

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, JANUARY 7, 2019

Present:

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

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Lois Frey, Charles Gallanter

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Eric called the meeting to order at 7:03.

2. Additions, Changes to Agenda

Eric added discussion of a potential meeting next Monday.

Kyle said she was wondering what our process for replacing Jan is. Brian said Jan has not formally stated when she is retiring.

3. Revise Formation of High-Speed Internet Development Committee

Charles Gallanter said he would rather have the high-speed internet group be a non-governmental organization so they don't have to worry about Open Meeting Law, posting agendas, etc. He thinks Rob Rodriguez feels the same way. He thinks they can get more done without the restrictions of Open Meeting Law.

Eric said his only concern would be if the group is reaching out to other communities. Being under the town umbrella gives the group more respect. Charles said he is a member of the Planning Commission. Eric said the group would not have the same authority of being endorsed by the selectboard. Charles said the selectboard can still endorse the group.

Nat asked, Open Meeting Law is not antithetical to getting things done, is it? The group would just have to warn meetings and submit minutes. Charles said he is not willing to do that.

Eric asked if there has been any other interest in the committee. Brian said we haven't solicited for members yet.

Brian said he thinks there is something to be said for both methods. It is easier if the group doesn't have to meet publicly and declare their meetings but it might open doors if they were empanelled by the town to consider this. He asked how often they have meetings.

Charles said right now if he and Rob are having coffee they are having a meeting. He doesn't know if they could talk about broadband while having coffee.

Brian said an alternative solution would be for the board to officially empanel a committee with 5 seats. Then Charles and Rob would no longer form a quorum.

Nat said he feels the committee needs to be open to community members to join if they have the inclination and expertise.

Doug said he is hesitant to turn it into a non-governmental organization. He thinks there ought to be a committee of a certain number of members and people can share ideas in non quorum groups and then have a quorum when they take action. Brian said he thinks that is a good idea.

Doug moved and Kyle seconded to establish a 5-member High-Speed Internet Development Committee, including the 2 previously appointed members. Brian said he will post the membership opening in line with our regular appointment policy. **The motion was passed.**

4. *Review Disposition of Historical Society Use of 188 Lower Main East*

Eric said he and Doug were appointed by the board to work with the Historical Society on drafting a letter of understanding. The Historical Society is looking for a sense of security that the town won't sell the building out from under them – that they would be given first right of refusal, etc. The problem is that because the Historical Society is under the town umbrella they can't sign an agreement without selectboard authorization. So we would be agreeing to our own agreement. And in the end a future selectboard would not be bound to whatever this selectboard came up with, and even this selectboard could change its mind. He and Doug propose asking our attorney how we can do this to give the Historical Society a sense of security, or if we even can.

Eric said a similar example is that the selectboard could decide that the town would no longer have ball fields and there would be nothing the Rec Committee could do about it. This board and all previous boards have always solicited input on any decision impacting the Rec Committee and he would expect that this board and future boards would do the same regarding decisions affecting the Historical Society, but even with the assurance that we have always done that, there is no guarantee.

Nat asked where this is coming from. Doug said the Historical Society came in with a proposal to transfer the building to them or to their 501(c)(3) and then the question of their collection came up. He didn't think transferring the building to the Historical Society was the logical result of anything that has evolved, but the Historical Society needs predictability. He and Eric switched to discussing how we can give them predictability. They considered a lease but how do we lease a building to ourselves? They have gone from talking about transferring the building to talking about giving them a guaranteed right of occupancy. We have also talked about whether they will outgrow that building.

Nat said he feels the predictability the Historical Society wants comes from the fact that the selectboard has made the investment in the building and the community values it. That could change but it wouldn't happen quickly. He hasn't been convinced yet that this is a problem.

Doug said the Historical Society building is an asset that might have value to the community. The town might get an offer too good to refuse and decide to sell the building. The ball fields are different as they are on land that has a lot of restrictions. The Historical Society raised a lot of money for this building, so much that they are thinking perhaps they should own it. Doug and Eric feel they really need predictability, not ownership.

Nat said the voters would need to approve selling the building. They approved purchase of the building. We can't take the right to sell it from the voters. We can't eliminate that option.

Doug said that is why he and Eric want permission to go to our attorney to ask what could give the Historical Society predictability. He thinks larger organizations have dealt with this. We have never had to face it with organizations using town properties.

Eric said Dean West and Duncan Hastings were advised that he and Doug would go to the full board to look for guidance.

Nat said he sees that the community purchased the building and strongly supports the Historical Society occupying it, so he doesn't see the uncertainty.

Doug said the community signed on to authorize the loan and the Historical Society raised much of the funds, so it was essentially free to the community but the Historical Society sees it differently.

Nat said he feels it is up to Eric and Doug.

Eric said he agrees with Nat but he knows the Historical Society wants some level of security. They have made a large investment in that property. Nat said he feels they already have the security.

Eric asked Lois if she had anything she wanted to add. Lois said she is not on that committee and she can't speak for the group. Before the Historical Society started raising money there was a memorandum of understanding with the town. She sees that as different from a lease.

Nat said he is all for a memorandum of understanding. Eric said it would be an understanding with ourselves.

Doug said he suggests a conversation with our lawyer. It should be a half-hour conversation. The board agreed Brian should call the town's lawyer to discuss this.

5. Potential Meeting January 14

Eric said he would like to have a meeting next Monday to finish up the budget and deal with highway foreman compensation and Brian Story's annual review. (*Charles Gallanter left at 7:27.*) The board agreed to meet January 14 at 7:00 pm.

6. Review Draft Budget

Brian said the amount to be raised by taxes seems awfully low to him. It shows us raising half a million dollars less than last year. But he hasn't yet been able to figure out where the error is. That figure is a calculation but he feels fairly confident that the budget figures are accurate.

The board reviewed the draft with Brian and suggested some changes. The board agreed to leave some conservative estimates for revenue with the idea that perhaps they can be tweaked later once we have a better idea of the amount to be raised by taxes.

Nat said the Rec Committee didn't budget for portable toilets. We should put \$1550 back into the budget for that expense.

Doug asked if the Rec Coordinator position will possibly expand Rec Committee activities to include adult programming. Nat said he would like to see it happen but he would not like to promise it will happen as a result of hiring a Rec Coordinator.

Brian said under office salaries he budgeted for the salary increase the board gave and an estimated 3% increase in January.

Brian budgeted for the Development Review Board to have Donna taking minutes. The board discussed having a combined line for Planning Commission and DRB expenses and decided not to combine them. Doug said he thinks the broadband committee could be combined with the Planning Commission. Brian suggested budgeting \$1200 for minute taking for the Planning Commission. Phil Wilson is taking their minutes now but may not be able to continue.

Brian said the Rec Coordinator salary will be an article. It gets added to the amount to be raised by taxes, but we wouldn't want to show it in the budget because then we would have a gap in financing if the voters approved the budget but not the position or the position and not the budget.

Nat said he thought we decided to cut a lot more for streetlights than what is shown. Brian said the cut to streetlight expenses looks small compared to the previous budget but compared to what we actually spent we cut almost a thousand.

Eric said we always have some tax abatements and yet we don't budget for them. Should we? Rosemary said we have gone years without any. The past couple of years we have had a lot. The board discussed what figure should be used in the budget.

Nat suggested increasing the amount we give to Front Porch Forum. One hundred dollars isn't a lot. Lois said she was going to make the same suggestion. Eric suggested \$200 and Lois and the board agreed to that.

Brian said Lois had asked about unspent Conservation Commission funds from this year going into the conservation reserve fund. But that is not how we wrote the reserve fund. It has to be funded by line item. We have to add a line item for the conservation reserve fund and decide how much to put into it. He recalls that the Conservation Commission had about \$400 unspent. We can't just roll the money over; we have to assign it by line item.

Brian said he is concerned that we have spent most of what was budgeted for solid waste and landfill expenses already this year. We have an agreement with the solid waste district that they take some items without charge in exchange for the use of our land. We need to check whether we are being charged for anything we should not be charged for. Eric said if we

underbudgeted for the current year that could affect the proposed budget. Brian said he will investigate more.

Postage rates are going up but Brian level funded. He said it looks like 2016-17 was a fluke. He doesn't have a good explanation for why we spent more that year. We must have had extra mailings that year. This line also includes job postings and some other things. We will save on school mailings as we are not doing them anymore. So level funding seems reasonable.

Eric noted the big jump in computer support expense. Brian said that item might actually see a little more of an increase. The new service provider is more expensive but we will get more and we will pay for fewer things by the hour, so costs should be more predictable. *(Lois left at 8:35.)*

Eric asked why Brian's budgeted amounts for water and sewer costs are going up so much compared to what we have spent year to date. Brian said he will give that a second look.

It was agreed to increase the amount budgeted for heating based on what was spent last year.

Brian said cemetery mowing is going up. We will be doing more for Plot Cemetery. It has been done by volunteers who are stepping back.

There was discussion about how much to budget for building capital expenses and how much to pay for from the building capital fund. Brian said for the past couple of years we have budgeted for what we think maintenance will cost and used the reserve for overruns. Eric said he would keep reserve funds for contingency.

Eric asked whether principal should be shown as income, as was done for Holcomb House. He thought that was a required accounting practice. Rosemary said she doesn't think so. She thinks the way she and Brian have done it is better.

Nat asked if there is an error in law enforcement expense. Brian said yes, the amount shown is an error.

It was agreed to add \$1550 for facilities maintenance for portable toilets for the Rec Committee.

Brian said the amount budgeted for uniforms is up because we have an additional person and the company that launders and provides uniforms is raising their prices.

There is an increase for health insurance because of the new employee and an insurance cost increase.

Nat asked why tree and brush removal is down. Brian said he will have to check.

Eric suggested budgeting more for road signs based on current year expenditures. Brian agreed to raise it to \$3500.

Doug said he would like to see the spelling corrected on the signs for Foote Brook and Cemetery Roads. Brian said he can edit the spelling on Google Maps if necessary.

Doug said he thinks money spent on Class 4 road maintenance will be well spent with the new Lake Champlain requirements. Brian said we are trying to be pretty generous with people willing to install culverts themselves on Class 4 roads. That is funded under culverts. Doug said he thought the Class 4 road maintenance item was money to be used for supplies when people applied to do work such as installing a culvert. Brian said he doesn't think we have been spending that money that way. Eric said that would leave the culvert line item for Class 3 roads.

Nat suggested increasing the amount budgeted for mud abatement, as it saves us money in the long term. Doug said taking money out of the budget for mud abatement is false economy. Funding it is beneficial. Nat suggested budgeting whatever we proposed last year before our budget was cut and explaining it better at town meeting. Doug agreed. Brian said he will get input from Brian Krause to make sure he doesn't budget for more than Brian K. thinks he can get done. Nat said he thinks it should be a fairly high priority.

Brian said he thinks it might be worthwhile to increase the amount budgeted for highway salaries. We will probably go over on overtime this year. There have been too many times employees had to go out on holidays and weekends. Doug said we will be over our budget this year but next year's weather may be different.

Brian said he is budgeting a small increase for salt. This year we using more and it is more expensive. Next year he is budgeting for regular usage at the higher cost. Eric said Brian had indicated he would have to order an extra load this year which would set us up for next year a bit.

Eric asked why Brian cut outside repairs and parts. Brian said he is cutting it slightly because the overall age of our vehicles is decreasing.

Brian said the Council on Aging has combined with RSVP. They are making one combined request for the amount they had last year before we cut it. We are holding everyone else at the reduced amount. Eric asked why we would give them more. Brian said because he hasn't been able to reach them to get their agreement on the reduced amount. We can give them the reduced amount.

It was noted that no petitions have been submitted yet.

7. *Adjourn*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:24.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths