

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, JANUARY 3, 2017

Present:

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

Others: Brian Story

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Eric called the meeting to order at 7:04.

2. Additions, Changes to Agenda

Kyle asked for a discussion item about making town meeting more accessible to the public.

3. Review the 2017-2018 Budget

Eric suggested that in budgeting we might want to think about the possibility that more federal money for infrastructure projects could be coming into the state. We may want to prepare for the possibility of having more money for bridges and culverts. Our bridges are all inspected by the state and he believes the only one of any size that has any deficiency is Scribner Bridge, but he thinks about 30% of our culverts may be deficient. We might want to think about allocating money to do a good inventory of culverts, guard rails, etc.

The board reviewed the budget draft and discussed some of the line items. Brian said we should not see any FEMA revenue from the Coddling Hollow project in the next fiscal year, but we may not get our final FEMA payment until close to the end of this fiscal year. Before closing us out they want to do an inspection of the site and they may need to see grass growing on the bank to be satisfied the project has been completed as specified, which would mean the inspection would need to wait until spring. Brian is going to try to negotiate an earlier inspection. He believes we have cash on hand to pay the contractor before receiving the last FEMA payment.

The board agreed that PILOT and current use revenues should probably be increased in next year's budget to be closer to actual revenues received in the last couple of years. Brian said he will go over historical figures to make sure last year wasn't a total fluke.

There was discussion about what should be budgeted for stone income. Brian said he thinks it is likely we will be back in our gravel pit next fiscal year but maybe to a lesser extent than in the past. We want what is left to last until we figure out what we are doing for a second pit.

Brian said he has been talking to Brian Krause about getting a disc roller to use on road shoulders that would recycle more gravel, cut down on erosion and help with roads widening. Brian K. is working this week to nail down pricing. Board members said that is not in the current reserve plan, so it should be in the budget.

Mike asked if the town has considered leasing vehicles. Eric said we looked into it and found either that there was no benefit or that there was a benefit to owning.

Nat said the board should look at the reserve schedule. He recalls that it was going to go bankrupt in about 4 years.

Mike asked if any money is hidden in this budget. He said that is a question members of the public often ask – whether there is something hidden. Eric said any reserve funds we have are shown. He said years ago, when there was a different town clerk, the selectboard never knew how much money they had. When Duncan and Rosemary came we found we had about a million in cash on hand that was just rolling over from year to year. The board has been trying to tighten up and have less cash on hand at the end of every year. Now we end with less than \$100K. With the difficulty of forecasting far ahead on a \$2 million budget he thinks that is pretty good.

Next year's budget will need to include the town's share of the cost for the work on the mill house. That is estimated to be \$9K. Mike suggested budgeting \$10K. Brian said he thinks the work on the municipal building will be done this fiscal year. Doug said he thinks we should ask the village if they expect to put money in their budget for the mill house. Eric said at the joint meeting they indicated they would pay their half.

Brian said one of our bridges is up for review but we probably won't be eligible for state funds for it. We might want to take a closer look at it. The covered bridge on School Street has a wire on it that is tense in an odd way. Troy pointed out that he would not have run that wire as tense as it is; there should be more slack in it. But it is not obvious why it doesn't have slack anymore. He wants to have an engineer look at it. Doug asked where the cost of an engineer would be in the budget. Eric said probably under contracted services in highway.

Brian asked if the rec committee made any revenue on the archery program. Nat said no, there will not be net revenue.

Salaries need to be adjusted for the 2% increase that was agreed upon for joint town/village employees, along with the change to the health insurance contribution. Eric said whatever increase we give to joint employees is usually given to town employees. Brian said the board will need to decide whether to give a bump to him and to Brian K. He assumes he would not get a 2% raise in addition to the pay bump. Eric said he would get a bump after his 6 months' probationary period ends. Then he would normally get whatever raise other employees get at the start of the next fiscal year. That is separate. Brian said he wasn't sure since he has a contract he negotiates if he would get the same increase as other employees or would be expected to negotiate any increase. Board members said he would automatically get those increases.

Brian said Kelly, the janitor, is technically a joint employee now, but he doesn't think anyone remembered that she is a joint employee. Eric said maybe the board should move to retroactively approve giving her the same increase approved for joint employees, contingent on agreement from the trustees. Brian said he will take this to the trustees. Eric said this should be an agenda item for the next meeting and Brian should let Meredith know.

There was a question about whether the 6 month to date figure for legal expenses was correct. Eric asked Brian to check with Rosemary about whether that column is adding up correctly.

Brian said Brian K. believes we should increase paving a little for next year, but he doesn't think we need to make it as high as what was actually spent this year. We spent more than budgeted because of grant opportunities. There was revenue to offset that extra expense. The board noted that we have spent more than budgeted already this year for sand. Brian said what Brian K. has spent so far includes what is stockpiled already for the winter so he shouldn't need to spend more this year. Brian and the board agreed to increase the amount budgeted for sand for next year.

Doug asked where in the budget expenses associated with getting back into the gravel pit would show up. Brian said it depends on the expense. Some of it would probably be fees for a consultant to help us with our closure plan. Eric said the closure is something we haven't budgeted for. That would probably be a line item of its own. Mike said it might not be too expensive if we use material from the new pit to cover the old pit. Brian said if we have both pits active at the same time we will be above the Act 250 exemption so he is not sure they would let us do that. They might because we are using it to close a pit. Mike said you would expect the state would give us a break because we are trying to get two things accomplished with the least amount of cost to the town. Brian said we will ask for a jurisdictional opinion and we will make that case. Mike hopes they will consider it and try not to put such a burden on towns, especially considering the other burdens towns will have related to lake cleanup. If they expect us to foot the bill for that, they should be willing to work with us on the gravel pit.

4. *Review Act 250 Permit Requests*

The board discussed Act 250 permit requests that are outstanding. There is one for Field Days filed by Anne Mullins. They are moving the track and enlarging it. The state has made no decision about it yet. We just received a notice that it was filed. Eric said the Field Days organization has done great things over the past few years. Others agreed.

Another filing was from Dearborn. They are building a Dollar General on Route 15. They were told they would be subject to Act 250, they appealed and were denied, then they asked for a reconsideration and were denied again. They may go to court or they may not. We will have party status and will be able to go to any hearing that is held. They haven't submitted an application yet. Probably they are going to continue to fight to try to get an exemption.

Highland Heights wants to add 8 additional mobile home units. Doug said we might want to look at it to see what it would require in services and what that would cost. Brian said Ken Harvey has had his hearing for that project but hasn't gotten his permit. Mike asked what kind of services Doug is thinking about. Doug said whenever there is an Act 250 permit request they get statements from the fire department, sheriff's department, school, and municipality on the ability to serve. When you look at expenses vs. taxes, a new home is generally a net loss to a community. But that is not the only discussion to be had. Eric said he can't see where we could say we can't support the project. It is a private road so there is no additional plowing needed. The school is under capacity.

A hearing on the RL Vallee project is scheduled for January 11. Brian showed the board the plans for the project. He said at the hearing the village is leaning toward not asking to have anything done about putting a crosswalk in. They feel it would put an undue burden on one particular business to ask them to put a crosswalk across Route 15.

Doug said the report on this project says that by a certain measure a left turn lane from Route 15 into Vallee's and a left turn lane on 100C would be warranted, but they say it is not a high collision area so they are not needed. He doesn't think they are accounting for how difficult it is to get out of 100C. He thinks a left turn lane from 15 is needed and a right turn lane is needed from 100C.

Mike asked if the selectboard had a position on this project. Eric said no. Mike asked if he can call Skip Vallee to suggest buying the house next door to provide easier access to the property off 100C. Doug said he thinks that would be more appropriate after the hearing. If the board wants him to, he will go to the hearing and say we think there should be a left turn lane off Route 15 and right and left turn lanes on 100C at the Route 15 stop sign. Nat said he thinks we want traffic calming, not wider roads in the village.

Doug read from the report that 66 trips per day specifically to Maplefields are predicted, as well as 130 stops from people who would have been driving by anyway.

Doug said he thinks if any selectboard members are planning to go to the hearing we should have a position before we go. He feels the report is inconsistent about whether left turn lanes are warranted. Kyle said she personally doesn't like this project. Mike said he agrees. He feels as planned it will cause congestion. Eric said he has mixed feelings. He feels the site could use sprucing up. The appearance of the lot will be improved when the project is done. But he is not sure about the amount of congestion. It sounds like there will be a lot of traffic there. Mike said he thinks it will improve that area but he doesn't like the fact it will cause more congestion. Nat said he understands the concern about congestion. He is all for easing congestion. His concern is that turn lanes would widen village main roads, which he thinks could be a detriment to traffic flow, walkability and quality of life. Doug said they are two state highways. He thinks if there is going to be more traffic on them and there is a report saying a turn lane is warranted, we should ask for a turn lane. They say there aren't many accidents there, but he believes a left turn lane from 15 would be useful because of the difficulty of getting out of Maplefields. That would at least stop one car going by.

Mike said he thinks our position should be that traffic congestion and safety should be discussed and Doug should be our spokesman. Doug suggested Eric be the spokesman but Eric said he would rather delegate it to Doug, who he felt could do it better. The board discussed exactly what position Doug should present.

Doug read from the report: "Based on the analysis and recommendation presented in this memorandum we conclude that expansion of the Maplefields convenience store and gas station as proposed will not cause unreasonable congestion or unsafe conditions on the local roadway and will not adversely impact the public investments in infrastructure in the area."

He suggested we can say that as proposed we think it will cause unreasonable congestion or unsafe conditions especially as they are not planning to install the left turn storage lanes and if they install the left turn lanes it would adversely impact the public investment.

Mike moved and Kyle seconded that the selectboard take the position that the board thinks the proposed Maplefields project will cause unreasonable congestion or unsafe conditions especially as they are not planning to install the left turn storage lanes and if they install the left turn lanes it would adversely impact the public investment.

Nat asked if this forces the state or Vallee to decide to put in a turn lane. Doug said he doesn't know where it goes. We are saying we think they should put in left turn lanes and that if they do that it would adversely impact the public investment in infrastructure. We just redid the town highway. Eric asked, do we want left turn lanes or not? Doug said Nat doesn't. This motion says that if they put them in it will adversely impact the public investment we made. Nat asked, what is a reasonable outcome based on that? Doug said we don't have any real leverage or teeth unless the state comes in and says they agree. Eric said if the state agrees, what they agree to do may be something we don't support. Doug said the Act 250 people might say Vallee has to pay for this. Eric asked, do we want to take a position that potentially would require a left turn lane to be put when we may not like having it put in? Mike said it is the only way to mitigate the congestion. Nat said downsizing the store would also have that effect. Mike said he would like the left turn lane to do away with congestion. He believes it would make it safer. Nat said it wouldn't make it safer for pedestrians. It would be less attractive. And wider roads tend to increase the speed of traffic. He is against a turn lane for those reasons. **The motion was passed with Nat opposed.**

5. *Improving Town Meeting Attendance*

Kyle said she has been concerned for a while that town meeting is not getting the attendance it could be. She has done informal surveys of parents she knows and people her age and it seems there are a few reasons people aren't coming. Child care is a major one. Also, some people have to work. Another reason is that new families are saying they feel intimidated. They don't know who we are, how to vote, or what the topics are. The town report is very overwhelming. So she has been thinking about how we can support people who do want to attend to feel welcome. She knows a woman who does trainings for kids to become babysitters. She is planning to a course at the school and those that get certification can potentially do community service and be babysitters during town meeting. Kyle would like to work with a group to come up with other ideas to increase attendance.

Eric said we have been seeing a steady decline and once the local school board no longer exists there will be more decline. One idea that has been suggested is to have an article authorizing a discount on property tax for people who participate. He is not sure if that is legal, though. Mike suggested we could change the day to Saturday. Eric said towns that have changed from the traditional day to an evening or Saturday have had their participation decline even more. Kyle suggested it could be helpful to make it more of an event. Eric suggested we might at least want to have a discussion about a tax discount for town meeting participation. Nat said the town report could be a more interesting 21st century document. We could do a better job of promoting and talking about town meeting on Front Porch Forum. Child care is an awesome idea. Kyle said she has talked to Katie Orost and the JES principal

and they don't think it would be a problem to have childcare in the building. Kyle suggested maybe part of the childcare could be some kind of fun age-appropriate lesson about democracy or how to vote. Doug said there would be a huge spread in ages. He said we also have to think about liability insurance. Kyle said she imagines parents would have to sign a waiver. Eric said we can check with VLCT to see if our insurance covers it. Nat suggested making town meeting more interactive, with kiosks for groups that are asking for money like the Historical Society, Rec Committee, etc. Doug suggested presentations by the Rec Committee, Historical Society, Conservation Commission, etc. could familiarize people with what those groups do. Brian said he thinks he might be able to do some outreach in advance. Maybe he can have a couple of meetings here or at the library for people to come and talk about the budget. Doug said few people would come. Kyle asked if we could put some kind of "Town Meeting for Dummies" information in the mailing that goes out so people feel like they are walking in educated. Doug suggested Front Porch Forum posts telling what will be discussed and what presentations there will be. Brian said UVM may have some resources they use with their students.

6. Compost Facility

The board agreed to plan a site visit to the compost facility for January 14 at 2:00 pm.

Doug moved to enter executive session to discuss the compost facility, Mike seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 9:20. The board came out of executive session at 9:45.

Doug said he would like to call AOT and ask to speak to their transportation engineer about the Vallee project and see if they have any concerns. The board agreed that would be all right.

7. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:46.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths