

Village of Old Bennington
Trustees' Meeting Minutes
Nov. 4, 2025

[Corrected to reflect the Trustees' decision to buy a "speed sign," not a "speed cart."]

The Trustees' monthly meeting was held at the Bennington Theater, to accommodate a presentation by the new owners of the Walloomsac Inn. Here's a link to a recording of the meeting and the presentation (with slides), which starts at about 30 minutes:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1couzILM16AVpalF7kxjKYHTBs7T90PB8/view?usp=drive_link

(Note: The video looks different from the Trustees' usual Zoom recording because of technical difficulties with the Bennington Theater's WiFi. The Zoom recording will be back next month, when the Trustees will meet at the Barn.)

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

Officials absent: Trustee Tom Woodward.

Citizens present are not listed by name this month because of the unusually large turnout.

1. Call to order: Ed Woods called the meeting to order at 6:01 and said the Trustees would go through the agenda quickly, to allow ample time for the Walloomsac Inn presentation.
2. Approval of minutes: TM moved to approve the minutes from the October meeting; SW seconded the motion and the minutes were approved unanimously.
3. Citizens' comments not related to the agenda: Christine Costello asked if TM would be reporting on his walkaround with Norm LeBlanc of the North Bennington public works department. EW said TM would go over that in his commissioner's report.
4. Commissioner Reports:
 - a. Roads Commissioner: TM said he and Norm LeBlanc had not yet done their walkaround; they first had to make a plan for repairing and cleaning the many storm drains that couldn't be cleaned this fall because they were stuck or damaged. TM and NL have been mapping the faulty drains and preparing a cost estimate for fixing them. The cleaning and repairs are now expected to be done in Fiscal 2027, with the

cost included in that year's roads budget. Once the mapping and cost estimate are done, TM and NL will do their walkaround to identify other necessary repairs. EW asked TM to post the map of the storm drains on the Village website.

- b. Parks and Sidewalks Commissioner: SW said that the orange plastic fencing that surrounded the Old First Church's steeple while it was being repaired had been removed. The large cement blocks protecting the work site from traffic will be removed soon.
- c. Police Commissioner: JT said there were no reported incidents in the Village, and there was no other police news.
- d. Other, Traffic Calming Committee: EW said that he, JT, and SW had met and put together a list of action items for addressing the problem of speeding in the Village.

JT said he wanted to post some distinctive signs on the streets, reminding drivers that the Village is on the National Register of Historic Places and urging them to slow down, enjoy the sights, drive safely, etc. The signs would be designed to look different from regular traffic signs; they might show a photo of the Walloomsac Inn, for example.

EW said that once plans for the new signs were finalized, the committee members would meet with the police department and get approval to install them. The Village needs to work in cooperation with the Police Department, so that the signs are enforceable.

KW predicted that the decorative signs would slow down drivers seeing them for the first time, but not the drivers who cut through the Village every day on their way to work. EW said they were "intentional speeders." Mark Vaughn reminded the Trustees that drivers continue to turn down Church Lane without knowing it's a dead end with no place to turn around.

EW observed that drivers coming into the Village on West Road drive past a series of signs making them step down their speed, from 50 mph to 40 mph, then from 40 mph to 30 mph, and finally to 25 mph. The committee wants to implement that approach on other roads leading into the Village, after discussing it with the police.

The committee will also discuss with police the possibility of adding some signs saying, "No Truck Traffic," or "No Through Trucks."

Last, the committee made plans to buy the Village's own solar-powered "speed sign," a lighted sign that flashes to tell drivers how their speeds compare to the legal limit. Currently the Village is on a list to borrow the Town's "speed cart," which is easier to move from place to place, but it's in high demand and seldom available. A speed sign is much less expensive than a speed cart, so the Village can economize and still have

a traffic-calming device that's available every day. A speed sign can be moved from time to time, just not as readily as a speed cart.

EW said the committee had put together a \$5,000 proposed budget to implement these measures, with police approval. The expense would be included in the current budget (which has a surplus) so that the Village could move forward without waiting until Fiscal 2027, which begins next April 1.

JT moved to approve spending a maximum of \$5,000 on these measures during the remainder of the Village's current fiscal year. TM seconded the motion, and it was passed unanimously.

- e. Treasurer: RR said that to date he had received about 30 percent of the tax revenue projected for the current fiscal year. More detail is in the Treasurer's Report under the Board of Trustees tab on the Village website.

RR then discussed the warrants for the month's spending, also in the Treasurer's Report on the website. He noted that the contractor's insurance would cover the cost of replacing the marble bench on the Village Green, which was broken during the repairs of the Old First Church steeple.

TM moved to approve the warrants. JT seconded the motion and the warrants were unanimously approved.

RR said that the trust that owns 57 Monument Avenue, which has been tax-delinquent for about two years, had now agreed to pay the unpaid back taxes and plans to pay the taxes for the current fiscal year, too. The beneficiaries have also moved back into the house.

- f. Auditor: KW said she had nothing to report.

- 5. Old business: None.
- 6. Future agendas: Renny Ponvert told the Trustees that Mary Rogers of North Bennington still plans to come and discuss possible cooperation on maintenance.
- 7. Adjourn: JT moved to adjourn the Trustees' meeting at 6:30. TM seconded the motion and the meeting was unanimously adjourned.

The Trustees' meeting was then followed by a presentation on plans for the Walloomsac Inn, by Rafe Churchill, a principal of the Hendricks Churchill architecture and design firm, and Casey Sunderland, the firm's managing partner. CS began by providing some information on Hendricks Churchill, which can also be viewed on [the firm's website](#).

RC then introduced himself as a Bennington College alum who first saw the Walloomsac Inn in 1986. Although Hendricks Churchill is based in Connecticut, he said he owns property in Arlington and West Rupert, Vermont, and makes frequent trips to Vermont with his family. He said he understood the Walloomsac Inn's significance for Bennington and considered the restoration project more democratic than anything he had done over the last 30 years. He initially bought the property at 3 Seminary Lane, planning to convert it to an inn for members of the Bennington College community, but then he heard about the Walloomsac Inn and got excited about the possibilities. His firm's focus has been saving historic buildings across the United States, and he was at a point in his career where he was thinking, "Where am I going to end this? What do I want my last project to be?" That's why the Walloomsac Inn has become so important to him.

He said he'd been combing through the Inn's records and talking to local people about its history. It was a nationally honored destination in its early days, when it was called Dewey's Tavern. Four U.S. presidents stayed there, among other dignitaries. RC presented a slide showing how the Inn looked back then, painted bright red with a gambrel roof, like a barn. Later it became Hick's Tavern, and then The Walloomsac Inn. Ownership has changed hands only a few times over the years.

Although the exterior of the Inn is in very poor condition, RC said the structure underneath is very solid. In fact, it's in much better shape than many other historic buildings.

RC said his firm's proposal was simply to restore the Inn to what it once was, neither larger nor smaller. He expected to finish it with white clapboards and green shutters. He said he had no interest in using modern materials like vinyl siding, and he hoped the residents of Bennington agreed with him on that. Certain features will have to be added to bring it up to code, such as a sprinkler system, an elevator, and wheelchair ramps. The floor plan will have to change in some ways, but many other interior features can be restored. For example, the firm plans to replicate some of the wallpaper now on the walls.

CS added that the firm wanted to tarp the roof quickly because water was now leaking in. The building has reached "a critical point."

RC and CS then took questions, first from residents of Old Bennington, then from residents of the Town of Bennington and the surrounding area. These minutes will summarize key questions and answers. People wishing to know everything that was said, and by whom, are referred to the video, linked at the top of these minutes.

In general, questioners expressed support, relief, and gratitude that Hendricks Churchill was preparing to restore the Walloomsac Inn. Some said they'd been worried that it would burn down. Specific questions included:

Q: Where will the Inn's guests park?

A: There will probably be a mixture of on- and offsite parking, possibly with valet service. Hendricks Churchill doesn't plan to turn all the land behind the Inn into a parking lot.

Q: Who will actually run the Inn, once the restoration is finished?

A: Hendricks Churchill plans to hire an outside management company, and oversee it. The firm is committed to maintaining high standards.

Q: Will the restoration be supported by tax credits?

A: Hendricks Churchill plans to keep the Walloomsac Inn on the National Register of Historic Places, which qualifies the restoration project for federal tax credits. Aside from that, the firm sees any state or federal financial support as supplemental. It would be happy to receive such funding, but it is not counting on it.

Q: How will the restoration fit in with the State of Vermont's efforts to ease the housing shortage?

A: The firm plans to use the Walloomsac Inn as an inn, not a residence. But it is well aware of the housing shortage and will have to make sure its employees in the area will have suitable housing.

Q: How many guestrooms will the restored Walloomsac Inn have?

A: There are now 51 guestrooms, but a lot of them have shared bathrooms and small spaces for doing laundry. The team expects the renovated Walloomsac Inn to have 40 to 45 guestrooms.

Q: What will happen to the dilapidated structures behind the Walloomsac Inn?

A: The one that was used as a workshop can be restored and kept in use. But the other, used for staff housing and as a barn, may not be recoverable. The firm will try.

Q: How many people will be hired for the restoration, and will they be local?

A: A rough estimate would be 15 to 25 people. Some will be local people otherw will move here.

Q: How long will the restoration take?

A: Hendricks Churchill is still raising funds and getting the required permits. If construction starts next spring, the restoration might be finished 20 months after that.

Q: Will Hendricks Churchill be using traditional joinery methods in the restoration? Where will you find people with such expertise?

A: “Durability” is Hendricks Churchill’s main requirement; the idea isn’t to throw money at the Inn, but to use suitable methods so the restoration endures and doesn’t have to be done over. The fact that the building is still standing today is instructive. RC himself came up through the building trades, and his brother is still a builder. He sees restoration as an important educational process for workers. The world is changing very fast, and people in the building trades and design need to pay attention to what could be taken away from them.

Q: Will Hendricks Churchill document the restoration on TikTok or YouTube? Could you use those platforms for fundraising?

A: The firm does want to document this process in some way. It wants to get its message – of promoting historic preservation – into circulation through the media.

Q: Will you share your design process with the community?

A: The Hendricks Churchill website has a sign-up for the firm’s newsletter, and that’s a good way for people to stay in the know. Floor plans will be shared when they’re ready, but designing them won’t be a collaborative process.

Q: Are the owners aware that out-of-town visitors are constantly asking the Old First Church’s docents if they can go walk around on the Inn’s porch, ring the doorbell, etc.? How will the firm deal with so much public curiosity?

A: When construction is in full swing, people aren’t going to want to sit on the porch, but once the Inn is operational, there will be a restaurant and a gift shop, and the owners will welcome foot traffic.

Q: During construction will the firm put up the kind of orange plastic fencing that’s been used in the past?

A: Insurance companies often require certain types of barriers around construction sites, but the firm will seek to soften them. Hendricks Churchill isn’t interested in putting up garish orange fencing.

Q: What is the plan for raising money?

A: There will be a mix of private investors from all over, and bank financing. Investors exist who are interested in this particular building.

Q: Even if the restoration is beautiful, will the Walloomsac Inn really be sustainable as a business?

A: Hendricks Churchill plans to make a significant investment in marketing. When word gets out about the Inn’s renewed existence, the firm has no doubt that people will come, including people who never heard of Bennington before. RC said he wanted not only for the Walloomsac Inn to survive, but for it to support the Bennington community, its local

businesses, and Bennington College. New York City isn't the center of the universe any more. People are moving to Vermont. There are excellent museums and other attractions in the area. RC said he had no doubt that a restored Walloomsac Inn would succeed.