

Minutes
Village of Old Bennington Annual Meeting
May 12, 2026

The annual meeting was held at The Barn and on Zoom. A link to the Zoom recording is here:

https://zoom.us/rec/share/GtMUpWzoWMyvd7_aUgZRQph22VR-kuQr8A2JL6gBDdnr3nNq25j69KNK9HNWEr8M.k4jhCYfAdyeLM4uP?startTime=1778627000000

Passcode: CpHl2%Hf

Officials present: Moderator Pat Winburn, Trustees Than Marcoux, Jim Thatch, Ed Woods, and Susan Wright; Auditor Kathy Wagenknecht, Treasurer Ron Rabidou, Clerk Mary Walsh, Zoning Administrator/Zoom operator David Kiernan, and Nominating Committee Chair Suzanne Buchsbaum.

Officials absent: Trustee Tom Woodward. Nominees absent: Renny Ponvert.

1. Call to order: The meeting was called to order at 7:02 by PW.

MW read the Warning. The officials introduced themselves. PW asked if there were any new Village residents, and Wendy York, of 77 Monument Avenue, introduced herself.

2. Reports of the Commissioners:

- a. Police Commissioner: JT said security was not currently a central issue, although there had been some trespassers at 18 Walloomsac Road; he said he expected 18 Walloomsac Road to be easier to keep an eye on, now that it had changed hands in a tax sale.

He said the main policing issue was speeding. The Village has budgeted money to purchase an electronic speed sign, which can be mounted on a pole and moved to other poles in different locations as needed. The Village also plans to put up signs at certain entrances, welcoming drivers to historic Old Bennington and asking them nicely to slow down. Once

those two steps are in place the Trustees will see whether additional steps are still needed. He said more details were available in the [Annual Report](#).

There was a question from the floor about when residents should contact JT. He said that if residents see suspicious activity they should first call the Town Police Department, but also to let him know, so he can keep records.

There was a question about why the Village no longer has its own traffic patrolcar. JT said the Town Police Department was currently shorthanded, but if, in the future, the Department returns to full staffing, the Village may once again get its own dedicated officer.

EW added that after the last dedicated officer retired, the Village had experimented with an arrangement in which a regular officer would work overtime on traffic patrol in the Village. This proved a poor use of taxpayer resources, because the Village had to pay \$55 an hour, and the officers tended to be available for overtime at times when there was little traffic to patrol, such as pre-dawn Sunday mornings.

RR explained further that the State of Vermont had changed its rules for taking in and distributing traffic-fine dollars, so that most of the money now stays with the State, rather than being sent back to the municipality where the violation took place. Since that change, traffic patrols no longer generate enough revenue to cover their cost.

- b. Roads Commissioner: TM said the most significant development of the past year was the reconstruction of Bank Street at a cost far less than estimated. The savings was achieved by working closely with Norman LeBlanc, the longtime Highway Superintendent of the Village of North Bennington. In the past, Village road projects were so small the Village couldn't attract competitive bids, and teaming up with North Bennington has reduced that disadvantage.

Christine Costello said from the floor that she wished to thank TM for his work in coming up with a road-maintenance strategy that would continue after the end of his term. TM then got a round of applause.

- c. Parks and Sidewalks Commissioner: SW said work was continuing toward replacing the monument that once marked the site of the Village's very first meetinghouse, across from what is now the Old First Church. (The monument was knocked down years ago by a speeding car.) She said about a third of the needed funds had been raised, and the goal was to replace the monument in time for the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Bennington.

In addition, SW said sidewalk running down Monument Avenue from the Barn to Bank Street needed extensive repairs. She had quotes of \$30,000 to \$35,000, and said that once the residents had voted on the proposed Budget she said she would engage the contractor.

- d. Tax Collector/Treasurer: RR said he wouldn't detail every line item in the just-ended FY 2026 Budget, since that information was available online, in the Annual Report. But he wanted residents to know that in general, the cost projections of the past year's budget were quite accurate. The exception was the cost of repairing Bank Street, which turned out to be far less than the budgeted cost. RR confirmed that the large saving was due to TM's development of a good working relationship with NL of the Village of North Bennington.

For the FY 2027 Budget, RR said there might be an amendment to the Budget now available in the Annual Report. He said that TM and NL had been given a new quote for road maintenance work in both villages, which promised a cost efficiency: Old Bennington would spend \$186,000 on its road maintenance in FY 2027, which would be more than the \$120,000 shown in the FY 2027 Budget – but which would allow the Village to pay substantially less in FY 2028. The catch, RR said, was that NL hadn't worked with this vendor before, and he wanted to assess its performance on North Bennington's streets before recommending it to Old Bennington. Should NL recommend against the vendor for Old Bennington's maintenance, RR said, the Village would go back to the \$120,000 now shown in the FY 2027 Budget.

TM clarified that the \$186,000 would be for road maintenance – filling potholes, sealing cracks, and resurfacing the Village roads. It did not include the costs of reconstructing Catamount Lane and Seminary Lane, which will not be undertaken in FY 2027. TM also said the cost of cleaning and repairing the Village's 90 storm drains appeared in the

Budget under “Maintenance: Other.” Maintenance was deferred for several years, and now the masonry under 17 drains is crumbling.

Also in RR’s budget discussion were estimated outlays for plowing and salting; spring cleanup of public spaces; possible replacement of LED streetlights; the tree replacement fund; rents due to the Old First Church (for meeting space); providers of tech services like Zoom; legal bills; and membership fees to groups like the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and the Bennington County Regional Commission, which provide valuable governance information.

There was a question from the floor about whether the Village could put a landscaping company like Greater Heights on a retainer for regular work on the Village’s many broken and ailing street trees. EW said that homeowners (and not the Village) are responsible for taking care of the street trees on their portions of the rights-of-way.

There was a discussion of the trees in front of the Old First Church, virtually all of which are in hazardous condition. The Town of Bennington owns the land that the Old First Church stands on, and the Village frequently reminds the Town of its responsibility for the care of those trees, but nothing ever happens.

There was a question from the floor about why the Zoning Board had budget of zero. RR explained that it had been confusing to keep Planning outlays and Zoning outlays separate, so a couple of years ago their spending was combined.

There was a question from the floor about a \$30,000 grant from the State of Vermont to help cover the cost of drafting a Plan of Development, and the Village’s payment of a \$29,000 consulting fee to the Bennington County Regional Commission. Did the Village come out ahead or behind?

Brian Scheetz, the Chairman of the Planning Commission, responded from the floor that the Plan of Development is a requirement of the State, and the State supports the BCRC’s consulting assistance by making such grants. He said the BCRC is authorized to determine whether a municipality’s Plan is valid or not, so it made sense to engage the BCRC to help draft the Plan.

RR said that the Village's property tax rate would increase by 7 percent per \$100 valuation in FY 2027. He recalled that the Village had agreed a couple of years ago to match the Town's tax rate with a one-year lag (because the Town doesn't set its tax rate until July).

There was a discussion about who makes tax assessments for the Village. KW said the Village uses the assessments done by the Town of Bennington. In general, assessments have fallen behind the unusual rise in real-estate market prices since the pandemic, leading to a big gap between assessed prices and fair market values. This gap means municipalities must increase tax rates to get adequate operating revenues. EW said the Town of Bennington has always used state-approved assessors, and there aren't enough such assessors at the moment. Therefore, properties in the Town and the Village are having to wait to be reassessed until the Town of Bennington gets a new assessor assigned to it.

RR said that since the Village's tax rate had been rising every year, he had done a 20-year lookback of the Village's road-construction costs and their respective State reimbursements. His findings [appear in two charts](#), starting on page 17 of the Annual Report. The first chart showed that from 2012 to 2026, the State of Vermont granted almost no road-work money to the Village. Consequently, the Village spent almost nothing on road maintenance. Then, in 2024, Village road maintenance costs skyrocketed. Deferring road maintenance didn't hold down costs – it just pushed them into the future, causing them to compound.

RR also said that in discussions with VTrans, the Village had been warned that it wouldn't get any more grants from VTrans for the foreseeable future. (There are 28 municipalities vying for the same money.)

The second of RR's two slides compared Village tax revenues over the past 20 years with road-construction costs, tracked by the National Highway Construction Cost Index. The index has risen sharply since 2021, but the Village has been able to maintain positive fund balances by raising its property tax rate (and getting a State roadwork grant for the first time since 2012). Even now, there's no reason to expect highway maintenance costs to taper off. Therefore, RR said it would be prudent to

keep pegging the Village's tax rate to the Town's tax rate, with the one-year lag.

RR next discussed property-tax delinquencies. The tax sale of 18 Walloomsac Road on April 24 opened a one-year statutory "redemption period," when the sales proceeds (\$300,000, less the \$42,000 owed to the Town and Village) are kept in an escrow account. The immediate past owner, Tzaims Luksus, is entitled to use the redemption period to cure his tax delinquency and/or move the contents of the house to another location. RR said that the Village and Town had supplied Mr. Luksus with contact information for two elder lawyers who could advise him at no cost, but Mr. Luksus never contacted them. RR also said the State required Mr. Luksus to pay interest of 1 percent per month on the escrow account, to give him an incentive to waive the redemption period and allow the new owner to take possession immediately. So far, Mr. Luksus hasn't taken this step.

RR said that by State law, a municipality in Vermont can start taking steps toward a tax sale when a delinquency has been accruing for two years. In Tzaims Luksus's case, the Village allowed the tax delinquency to accrue for five fiscal years. That's longer than legally required. RR said two more properties in the Village that will have passed the two-year delinquency mark come November. More details on property tax delinquencies can be found in the [monthly Treasurer's Report for April](#).

- e. Auditor: KW said RR had been doing a great job keeping the accounts of the Village. She said she went through every single page of the paperwork and the only error she found was a check that had just two signatures instead of three.

There was a question from the floor about when the work on the Walloomsac Inn would commence. JT said the owners still had to submit their plan, which will go to the Planning Commission. Unless things change, they will not have to go to the Zoning Board.

There was a question from the floor about whether the Inn's developers would have to apply to the State of Vermont on their use of Route 9. JT confirmed that they did, adding that their interactions with the State have been extensive.

3. Report from Will Greer, Old Bennington's State Representative. WG gave a summary of recent legislative developments of interest to Village residents, including: A House act to consolidate the school districts in Vermont, now before the Senate; a big increase in survivor benefits for public safety workers who die in the line of duty, now to include Corrections Officers; funding for a new "forensics facility" to house and treat people who are mentally incompetent to stand trial; reforms to Vermont's controversial land-use statutes; an expansion of the list of places that immigration police cannot enter without a warrant; funding for repairs of North Side Drive; and a 3 percent increase in the state's property-tax rate. WG said legislators had discussed shifting Vermont's funding of public education to an income-tax-based system, but that initiative didn't succeed, so funding will continue to be raised through property taxes.

WG also honored the Village's Abeh Woods, a finalist for the National Association of Secretaries of State's John Lewis Leadership Award. The award, named for the late Member of Congress and Civil Rights leader, recognizes people under 25 who are civic-minded and working to improve the quality of life where they live. Abeh is a graduating senior at Mount Anthony Union High School. Well done, Abeh!

4. Elections and Voting:

- a. RR moved to approve the proposed budget. KW seconded the motion. During citizen comments, Christine Costello said that Village budgets generally seemed biased in favor of Upper Monument Avenue. She said her street (Church Lane) had no cobbled gutters, no streetlights, nor even a curb. She asked the Board to keep the Village's other streets in mind in future budgets. The proposed FY 2027 Budget was unanimously passed, along with a measure allowing short-term borrowing to cover possible temporary revenue gaps.
- b. EW announced that TM and TW had chosen not to run for new terms on the Board of Trustees, and a new Nominating Committee, composed of Suzanne Buchsbaum, Andrew Buchsbaum, Liz Warner, and Galen Jones, had worked to bring in new candidates. SB then nominated Kristin Roessner for a two-year term on the Board. KR said she would be delighted to serve but didn't want to make a speech. Kate Musso seconded the motion, and KR was unanimously elected.

To replace TW, AB nominated Renny Ponvert to a two-year term on the Board, noting that RP was travelling and could not attend the current meeting. KM seconded the motion, and RP was unanimously elected.

The four incumbents were all unanimously re-elected one-year terms:

Clerk: EW moved to nominate MW and JT seconded the motion;
Treasurer: SB moved to nominate RR and EW seconded the motion;
Auditor: KM moved to nominate KW and AB seconded the motion;
Moderator: Galen Jones moved to nominate PW and EW seconded the motion.

5. Other business: Nancy Coseo announced that the Old First Church tag sale would take place on June 6, and donors could drop off clean, intact items for the sale at the Barn from June 1 to June 3. She said a detailed list of what could and could not be donated was posted under the “Other Documents” tab of the Village website and asked everybody to review the list before dropping anything off.
6. The meeting was unanimously adjourned and an informal reception convened.