

Village of Old Bennington
Trustees' Meeting Minutes
Sept. 9, 2025

The Trustees' monthly meeting was held at The Barn and on Zoom. There is a delay in the processing of the Zoom recording of the meeting. A link to the Zoom recording will be posted with these minutes when a working link becomes available.

Officials present: Presiding Officer Ed Woods; Trustees Than Marcoux, Jim Thatch, Tom Woodward, and Susan Wright; Treasurer Ron Rabidou; Auditor Kathy Wagenknecht; Clerk Mary Walsh; and Zoom Operator McKinley Keaffaber.

Officials absent: None.

Citizens present: Hillary Ponvert, Daniel Richmond, Brian Scheetz, and Megan Schwarzkopf in person; Lucy Baldwin on Zoom.

Guest speaker: Jonah Spivak, communications coordinator for the Town of Bennington.

1. Call to order: EW called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. and pointed out that it was a regular monthly meeting rescheduled by one week, and that the usual seating arrangement had been changed to accommodate new technology that will allow better communication via Zoom. Zoom operator MK noted that the proceedings were being recorded.
2. Changes or updates to agenda: EW reminded listeners that he had agreed to serve a six-month term, which would end in December. He said that people should keep in mind that there would be a new presiding officer after that.
3. Guest speaker JS, Communications Coordinator for the Town of Bennington, who also serves on local, State and regional planning bodies for the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Bennington: JS made a presentation about a proposed walking trail to be built on an unused Village road right-of-way that leads down the hill off of Monument Circle, roughly opposite Monument Avenue. The portion of the trail that would be in Old Bennington would be only about 300 feet long, but JS said it could eventually be used as a connection with the Town of Bennington's much larger network of walking trails. In the future the connected system might include stepping stones and a handrail to let people walk across the Walloomsac River.

JS made such a presentation to the trustees last year, but there was opposition then, based in particular on concerns that it might promote crime, loitering and other nuisance behavior. JS suggested that Village residents look at a 2014 survey of property owners

along the 11-mile Ashuwillticook Rail Trail for bikes and pedestrians, in central Berkshire County, Massachusetts. The survey showed that most respondents were satisfied with the trail, thought it had improved the quality of their neighborhoods, and did not expose them to greater safety risks. There were complaints about litter and walkers' failure to pick up after their dogs, however.

[Clerk's note: A PDF version of the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail survey results is available [here](#).]

JS said residents' concerns about walkers relieving themselves on private property or picnicking on people's lawns could be allayed by setting up some picnic tables and a portable toilet during tourist season. He also suggested adding fences, signs, or hedges to keep people on the right-of-way. To reduce the risk of crime, cameras could be installed.

For possible funding, JS said a grant of up to \$50,000 could be sought from the State Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation; it would require a 20% local match.

The discussion that followed covered such topics as: What historical story the trail would tell; how much the trail would cost to maintain in future years and who would pay that cost; the benefits of connecting the Village trail with the Town's trail system; whether it could eventually connect with other trail systems in the area; how much of an attraction a 300-foot trail would amount to by itself. BS objected strongly to the idea that a portable toilet could be used to reduce nuisance behavior. The discussion can be reviewed in its entirety in the Zoom link, when it is available.

JT moved in favor of the Trustees exploring the development of a walking trail in time for the Battle of Bennington anniversary. SW seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.

EW said there should be further discussion of financing such a project, particularly the possibility of a \$50,000 grant. He said TW had experience writing grant applications and it might make sense for him to work on one with JS, who has the information about the grants. TW said that in general, if you submit an application for any grant and are chosen to receive the grant, you have to go ahead with the project. Therefore, if the Trustees did want him and JS to apply for a grant, they would have to vote to approve the trail project first.

4. Approval of the minutes from the August meeting. TW moved to approve them; JT seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved unanimously.
5. Citizen comments unrelated to the agenda: RR asked how long the Old First Church steeple would be standing on the Village Green, where it's being repaired. It poses a significant traffic hazard, because drivers waiting at the stop sign in front of the Church can't see what's coming toward them on West Road. TW said the repairs are supposed to be completed before the end of September.

MW said now that the Zoning Board of Adjustment had become active, she wasn't sure who was filing the ZBA's on the Village website in time to meet the State's deadline, and she couldn't find the minutes from the ZBA's August meeting. BS said the ZBA's minutes could be found by scrolling down to the bottom of the tab that the Planning Commission shares with the ZBA. David Kiernan will be doing the minutes for both the Planning Commission and the ZBA.

6. Commissioner Reports:

- a. Roads Commissioner: TM said the work on Bank Street is close to complete, but a little more riprap could be added on the North side of the street, to make the ditch less of a steep drop. TM also said the Village could still add white lines on the edges of roads, which are called "fog lines." Having them painted would cost \$1,320. EW said he was concerned that would make the road too narrow. MW said there was now an unusually deep storm drain on the right side of Bank Street as you go down the hill, which seemed like a possible hazard. There was a discussion of whether and how the storm drain might be marked, to keep drivers from hitting it.

TM said that everybody he had asked expressed satisfaction with the ditches, drains, and road repainting. His next step will be to gather all invoices from the vendors and draw the Village's reimbursement grant from the State. He said he had also been in touch with the State about getting damaged curbs repaired on Monument Circle, since the curbs are on State property.

TM also said he had been putting together a list of other possible infrastructure repairs to be made, if the Village decides to go on utilizing North Bennington's public works department for maintenance and repairs. He said he had been in touch with Norm LeBlanc about this and NL saw two obvious items: First, NL recommended cleaning out all the storm drains, because they're supposed to be cleaned every year and he noticed the ones on Bank Street hadn't been cleaned in a long time. NL said his team usually took three days to clean all of North Bennington's storm, and if they cleaned the ones in Old Bennington, it would cost \$1,500 a day. RR said that in the past Old Bennington had had all of its storm drains cleaned as a part of annual maintenance, and that practice should now be revived, with the cost considered an implicit budget item. TW pointed out that the Village's total allocation for Bank Street's repairs had not yet been spent, so he didn't think cleaning the storm drains would require a vote; the Village could simply go ahead with NL's recommendation to get it done.

TM said NL's other recommendation was pruning the vegetation back in some places along Bank Street where it still overhangs the road. He said the vegetation creates shadows that prevent the road from drying out after it rains, and the moisture can rot the asphalt. NL recommended doing the pruning in the winter.

TW said the Village bylaws called for property owners to keep the vegetation on their land away from the roads. Not only do the roads stay wet for too long, but if there are

low branches in the roadway, cars sometimes hit them. RR said it was one thing to expect residents to keep their shrubbery away from the roads, but it was something else to expect them to trim tall trees.

There was a discussion of whether there should be an email list of Village residents, for use in notifying people of issues like excess vegetation. MW said she would start to compile one, since she has already been keeping regular mailing lists for use in elections.

TM said that so far, he did not have a vendor lined up to provide road salt this winter. Last year the Village used Apalachee Salt, and TM said could contract with that company again this winter.

TM also reported on the continued existence of yellow center lines on some Village streets, despite requests that they be removed. (Data provided by the Bennington County Regional Commission show that yellow center lines tend to promote speeding.) He said the company that was supposed to remove the lines had made many mistakes, such as going to the wrong location and even pulling down an overhead electrical line. The company also told TM that surface of the Village's roads curve in a way that makes it very hard to remove painted lines. Given all the problems in removing the lines, TM said he hoped residents could just wait for the lines to wear off.

RR said there had been talk in the past about writing a ten-year road-maintenance plan, so that there would be a record of estimated future road costs and everyone would know how much the Village should have on reserve. TM agreed that there should be a plan and said NL was willing to help Old Bennington prepare one.

- b. Tree Commissioner: TW said he had no news to report.
- c. Parks and Sidewalks Commissioner: SW said there was a plan in place for refurbishing the gardens on the Village Green. Lori Thatch will do the work, fulfilling the volunteer-work requirement for her Master Gardener certificate.
- d. Police Commissioner: JT said he had no news regarding the police. He said he was researching speeding in the Village and wanted to know where the worst speeding tended to happen. EW said the stretch of Monument Avenue from the Old First Church to Elm Street was known for speeding because it was flat and wide, and the stretch of Walloomsac Road from Fairview to Monument Avenue had a lot of speeding too. KW said she wanted to know where the Village's speed-limit signs were, because it seemed to her that there weren't any. EW said there were 25-mph signs at each entrance to the Village, but people tended to drive by and forget them. He said that if the Village intended to add more speed limit signs, they would have to be added to the Police Department's stop-sign inventory; otherwise they'd be hard to enforce. TM said a resident had recently told him there was no speed-limit sign for drivers turning left off Bank Street onto Monument Avenue. JT asked whether a

three-way stop at that corner might help, but EW said that when the Village had looked into it and learned that stop signs didn't really calm traffic and added noise.

KW said she had recently written to our State representative, Will Greer, to say that the State's recent decision to start capturing most of the fines paid for speeding violations (rather than sending the money back to the municipality where the speeder was caught) had deprived Old Bennington of an important revenue source. Fines previously paid the full cost of an officer, a patrol car, and related gear. Now Old Bennington can't afford those things and speeding is rampant. She said she asked for Rep. Greer's help with this problem. EW said the State's policy change to remove incentives for speeders to pay their fines had harmed Old Bennington too. KW suggested that "fog lines" might be added to the stretch of Monument Avenue where speeding is now such a problem.

- e. Other: TW gave a status report on his discussions with the State about the Village's forthcoming Plan of Economic Development. (The State has provided a grant to defray the Village's cost of developing the plan; TW is the State's primary contact person in the Village regarding the grant.) TW said he had discussed the Plan with Jonathan Cooper, a community development planner with the Bennington County Regional Commission who is now a State representative. They thought the Plan could help the Village position itself for "heritage tourism," and with that in mind TW drafted concepts for three projects: replacing dying street trees, restoring the ground-level memorial on the Village Green, and improving the sidewalks. He said Cooper read the drafts and thought all three stood a good chance of receiving grants. TW submitted grant applications in time to meet the Sept. 5 deadline.

BS, chair of the Planning Commission, updated the Trustees on work with the Bennington County Regional Commission, which is assisting the Commission's drafting of the Plan of Economic Development. The State expects each municipality to conduct "engagement" with its residents before drafting its Plan of Economic Development, so it can incorporate their ideas into the Plan. The BCRC and the Planning Commission are now scheduling some public events in which they hope to gather residents' views on how they hope the Village will look and feel in the future.

One is a walking tour, scheduled for the morning of Saturday, Oct. 25, guided by historians from the Museum. The walking tour is intended to give participants a chance to see historic and scenic features of the Village, learn how land uses have changed over time, and identify areas of pride and concern. (MS noted that the local Garden Club will also have an event on that date, but it will take place in the afternoon, so there won't be a conflict.)

A second event will be a community meeting, probably in late October or early November, at the Monument School. The BCRC plans to use various methods to facilitate a community conversation, allowing residents to image the future, and determine priorities.

A postcard event and a survey are also being planned. BS asked for the assistance of the Village government in publicizing these events and wondered whether the Trustees could handle a postcard mailing. TW recommended the public be asked to register for these events online, using a platform like Eventbrite. That would allow better recordkeeping.

7. Treasurer's Report: RR summarized the month's revenues and expenses. They can be seen in detail in the written Treasurer's Report, filed in the "Treasurer's Reports" section under the Board of Trustees tab on the Village website. RR said that the low cost of the Bank Street repairs had not been anticipated when the current budget was drawn up. Therefore, the Village could end fiscal 2026 with about \$400,000 in reserves. He said this likely outcome showed the importance of having a multi-year road-maintenance plan, so that residents could see clearly why the Village was holding such a large reserve.

RR summarized the expenses in the Warrant for Aug. 31, 2025. The full list is also in the Treasurer's Report on the Village website. TW moved to approve the Warrant; TM seconded the motion and the Warrant was unanimously approved.

On tax delinquencies, RR said that he still hadn't found a way to track the whereabouts of the owner of 57 Monument Avenue, which is a trust. He said the Town hasn't been able to locate the owner either, and he plans to check with the Town Treasurer on possible next steps.

There was a discussion about removing Anne Slattery's name from the bank authorization records, and replacing it with Jim Thatch's name. RR also recommended improvements to the process residents use to pay for Planning and Zoning permits, which would lead to a more complete and orderly paper trail.

8. Auditor: KW said she had nothing to report.
9. Other Business: EW asked Daniel of Richmond, a resident of 362 West Road, to make his prepared comments to the Trustees. DR apologized for adding to the length of the meeting and said he would be brief. He said he and his mother have lived at 362 West Road since 1973; he grew up in the Village, went to Monument Elementary School, and has always enjoyed the unique atmosphere that the Village has managed to preserve. Now, however, he said he had serious concerns about the redevelopment of the property at 3 Seminary Lane, which abuts his land. He said the buyers had mischaracterized their plans for the property, telling him it would be used by "family and friends," when in fact they intend to put to commercial use, as an inn. Doing this would pose serious trespass risks, he said. There are no sidewalks on Seminary Lane, but with an inn, there will be increased traffic, noise, and lights at night. Current plans for the inn also show a proposed event space, which would mean noisy party-goers spilling out of events within full sight and sound of DR's kitchen door. He said that the inn's landscaping workers marked one of his mature cherry trees for removal. DR said he had been in touch with the Zoning Board of Adjustment, and he understood that they, and not the Trustees, had jurisdiction over rezoning 3 Seminary Lane for commercial use. Still, he said said the Trustees should

be aware that this was happening to him, and it could therefore happen to any other property owner in Old Bennington.

A copy of DR's statement will be posted on the Village website when it becomes available.

10. Adjournment: TW moved to adjourn the meeting. JT seconded the motion. The meeting was unanimously adjourned.