

Village of Old Bennington
Trustees' Meeting Minutes
Dec. 2, 2025

The Trustees' monthly meeting was held at the Barn and on Zoom. Here's a link to the Zoom recording of the meeting:

https://zoom.us/rec/share/JMWez7rLzym4CpmsyCSE-hLy0LbmpjD6HJv1IePpi_4QuK4SfP-k8GtY5Ag5hBXi.K4d4hoL_AdrgMlBp?startTime=1764719979000

Passcode: gZ&bC073

Officials present: Trustees Than Marcoux, Jim Thatch, and Susan Wright; Treasurer Ron Rabadou; Auditor Kathy Wagenknecht; Clerk Mary Walsh; and Zoom Operator McKinley Keaffaber.

Officials absent: Presiding Officer Ed Woods. (The Trustees agreed that in EW's absence, JT would preside over the meeting.)

Citizens present: Renny Ponvert in person. Meghan Schwarzkopf and Rafe Churchill (of Hendricks Churchill) on Zoom.

1. Call to order: JT called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
2. Changes or updates to the agenda: None.
3. Approval of minutes from the November Trustees' meeting: SW said November's minutes said that the Trustees had decided to get a speed cart, but she thought they had decided to get a solar-powered speed sign. JT said the minutes had to be corrected. TW moved to approve the November minutes with that correction. TM seconded the motion, and the corrected minutes were approved unanimously.
4. Citizen comments not related to the agenda: JT said he would read a letter he'd received at the appropriate time.
5. Reports of Commissioners:
 - a. Roads Commissioner: TM provided a status report on road maintenance plans. He said he had met with Norm LeBlanc of North Bennington to compare [MSK's 2019 roads report](#) with the current state of Village roads. All still need some repairs, except for Fairview Street and Banks Street. Other streets have cracks that need to be filled with tar, but that's a job for the warm months. MSK's report mentioned possible

“chip sealing” of the Village roads, and NL agreed with what MSK said. Chip sealing isn’t a full road redo; it’s a lesser measure that can extend the life of a road before a full redo is necessary. He and NL plan to get together again and determine which roads are good candidates for chip sealing, then get the work done, probably over the next two years. NL estimated that chip sealing could add three to five years to the roads’ lifespans. TM and NL will also bring in some possible contractors and get estimates.

JT said the Village was lucky to have NL assisting with road maintenance.

RP asked TM what his top priorities were for road work. TM said he still needed to get NL’s opinion, but for now the worst stretches of Village roads were 1) about two-thirds of Catamount Lane, where there are lots of overhanging branches, and 2) the westernmost part of Elm Street and the southernmost extension of Monument Avenue, where there’s also a lot of shade. The shade prevents rainwater on the roads from evaporating, and the standing water rots the surface and may affect the roads’ foundations. TM said Seminary Lane was also in rather poor shape, but it was of less priority because it isn’t a main road.

RR asked how the new contract for plowing and salting Village roads would work, noting that he had already received two bills. TM said the contractor, Pembroke, was providing breakdowns of its salting and plowing manhours. RR asked whether there would be any carry-forward of the manhours in months when it didn’t snow and the manhours weren’t actually used. TM said the Village’s contract doesn’t work that way. The Village gets a much lower hourly rate over the course of the year by paying a consistent rate in winter, whether or not there’s snow. This is a new approach for the Village. The goal is to make sure we get consistent service and safe roads, based on our budget.

JT said that the Village had reviewed all options before entering the current contract, and this approach seemed best. He said the Trustees could take another review at the end of the season.

- b. Trees Commissioner: TW said EW had submitted a request that the Village tree-replacement fund cover the cost of one new sugar maple, \$1,375. EW recently had to remove two sugar maples on Monument Avenue, and he replaced both of them, but he would cover the cost of one tree himself. SW moved to reimburse the cost of one replacement sugar maple; TM seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

TW also said that the problem of trees overhanging Village roads, allowing water to accumulate and damage the pavement, was an ongoing concern. He said some residents appear not to know they need to keep vegetation trimmed back, and he was planning to send all residents a letter explaining this.

RR said he had seen lots of weeds growing in cracks between the Village sidewalks and streets. TW said he had noticed the same thing and wondered why, since the Village has contracted to have herbicide applied.

- c. Parks and Sidewalks Commissioner: SW said she had contacted Pembroke, the Village's snowplowing contractor, to make sure they knew how fragile the marble sidewalks are in areas near the Old First Church. Pembroke told her their equipment weighs about a third what Jerome's equipment did, and it has a rubber cutting edge instead of metal. They said if the Village still thought that the lighter equipment was harming the sidewalks, they have another machine that's even lighter.

SW also pointed out that the orange fencing and huge cement blocks that were on the Village Green have been removed.

- d. Police Commissioner: JT said there had been no police incidents, other than a traffic sign that was knocked over. He reminded everybody to contact him if they had safety concerns.

He said he and EW had met with Police Chief Paul Doucette and told him about the \$5,000 worth of traffic-calming measures that the Trustees approved at the November meeting. They plan to implement the measures in steps, starting with the milder ones and adding tougher ones as needed. Chief Doucette agreed with the plans. There will be additional speed-limit signs in the Village, and more "reduced speed ahead" signs on the roads leading into the Village. JT said he was still working on more decorative signs, based on his observation that you can get more drivers to slow down if you smile than if you scowl. He said the decorative signs' would be about two to three feet in size. Finally, Old Bennington is getting not a "speed cart," but an interactive, lighted speed sign that will be mounted on a pole and can be moved from time to time. It will detect drivers' speeds and flash "thank you" or a warning, depending.

TW asked how the Village will measure the effect of these changes. JT said the Village would rely on reports from the residents who can see the traffic outside their windows.

TW said he understood that the Village had a real traffic safety problem, but he was concerned about possible "sign pollution." The Village already has a lot of signs, and they can really disrupt the local character. JT said the Village could make a map, showing the locations of the signs, and use it to keep track of where there are too many signs or not enough. KW said there appeared to be only one sign on Monument Avenue below Old First Church, and a map could confirm that. MK said he hoped the Village would consider posting the decorative signs on wooden posts.

- e. Other: EW was travelling but left a brief message for Clerk MW to read, with an update on Walloomsac Inn developments. It said that the new owner of the Inn was planning to pursue an interim amendment to the Village's bylaws and ordinances, allowing the property to be returned to a being functioning inn while the Village's

Plan of Economic Development was undergoing review. That would allow Village residents the opportunity to voice their opinions or concerns about the project. EW said he had sought legal counsel on this approach and was told that the Trustees should vote on a resolution to this effect:

Shall the Village of Old Bennington adopt an interim bylaw that would allow the Walloomsac property to be returned to its previous use as an inn?

EW's message said that if a majority of the Trustees voted Yes, the owner would apply for the interim bylaw amendment. JT moved for the Trustees to approve the use of an interim bylaw. TW seconded the motion.

In the discussion that followed, RR said he wanted to make clear that the Trustees were not voting to pass an interim bylaw, because the correct legislative process would start with the Planning Commission. Rather, the Trustees were voting to register their favor for an interim bylaw, and to urge the Planning Commission to set to work on one. While the Planning Commission works on the interim bylaw, it can hold public hearings. There was a discussion of the Planning Commission's expected timeframe and the need to have a workable legal framework for the coming renovations. RP said the recent survey returns show that an overwhelming majority of Village residents support this project.

JT read a letter from Resident Peggy Hammond, saying the Walloomsac Inn was one of the most interesting and valuable structures of its kind anywhere, and having to pass it every day in its current condition was stressful and bad for our mental equilibrium. She urged Village officials to give the renovators all possible support and encouragement.

There was no further discussion and the resolution was passed unanimously. MW said that in the message EW had left her to read, he had also said he planned to research the development of a new commercial tax rate.

6. Treasurer's Report: RR said that as of now, about \$179,000 in property taxes and PILOTs had been paid, and there was a delinquency of about \$13,000 for the current year. He also read the Warrant, breaking down expenses for the most recent month. The documents can be viewed on the Village website, under the Board of Trustees tab. TM moved to accept the Warrant; TW seconded the motion and the Warrant was unanimously accepted.

There was a discussion of the delinquencies. RP said the total amount had now grown to about \$30,000. RR said a State law bars the Village from collecting penalties and interest until taxpayers are at least two years delinquent. Also, there are some special circumstances. For instance, Tzaims Luksus is delinquent on his taxes both to the Village and the Town. Normally, his delinquency would have triggered the tax-sale process already, but the Town has said it wanted more time to analyze the effect of a recent State law change. For now, the Village is waiting for the Town, so the tax sales can proceed concurrently. RR said he thought the Town would start moving on a tax sale next year.

7. Auditor: KW said she had nothing to report.
8. Old Business: There was none.
9. Future Agendas: Mary Rogers (of North Bennington) is planning to come to a Trustees' meeting, to discuss public-works efficiencies, but the scheduling hasn't worked yet. The Trustees hope to hear from her at the January meeting.
10. Adjourn: TW moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:59. SW seconded the motion and the meeting was unanimously adjourned.