information related to parking: The State of Vermont already had a construction plan, which the Board considered back when he was serving, around 2017. Even then, there were already problems on that stretch of Route 9. The State's plan was not completed. He urged the board to talk with MSK Engineering about this, come up with a plan, and make sure there's follow-through.

EW said the Trustees were going to discuss that in their regular monthly meeting, when they would be updated on traffic-calming measures.

JT said all of the concerns being presented would be addressed at the proper time, but for now the Trustees simply wanted to give the developers a commitment, which would allow them to start investing in their project. He said the restoration would be very beneficial to the Village. He said Hendricks Churchill was a very well-respected architectural design firm, which had attended every Village meeting. He urged listeners to review the firm's web page and see that the firm had done this type of work many times in the past. JT said everybody kept saying, 'Well, I'm in favor of this, but...' and for tonight, the Trustees should simply let them start working on it.

SW said she wanted to repeat what JT had said. The restoration was going to be challenging, but the developers had the experience to find solutions to the many problems. She said the Board needed to trust them to go forward.

EW said everyone was interested in the Inn being operated responsibly. He said he had done a lot of research on Hendricks Churchill. Tourism is the number one source of revenue for the State of Vermont, and Hendricks Churchill had a plan, and the background experience, to complete the restoration. He said they were not just builders, architects, or historic preservationists, but they had a plan to bring the restored Inn into commercial operation, too.

Marc Baetens said that the Board was considering a unique application for commercial use, and he asked whether the Board could ask the developers to specify the number of rooms the restored Inn would have, and the number of seats in the restaurant, because those numbers would allow the Board to calculate the number of parking places needed.

JT said those concerns were valid and they would be addressed when the time was right. For tonight, the Board was just deciding whether to affirm its commitment to turning the property back into an inn.

EW said the restoration project would have an added layer of oversight because the Trustees would have to “own” it and approve it along the way. He said it was key that the Planning and land-use experts be involved in advising the Trustees.

Colleen Kelley, of 72 Monument Ave., said she and her husband had bought their house in 1993, when it was full of lead paint and the porch was falling off. They were intent on fixing it even though they didn’t know what they were doing. She said the applicants for the Walloomsac Inn did know what they were doing. They would bring value that would far exceed the financial returns, because they would raise the culture of the area, make Old Bennington better known, and help the public learn what went on at the Inn before Vermont was a state. She said the residents of Old Bennington had a responsibility to make the Village thrive, and she commended the applicants for coming in from the outside and helping to do that too.

EW said he agreed the restoration would be a boost for everyone, and it would be a tragedy if the Inn collapsed, especially right next to Route 9.

RR said he understood JT's statements, and it was the Interim Bylaw that would give the Conditional Use Permit force.

EW said that was right. The Interim Bylaw protected the Village by allowing the Trustees to approve the Conditional Use Permit.

Galen Jones, of 10 Walloomsac Road, said he was hearing a lot of cheerleading from the Trustees, and lip-service to protecting residents from unfortunate externalities. He said he thought it was extraordinary for the Board to be approving something without a fully developed site plan. He wanted the Trustees to be aware of how hard it was going to be to make the required number of parking spaces fit on the available site. He said he thought all the challenges of this project were being looked at in a cavalier way.

EW said he took exception to most of what GJ had said, and that calling their process "lip service" was a slap in the face to the Board. He said he lived in Old Bennington because he loved Old Bennington, and he wanted to protect it.

JT said that the Trustees were not treating the planned restoration as a trivial thing.

Brian Scheetz, of 19 Monument Circle, urged the Board to approve the Conditional Use Permit with many of the conditions mentioned. He said he wanted to comment on Ed's contention that the Trustees wouldn't get into the decision of how many rooms the Walloomsac Inn should have. When the Four Chimneys wanted to expand, he said, the Village did, in fact, get involved in how many rooms there would be, and they ultimately limited it to 13. With that in mind, he didn't think the Trustees should be saying they weren't going to get into the number of rooms that the Walloomsac Inn could have.

EW said the Board was focused on use, not capacity, in the current hearing. He said the applicant hadn't provided the planned number of guest rooms, and the size of a business was not in the Board's purview.

Kathy Wagenknecht, of 87 Monument Avenue, said she wanted to point out that Route 9 was under the control of the State of Vermont, and it was the only street that ran by the Walloomsac Inn. Therefore, she said, the condition of Route 9 was the State's issue, and not up to the Village.

EW encouraged Village residents to get information on Route 9 from the State's portal, once Route 9 was under consideration. He promised to tell residents how to access the information on the portal.

Bob Bullington said he wanted to lend his support to what Galen Jones had said.

MK said he lived in the Town of Bennington, right outside the Village, at 733 Monument Ave. He said that when he started as the Village's tech operator, one of the first issues he heard about was the risk that developers, motivated by the State's new Home Act, would start building giant condominium buildings. He said it was his opinion that if the historic Walloomsac Inn were allowed to fall down, it would be just as disgusting as if a 13-story condominium tower arose.

EW said it was time for the developers to speak and he gave them the floor. He asked Casey Sutherland if the Board had correctly stated the involved parties' roles. CS said he had.

David Cooper, the applicant's lawyer, said he wanted to clarify the nature of the present meeting: The Trustees had graciously reviewed the situation and enacted the Interim Bylaw, which enabled the Board to express its commitment by approving a Conditional Use Permit. He said that was why the site plan was rudimentary, narrow, and simple. The Board was trying, at this point, to focus solely on the requirements for approving a Conditional Use Permit. Other issues of interest to the Village would come before the Planning Commission, which still had the authority to conduct a complete design review. For now, the developers didn't want to devote resources to issues that the Board of Trustees didn't have control over. They wanted to address what's at issue now, and leave aside what would happen later. He urged the Board not to handicap the process by imposing conditions now. Requiring a parking plan, for example, was going to be critical during the Planning Commission's review, but that wasn't what was happening at the current hearing. He also pointed out that Hendricks Churchill had engaged MSK Engineering for the coming work, and MSK was as expert as any engineering firm in the State.

He said the question for Conditional Use Permit approval was whether the Walloomsac Inn project would adversely affect roadways. He said the restoration was a complex project, and it couldn't be done without the Village, and help from the neighbors. He said the developers wanted to work constructively with them. He said he lived in Rutland, and projects of this nature didn't come along very often. He said Old Bennington was going to go from having a big, dilapidated structure to

having an economically viable structure. This couldn't help but affect the Village, and the developers' job was to work with the neighbors and make sure drivers didn't block driveways, or crash their cars because they couldn't see. He said the developers wanted to work both with the State and the Village.

Tonight, he said, the application for a Conditional Use Permit was before the Board of Trustees, and he believed the developers had shown that they qualified for it. Parking would be an issue, no doubt about it, but the team was confident that there was a solution that would work for everyone.

EW said he wanted to confirm that everybody knew there were issues that the Trustees weren't ready to take up at the current meeting.

Jess Rizzio, from MSK Engineering, spoke on Zoom, saying the firm had done a traffic study on Route 9 and it had shown that there would be no adverse effects from a greater number of trips per day. She said the firm had also looked into other resources in the area and whether they would turn up on the parcel, but they had not found any. The building would be served by municipal sewer and water infrastructure, and the current infrastructure was very old. She said MSK had not yet been able to discuss this with the Town yet, because the relevant officials were away.

EW said sewer and water infrastructure wasn't on the agenda for the current meeting.

Casey Sutherland said that the restored Inn would have a valet parking component, since the existing space couldn't hold as many cars as needed. He said that the details of the valet parking system would comply with Village bylaws.

EW said parking would be taken up by the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board.

The public portion of the hearing was adjourned at 7:22 p.m., and the Trustees went into a closed executive session. During the closed session the Trustees voted unanimously to approve the Conditional Use Permit application, as submitted by Walloomsac Property LLC.