

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, JANUARY 28, 2019

**Present:**

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Doug Molde, Kyle Nuse, Eric Osgood

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Lois Frey, Kerri O'Halloran, Lea Kilvadyova, Duncan Hastings

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. *Call to Order***

Eric called the meeting to order at 7:01.

**2. *Additions, Changes to Agenda***

The board agreed to add an opportunity for Lea Kilvadyova to make a request to remove an article from the warning and put money into the budget instead and a discussion about the possibility of a town finance committee.

**3. *Facility Use Request from Cambridge Youth Soccer for Old Mill Park***

Brian said Cambridge has often used Johnson's ball fields to supplement their own and they would like to continue that arrangement. They have agreed to work with Johnson Recreation to make sure they use fields assigned to them. They have been helpful and cooperative in the past.

**Nat moved and Mike seconded to approve the facility use request from Cambridge Youth Soccer for Old Mill Park.**

Doug said he is curious why we would do this. Nat said we have been doing it for about 3-4 years. A lot of Johnson kids play spring soccer with Cambridge Youth Soccer. Kerri O'Halloran said they are the league that offers spring soccer. Johnson Recreation has never offered spring soccer. Nat said it doesn't present a conflict.

**The motion was passed.**

**4. *Request to Remove Article from Warning***

Lea Kilvadyova said she believes the rec coordinator position is important for our community. In her opinion the article about the rec coordinator is likely to be voted down because of the financial magnitude. By eliminating the position from the budget and making it an article she is concerned we are setting ourselves up for the possibility of not having a rec coordinator for the next fiscal year. Even though she knows there is a need for the hours proposed, she would propose budgeting for, say, 12 hours from a rec coordinator. Even though that might not get us all we want, she thinks it would increase the chances in the short term of continuance and sustainability of the position.

Eric said he thinks the intent of this board and the Rec Committee would be to give strong endorsement of that article. He is curious why she thinks the voters wouldn't support it. Historically the voters have been generous and supportive of anything regarding the Rec Committee. He doesn't see the voters rejecting the article. If we were to put the whole \$50K

in the budget it could be vulnerable to being cut by the selectboard if the voters ask us to make cuts.

Lea said she feels it presents security having the position in the budget. Giving it up is a risky move. She thinks what is being proposed is a really big jump from what we had this year.

Nat said we could take out \$8-10K of the amount requested in the article and put it in our budget to level fund the position so at least we wouldn't lose ground. But his concern with that is that the current 8 hours a week is so unattractive that we got very few applicants. Heather Rodriguez has begun doing the work but she may not want to continue. If we advertise an 8 hour a week job we may not find anyone. If we post for a 20-30 hour a week job that could be enough for someone to be interested.

Kerri said Lea is not the first person who has expressed a concern about the article not passing. The committee has talked in detail about the impact of Heather leaving and what they would need and they came up with 20 to 25 hours 10 months out of the year for rec responsibilities alone. But her fear is that the article will get voted down and we will be left with nothing. She likes Nat's idea.

Eric asked about the issue of being able to fill the position. Kerri agreed it was tough to fill last year. There were only 3 applicants and Heather was the only qualified one. She sees that as a valid point.

Doug said he thought he understood that our attorney said we couldn't file the article this way. Brian said the attorney didn't like the way the article was originally phrased but phrasing it as a money question is all right. We are asking for something the voters have authority over – determining the budget. They don't have authority to hire or fire so we can't ask if they want to hire a rec coordinator but we can ask to raise \$50K to use for a rec coordinator.

Doug said he thinks the idea of a separate article was hopefully to bring supporters of the position to the floor, thinking there would be many more supporters of that part of the budget than those who think the budget is too much and something has to go.

Kerri said her fear is that the voters don't necessarily know the amount of work that goes into Johnson Recreation. She fears they won't realize it until it's not there anymore.

Kyle asked, isn't part of the job of those who want the position to do education before town meeting? Kerri said yes. She said she joined the Rec Committee because she has a child who uses its programs and she wanted to volunteer her time. It wasn't until she was in the trenches that she realized how much work is involved.

Eric said testimony like Kerri's is what would make the article pass – her and others explaining why the position is needed so badly. He thinks it will pass if they are there. Last year the voters slashed the budget but also approved purchasing the Jewett property because the board made a case for it.

Lea said she likes Nat's idea. Why not have a portion level funded in the budget and still put in an article for the remaining amount? Kerri said she likes that. Lea said supporters can do community outreach to help get the money for the rest of the hours but we would not be exposing ourselves to having nothing.

Doug said it leaves the voters with an out because they will be able to say the position is still in the budget. Kyle agreed they may see that there is some money in the budget and feel that is enough because the Rec Committee has managed this long without more.

Brian said what he has heard from the Rec Committee is that even if we continue to fund the position at the current level there will be a loss; status quo is not an option. Including something in the budget may make it seem like status quo is an option.

Nat said if the voters do say no, he would suggest that someone raise a motion from the floor to at least put a smaller amount back into the budget. Brian said someone can't make a new motion for a dollar amount but they could move to change the \$50K to a different figure. Eric said we will have already voted on the budget before this article and Dave Williams will not allow someone to make a motion to increase the budget. His reason for that is that there may be people who didn't come to town meeting because they thought the proposed budget amount would be fine but who would not like to see a larger budget. Nat said that is a reasonable argument

Lois asked if the job description is currently just rec coordinator. Brian said that and working for the skate park. Lois said she thinks the community development part threw a lot of people. Others said that has been taken out.

Lois said people with younger children can talk about their children's experiences and their limited time. Doug said he thinks 8 or 10 supporters should speak. Kyle agreed. The Rec Committee should have people lined up.

Mike said he thinks it would be best to leave this as an article. *(Lea and Kerri left at 7:25.)*

The board agreed not to put anything in the budget for the rec coordinator position.

**5. Review and Approve Draft Budget**

Brian said Historical Society revenue was not calculating correctly so previously there was a pretty significant overestimate for their revenue.

Lois said she couldn't find the conservation reserve fund on the budget sheet. Eric said it should be under our reserve funds. Rosemary agreed. Rosemary said there should be a new line with \$2500 in it. She and Brian will get together tomorrow and go over the numbers. *(Duncan Hastings arrived at 7:36.)*

Lois asked if the board has considered putting any money into the conservation reserve fund by line item for the coming year. Brian said he had suggested in a phone conversation with Lois that we might add \$100-\$200 from the operating budget since the Conservation

Commission generally has underspent their allocation. They could always draw it back and use it for current year items. Lois said it would be nice if the board supported the conservation reserve fund with a small amount, even if it came out of what is currently budgeted for the Conservation Commission.

Nat asked, what about rolling over anything not spent at the end of the year into the conservation reserve fund? Brian said we can't do that because the article establishing the reserve fund said it will be funded by line item. Eric said we suggested that and the Conservation Commission didn't want it. Doug asked, can't we just put in the amount left over without saying it is related to what is left over? He doesn't think we should reduce the Conservation Commission budget by that amount.

Brian said his suggestion was to reduce their budget a little because they have typically not needed the whole \$1500. If we took them to \$1300 it would still meet their budget obligations except in years with a great deal of expense. We currently allocate a little more than they need in most years to act as a kind of reserve. We could divert some of that into building the reserve fund with minimal impact on them.

Doug said he doesn't think a conservation reserve fund is the same as a reserve fund for the Conservation Commission. He asked what Lois thinks.

Lois said the Conservation Commission had carryover because they had to hold over the money for a bridge at Journey's End to another year. They are waiting on figures to put a new path into the Beard Recreation Area. Having that flexibility helps.

Kyle asked where Doug is suggesting the money come from. Doug said from the taxpayers. Eric said he thinks Doug is suggesting we would just increase our budget. Doug agreed. He said he thinks there is long term benefit to seeding this fund. If Lois doesn't think the Conservation Commission needs the money they have, he would go with a number she picks out.

Duncan said it is important to remember that reserve funds can't be used for operating expenses. But capital improvements to the Beard property and Journey's End would be perfect for the reserve fund. Lois said the Conservation Commission is not thinking of using the reserve fund for those.

Nat said he thinks we need to allocate some money. Mike said he thinks we should find some other place to cut it. Nat said if the Conservation Commission is typically not spending all of what is budgeted for them, cutting their budget would be an option. The board agreed to budget \$250 for the conservation reserve fund. Eric asked if we should reduce the \$1500 budgeted for the Conservation Commission by \$250. Nat asked Lois what impact that would have on the Conservation Commission. Lois said she thinks they could manage it. The board agreed to do that.

Duncan asked if the budget currently contains anything that would potentially flow through to the next budget year for consultant fees for the merger proposal. Brian said we are level

funding selectboard consultant services at \$10K. Duncan asked if Brian reduced the potential surplus amount for the current year by any amount for consultant services. Brian said no, but we are underspent for the current year on consultant expense and we are reserving the full amount. We have capacity in the current year. Duncan asked if Brian is anticipating spending 100% of what is budgeted. Brian said yes. Duncan asked if Brian knows of any other items under selectboard consultant services the board will need to spend on next year. Brian said no; this is our main target. We may spend a portion on a local match for a planning grant for engineering for the light industrial park but he believes we can afford both.

Duncan said he had sent Brian a list of people that the merger RFP could potentially be sent to directly. His guess is that it will require targeting some specific people. It is possible that if the selectboard does that and changes the RFP the trustees might drop out of the merger study, which begs the question of whether the selectboard is willing to go ahead without the trustees being involved. But if there is money reserved from this year's surplus and the board is budgeting money for next year hopefully that will give the board some flexibility.

Duncan said he supports the concept of having a rec coordinator. His only question is about the dollar amount and the potential impact on the budget. He doesn't believe 30 hours a week is needed. For a 30 hour position the town would be required by federal law to provide 100% insurance benefits. Benefits couldn't be pro-rated. If the position is less than 24 hours the town doesn't have to provide benefits. He gets that the town needs to offer someone a pay equivalent that will attract someone good. But he would have a problem with offering 30 hours a week with the associated benefits. He doesn't think that much is needed. Another thing to think about is whether there are other communities that need a part-time rec coordinator that Johnson could pool with to hire a full-time person.

Nat said we started off the meeting with Lea and Kerri bringing up concerns about the article. There is a need for 30 hours to support the Recreation Committee. The work that is done requires a tremendous amount of volunteer hours and the 8-hour person is getting quite burned out. Duncan's feedback is interesting because people are concerned the article won't pass.

Duncan said he has a hard time believing it really will require 30 hours week year-round. Nat said 20-25 hours a week for 10 months out of the year is essentially what Heather puts into it for the Recreation Committee, unpaid. Work for the skate park and on other small projects could easily fill the position out to 30 hours a week.

Duncan said he thinks the most important thing is to get a position. He suggested starting with a lower number of hours and then increasing if needed. If the position is less than 24 hours it is not subject to our personnel policy regarding benefits. If the town lowered the hours so there were no benefits the hourly rate would probably have to be increased a bit to attract a decent person. If Johnson could find another community looking for a half-time recreation person that would be a wonderful marriage.

Mike said he can see Duncan's point that with less hours and higher pay the town will save money.

Duncan said it seems to him that if the hours were cut there would still be some need for volunteers, but less than now.

Brian said because full benefits would have to be provided at 30 hours he has targeted the position for 25 hours. Eric said he thinks 25 hours would be attractive to some. Brian said benefits would be pro-rated.

Doug asked how it works if the 25 hours are needed 10 months out of the year. What happens the other 2 months? Brian said we will have to work with the Rec Committee. They would like the hours per week to expand and shrink and we can't really do that. They will have to make commitments farther in advance. Now there is a lot happening at once but we can't do that with this employee. Nat said that would be a welcome change for the Rec Committee. Brian said the Rec Committee's greatest need is in fall and winter and the skate park's greatest need is in spring and summer. He doesn't think we will have a hard time balancing the hours out. The duties won't be the same all year round.

Mike asked if Duncan is suggesting 23 hours. Duncan said he is mostly suggesting that he would have heartburn as a taxpayer with 30 hours and the requisite benefits. He feels the town should start with a little and add to it as needed. It is harder to cut hours than to add them.

Mike said if we had a 23 hour a week position at \$20/hr we might get more applicants.

Duncan said when we had Jim Rose in a similar position it was 16 hours a week and there were times even then when he was looking for things to do. To him the more important thing is to get the support of the voters to establish the position. If the town finds 20 or 24 hours inadequate the board can always ask the voters to increase the number of hours.

Mike asked if Duncan will speak to that at town meeting. Duncan said he probably will if the board leaves the position at 30 hours.

Lois said she would suggest 24 hours rather than 23 because the person could work three 8-hour days or four 6-hour days.

Duncan said he noticed discussion in the minutes about power washing the Holcomb House. The \$1700 estimated cost was based on 2 days of lift rental at full price but it is likely that the Historical Society will be able to get a break on the price so he is pretty sure it will be less than \$1700. The Historical Society board has discussed it and none of them will volunteer to pressure wash the building. Mike said he would volunteer to do it. Duncan said he would advocate that some amount of money be included in the budget for power washing. Mike said he doesn't see why it can't be done in one day. Duncan said the Historical Society board discussed the ramifications of pressure washing the trim. The contractors were clear that if that is done the paint will come off and it will have to be painted. But they don't have to pressure wash the trim and then it might not take 2 full days. There is no half day charge. If they use the lift for part of a day they are charged for a full day.

Mike asked if the pressure could damage the vinyl. Duncan said he hopes the contractors know what they are doing. They have done this before. He thinks it will take more than just a hose unless it is washed with a brush because there is grime stuck to the vinyl.

Eric asked if we captured this in our budget. Brian said not specifically. Eric said if the Historical Society comes back in spring with a request it will be in the current year's budget anyway.

Brian said he made a couple of formula corrections. The current draft has a final total budget of \$2,720,783.25. That is a 2.44% increase without the Jewett property expense and a 4% increase with it. Eric said the amount to be raised by taxes increased by almost 14% because we have less cash on hand. Brian said we have increased our estimates of spending for this year with the way the winter is going. We are planning on going over budget on almost every measure related to winter. Eric said the impact to people comes from the change in the amount to be raised by taxes, not the change in the budget. We have tightened our budget to the point where there is no cash on hand to apply to taxes.

Duncan asked if the board has discussed the issue of the weathervane. Board members said no.

Eric asked if the board is prepared to approve the budget.

Mike asked the cents per 100 increase. Brian said it is 85 cents per 100, a 7 cent increase. The increase in taxes for a \$150K home would be \$97.

Mike said he thinks 7 cents is too high. From what he hears on the street, people are saying the town had better not increase taxes too much. Rosemary said the Common Level of Appraisal is down for Johnson.

Mike said he is afraid if we don't find something to cut someone will find something for us on town meeting day.

Eric asked what Mike's goal is. Mike said 4 cents. But he doesn't know where we will get it. Eric said that would mean shaving off almost \$100K.

Lois said last year at town meeting the annual increases in salaries came up. A lot of people don't get any increases. Mike said we have to be competitive with other towns or we might lose employees.

Mike asked if Brian has any suggestions. Brian said he set himself a goal to reduce \$70K out of the budget a couple of weeks ago and he managed to take \$20K out. There are no more good places to cut.

Nat asked what we decided about mud abatement. Brian said it is now \$15K, a pretty significant decrease. Brian K. has a few plans he thinks will be more cost effective. Nat said

that is one area we would have the option of cutting with no blood being spilled this year. Brian said that is like cutting paving. Nat said it would be penny wise and pound foolish. Brian agreed.

Brian suggested we could cut the amount for signs a little.

Duncan brought up the sheriff's contract. He said there will come a day when the board will have to figure out if it is worth spending that much money on the sheriff's contract. He is not suggesting that we don't have any law enforcement, but Roger Marcoux will never voluntarily cut back on what he anticipates he needs for services. A nice chunk of the money goes directly to his salary.

Nat said Roger has recently been saying similar things. He has asked the 3 contract towns if they could come up with a community advisory group to advise him. His expenses are going up. As the dollar amount we are spending for the sheriff's contract has gone up, the percentage of the overall budget has increased, but not significantly. It was 14.6% of the budget in 2004-05, 16% in 2015-16 and it is 16.9% of the budget now. Roger takes substantially less than he is entitled to for his salary. He takes a lot of the money he is entitled to for other contracts and rolls it into our contract for things like vehicles. Nat thinks the contract is a good deal.

Duncan said he doesn't want to leave the impression that he thinks Roger is doing a poor job. He has a great deal of respect for Roger and thinks he has done excellent things with his department. But the contract expense is a large number. It would help if Cambridge could be induced to come into the contract. Nat said they aren't going to. The state police are in their community already. Duncan said he knows not everyone is happy with that contract either. That may not last long term. If we could have a county-wide police force that all towns committed to fund that would lower costs for all, but that won't happen overnight. There are a lot of communities larger than ours that only provide traffic enforcement.

Nat said Roger gets 3.1% of the contract amount and he is entitled to 5%. Duncan said he thinks Roger is the second highest paid sheriff in Vermont. Brian said that is because of the breadth of his contracts.

Doug said he wonders what law enforcement costs per capita in Stowe and Morrisville. Nat said the per capita cost in Morrisville is \$239. Our per capita cost is \$123.

Mike said LCSD is a revolving door for people to go to the police academy and then get jobs somewhere else.

**Doug moved to adopt the 2019-2020 budget as presented, seconded by Kyle.**

Nat said he feels like we should keep working on it. Mike said he will vote no on principle.

Duncan asked if the spending related to the article for the rec position is built into the budget. Board members said no. Eric said that would be another 2 and a half cents.

**The motion failed unanimously.**

The board went over the budget line by line. It was agreed to increase some of the revenue figures, including rent on the Holcomb House apartments. After making the revenue changes, the amount to be raised by taxes was reduced by \$10K.

The board made some changes to expenses, including reducing the amount for beautification.

Nat asked when we will start getting income from the solid waste district for the trucking fees we negotiated. Eric said they may have forgotten. Brian said we forgave the fees for a period of time. Eric suggested looking at our contract to see when we should start getting fees.

Nat asked why there was a 93% increase in retirement for the library. Brian said he thinks it is an error. He calculated what he believes retirement should be. It was agreed to put that amount in the budget and follow up with the library treasurer. (*Duncan left at 9:18.*)

Nat said he would be willing to cut the \$4K budgeted for the toddler playground. We currently have a boat and a train but some repairs are needed. It was agreed to zero out the toddler playground line item and increase facilities maintenance by \$1K to pay for repairs to playground equipment.

Kyle said she had contacted Jessica Bickford who said the retirement amount for the library had been left blank so Brian could fill it in according to standard retirement calculations. So the number Brian calculated this evening is correct.

Brian said he was able to cut \$200 from office salaries after looking into the figures.

Some reductions were made to highway department items.

With all the reductions made, the budget increase was reduced to 3.6%. The budget total is \$2,709,614.02. Without the Jewett property expenses the budget increase is 2.01%. The increase in taxes is 6 cents.

**Nat moved to approve a 2019-2020 budget of \$2,709,614.02, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.**

**6. *Review and Approve Town Meeting Warning***

Brian handed out a draft warning. It was noted that articles about board member compensation and reviewing the reports of the town officers need to be added.

Brian said we are anticipating having \$5,453.05 at the end of the year that could be used to reduce taxes. He assumed we would use \$5,000 of that to reduce taxes but we could add in the \$453.05. He was thinking that would go to reduce taxes at the end but he didn't want to make corrections every time we changed the budget. Eric suggested putting the \$453.05 into the tax anticipation fund and that was agreed upon.

Brian suggested fixing the punctuation in Article 12 and that was agreed upon.

Nat asked where the sum of \$50K for the rec coordinator position comes from. Brian said that is based on pay of \$18/hr from July 1 through the end of the year, with the person getting the same pay raise as the rest of the employees January 1. It includes benefits. Rosemary suggested changing the wording of the article to make it clear that the amount includes both salary and benefits. That was agreed upon. Brian said he and Rosemary had talked about 25 hours a week. Doug suggested 24 hours is better because it can be divided into 3 8-hour days. Brian said 24 hours times 52 weeks is 1248 hours, a little less than the number he had used. Mike said Duncan had suggested going below 24 hours a week so our personnel policy doesn't apply. Brian said he feels not offering even pro-rated benefits would really reduce the desirability of the position. What makes our part time position better than another is health insurance. Brian said the salary total comes out to \$25,856.29. Health insurance is \$12,446.34 and long term disability and dental adds about another \$2K. A total of \$45K would give us plenty of cushion.

Rosemary said if we find a good candidate we might want to go over \$18/hr.

Brian said the total without long term disability or dental is roughly \$38,330. A realistic number with some cushion would be \$42K.

Doug asked if the cost depends on what insurance they sign up for. Brian said yes.

Doug said he thinks we should explain the cost breakdown at town meeting.

It was agreed to change the amount in the rec coordinator article to \$45K.

**Mike moved to approve the town meeting warning as presented with the addition of the 2 missing articles, the changes made to the budget figures, the agreed-upon changes to the rec coordinator article and the punctuation changes in the inclusivity statement article. Nat seconded and the motion was passed.**

**7. *Town Finance Committee Proposal***

Mike handed out some information to give everyone a general idea of what a finance committee does. He said a number of towns have finance committees. The committee would go over the budget and do a lot of checking that the board or the town administrator might not have time to do. They would go over the balance sheets of organizations that ask for money to see if they actually need the money they are asking for. The town would have a better handle on the money we spend and would be more responsible. The committee should be made up of accountants and financial professionals. It would be a good way for community members to be involved with our budget and see the workings of the town.

Eric asked how big the committee would be. Mike said he would think 3 to 5 members.

Eric suggested Brian could reach out to the Cambridge town administrator to get information about their finance committee. Doug said he would like to see the language establishing the

Cambridge finance committee. He wonders if they had it because they had a 3-person board and didn't have an administrator. Does it duplicate things we have?

Nat said one reason he serves on the selectboard is to have input on the budget. Rosemary said she thinks the finance committee just makes recommendations. The board has the final say.

Brian said he likes the idea. A lot comes out of having more eyes on the budget. If a group were willing to start looking at a budget draft in December that would help him.

Doug said if the board appoints a finance committee some of the board's authority will be delegated to them. The board will need to respect what they are doing. Brian said the selectboard would not see every budget draft.

Eric said the finance committee could work with groups like the Rec Committee or the Skate Park Committee and go over their budgets with a fine tooth comb. We can't take the time to do that.

The board agreed to start exploring this idea. Eric suggested that Brian reach out to Cambridge.

Mike moved to go into executive session to discuss employee compensation

**Mike moved to enter executive session to discuss employee compensation as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3), inviting administration to remain, Kyle seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 10:19.** The board came out of executive session at 10:34.

**Nat moved and Doug seconded to increase Brian Story's salary to 68,000 per year retroactive to July 1, 2018.** Nat explained the reasons for the increase: We have not given Brian the 2 previous pay increases given to other employees and the board has also decided to increase Brian's pay due to a very satisfactory job performance review and because he is taking on the added duties of zoning administrator. **The motion was passed.**

8. ***Adjourn***

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*