

JOINT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING  
Rockingham Selectboard & Bellows Falls Village Trustees  
Tuesday, November 24, 2015

Present:

BF Trustees: Nancy McAuliffe, Evelyn Weeks, Colin James, Sanford Martin, Stefan Golec  
Rockingham Selectboard: Thomas MacPhee, Joshua Hearne, Ann DiBernardo, Peter Golec  
Absent: Selectboard – Susan Hammond

Also Present: Willis Stearns, II, Municipal Manager; Kerry Bennett, Recording Clerk; Windhoud County Sheriff Keith Clark; US Marshal Dave Demag, Senator Jeanette White; Development Director Francis Walsh;

Press: Joey Powers & Alex Stradling, FACTTV; Joel Slutsky, The Shopper; Susan Smallheer, Rutland Herald

Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 5:00 p.m. by Rockingham Selectboard Chair Thomas MacPhee.

Additions to the Agenda for Routine Administrative Matters and/or Pressing Matters that will require ratification at a future meeting: None

Approve Minutes of October 27, 2015: *Stefan Golec made the motion to approve the minutes of October 27, 2015 as printed. Motion was seconded by Peter Golec. Motion passed unanimously.*

Public Comment on items not on the Agenda – 3 minutes per person: None

Agenda:

1. Presentation by Windham County Sheriff Keith Clark – Redevelopment of Liberty Mill: MacPhee introduced Sheriff Clark who gave a power point presentation on the prospective redevelopment of the Liberty Mill (Chemco) to a justice center. Clark stated that this project was still in the early stages but felt it important to inform the public. Following the presentation, Clark noted that information is available on the web at [www.windhamcountyyvt.gov/justice](http://www.windhamcountyyvt.gov/justice) .

MacPhee then opened the for discussion and questions starting with the Board.

Stefan Golec asked what funding sources Clark anticipated. Clark stated that there were many including the US Department of Justice, tax credits, a USDA loan to name a few.

Hearne noted that Clark stated that there would be 65 jobs created and asked how many of these would be local. Clark said that there would be approximately 35 residential staff jobs, custodian, IT, food, finance and director positions to be filled and they would attempt to fill as many as possible locally.

James asked Clark to elaborate on the secure beds. Clark stated that these would be for offenders in transition awaiting either housing or trial and could be anywhere from 3 months to 9 months.

Peter Golec asked what happens after the funding for building and staffing the facility runs out, will the taxpayers here be responsible? Clark stated that no county taxes would be used and the facility would be operated as a business and the main source of income would be the secure beds.

Weeks asked if the hosting of this facility in this community going to go to a vote by the Town & Village voters. Clark stated that he did not know the answer to that question at this time.

DiBernardo stated that she was concerned that the community would become known as a “prison town”. Clark noted that it was his hope that it would be known as a justice center offering programs, not a prison.

McAuliffe asked if there would be more paroled individuals in our community. Clark stated that most paroled individuals return to their own communities.

Martin asked about the private ownership of the building and who Clark had been in discussion with. Clark stated that DW Corporation of Burlington was very interested. Martin noted that Clark had stated they would lease the facility for 7 years and asked if this would remain on the tax roll. Clark stated that a tax stabilization agreement would likely be sought but the facility would continue to pay taxes.

Hearne noted that this was more a zoning issue than a town vote and asked if the project would continue to move forward if the people in the community do not want this. Clark stated that it would depend on the reasons and plans were to continue to move forward.

Stefan Golec asked what would happen to the project if Clark was not re-elected. Clark stated that this would all be covered in all agreements.

James asked about Clark’s statement that a dispatch center would be included. Clark stated that the Sheriff’s Department has been approached by many surrounding towns in the County and in New Hampshire to include this service.

Peter Golec asked if detainees would be released into this community after they had been trained and educated. Clark stated that statistics showed that most return to where their support system is.

DiBernardo asked if there was a plan to replace the Bellows Falls Police Department. Clark stated that his focus would be on the facility and not looking to take over the BFPD.

Martin asked how this would affect potential new businesses locating here and how this facility would be presented. Clark felt that a state of the art justice center and a safe community could be presented as a “come see what we did” approach.

Stefan Golec asked what the timeline was. Clark stated that it depended on funding but an estimate would be 12-24 months to complete construction and 24-26 months to complete.

Hearne noted that the first phase of a 3-phase project was completed with a walking path behind the TLR buildings and the intent was to continue along where this proposed building is and along the Saxtons River. Hearne asked if this was something that would be impeded. Clark stated that he would encourage that this project be completed and felt that with the landscaping planned it would be a safer environment and easier access to the river.

MacPhee then opened the discussion to the public present.

Tim Doherty asked about the federal prisoners that would be at the facility. Clark introduced US Marshal Dave Demag who explained that he is responsible for placing detainees and a majority of these are housed out of state and this facility would keep Vermont money in Vermont.

Doug MacPhee stated that he serves on the local Restorative Justice Board and asked why case management would be different. Clark noted that the facility would be limited to a certain type of cases.

Lynn Raymond Empey noted that detainees are usually not covered under insurance and asked how these cases would be funded. Clark stated that most are covered for 30 days, enough time to be screened and evaluated.

Joel Love asked what the median high/low salary would be. Clark stated an executive director with benefits would be around \$180,000 to a lower scale position with benefits, middle position with benefits \$70,000 and lower scale position with benefits \$40,000 to \$45,000.

Charlie Hunter asked what guarantee the community would have that this doesn't get turned into a jail. Clark stated that the agreements would be structured so the current plans move forward.

Joe Brissette noted that there are not a lot of opportunities in Bellows Falls and asked why this facility was being targeted here. Clark stated that this area is a central location and near the Interstate 91 corridor.

Chief Phil Tyrell, Southwest Dispatch, asked why a dispatch service was being considered. Clark stated that many fire chiefs in the area have asked him to consider this.

Jill James noted that Bellows Falls is a struggling community and that we cannot financially support this project. James stated that this should go to a town-wide vote.

Cindy Riendeau asked if the Bellows Falls Police Department supported this project. Clark stated that he has spoken with Chief Lake and he was supportive at that discussion.

Jim McAuliffe asked if there had been an economic and social impact study done feeling that there would be a direct impact on schools, housing, education budgets, etc. Clark replied that this has not been done and will pursue this.

Katie Dearborn asked what kind of detainees would be housed here noting that she struggles with allowing her children walk anywhere now. Clark stated that 75% would be non-violent.

Drew Pelletier asked what the building was zoned for at present. Francis Walsh, Development Director, stated that the zoning for this area does allow this type of project.

Laurie Rowell asked why the Bellows Falls Police Chief was not in attendance. Stearns replied that Chief Lake was currently out on vacation. Rowell also suggested that there be an oversight committee or board for this project.

Kathleen Govotski stated that she feels this is being “shoved down our throats” and that this needs to be voted on.

Steve Cenate reminded everyone that the voters do not vote on a business coming into the town. Cenate also stated that he believes with the influx of police cars and officers we would have a safer community.

MacPhee & Clark thanked everyone for coming. Clark urged people to email him with any questions or concerns at

Adjourn: *Stefan Golec made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:30 p.m. Motion was seconded by Nancy McAuliffe. Motion passed unanimously.*

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Kerry Bennett, Recording Clerk