

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2019

**Present:**

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

Others: Brian Story, Walter Pomroy

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

**1. Call to Order**

Eric called the meeting to order at 7:00

**2. Project Prioritization**

Eric said he would like to separate must-dos from may-dos. Must-dos usually need to be done on some type of monthly or annual frequency. May-dos are things the community sees value in that may not be required by law. He suggested we start with the must-dos. On a monthly basis we hear reports from the treasurer, committees, and the highway foreman and we sign orders. Every year we do budget preparation and we meet with trustees to discuss employee benefits around the same time. In late February we have town meeting prep. At the first meeting in March we do appointments. In July we set the tax rate. In August we reconcile the budget. This coming spring, with the completion of the townwide reappraisal, we may have tax appeals over several months. Brian said dog hearings and health orders should be included. Doug said he thinks periodic meetings with the trustees are a must-do. Eric said in theory we could deal with all issues concerning both boards in December, but things come up every year related to the buildings, etc. Doug said there will be meetings for the merger study. All agreed those are must-dos. Doug said he feels must-dos have kept us from getting to priorities. If the community is going to move ahead substantially, we have to get to priorities beyond the must-dos.

Brian said he liked Nat's idea of a matrix to classify items. Nat said the matrix he suggested classifies each item as urgent or not urgent and important or not important.

Walter said he had come just for one item on the list – the talc mill property trails. Brian said he took the lack of a vote to investigate the need for an Act 250 permit for the trails to mean the board wasn't interested in pursuing that, so he hasn't.

Brian mentioned that Michael's Tree Service was able to take the dead tree in Plot Cemetery down in pieces, without felling it, and it was done with no damage to stones. The cost was under budget.

The board and Brian put all the items they could think of on sticky notes and discussed where each should be placed on the four-quadrant matrix showing important and urgency.

Talc mill trail project

It was agreed that the talc mill trail project is both urgent and important.

Doug asked how we distinguish between urgent and important. Brian said he is thinking of urgent as referring to the speed with which we will do it. If something is urgent we will do it

right now. Eric asked if urgent items are those to be completed in the short term, unlike the Jewett property project, which will be very long term. Brian said he thinks “urgent” will mean different things for different projects. If there is a way to act right now the item could be urgent even it will not be completed soon. Doug said sometimes we have a long term project but we need to start right now.

#### Travis Hill water line

Brian said we have been putting the ice rink in again with no problem. It was there for a long time with no problems. He thinks what happened to Travis Hill’s water line was a fluke of weather conditions. (*Walter left at 7:38*). It was agreed this is low priority and non-urgent.

#### Social media policy

Brian said this is in process now. Nat suggested it is important but low urgency. Brian suggested making it somewhat urgent.

#### Highway access policy

Brian said the board wanted legal review of the policy concerning work in our right of ways and we decided we would use VLCT for the legal review. They didn’t have time then because they were going into the legislative season. He has reopened the conversation. He doesn’t have a cost estimate yet. It was agreed to place this near the social media policy – important, but not highly urgent.

#### Speed limit ordinance

Brian said he sees this as a little higher priority than the previous items. Eric asked why. Brian said the sheriff would like us to update our speed limits. Nat said it’s a safety issue, so that would make it more urgent than the social media policy. Brian said we also get frequent comments from residents about speed. It was agreed to make this important and more urgent than the previous two policies.

#### Prep for merger study

Doug said he thinks we should have some information ready before the study starts and we should check with other communities that have merged and see what lessons they learned. We should be driving it ourselves, not just giving what the consultant asks for. Nat said this is voter-mandated, so it should be very important. It was agreed to make it more important than the speed limit ordinance.

#### Evergreen Ledge legal work

Mike said he thought we already decided we own Evergreen Ledge Cemetery. Doug said we can decide that, but the cemetery isn’t in our hands yet. Nat said there was an idea about going through legislative channels.

#### Blighted building ordinance

It was agreed to make this high priority and urgent, near the speed limit ordinance.

#### Light industrial park

Eric suggested making this medium urgent. Nat said right now there is nothing urgent to do on this. Brian said we have a good opportunity now to work with EDA and Northern Borders that he hopes will prep the groups for a more successful application. Mike said we need

something for town meeting, based on what we heard at the last meeting. He thinks people will be asking about this at town meeting if there is nothing about it in the town report.

#### Class 4 road policy

Eric suggested this is low urgency. Brian said there is no action we can take until we get recommendations from the Planning Commission. Doug said we can find out whether we can have a trail and maintain it and still have it considered a trail. We know that is a central concept of the Planning Commission's proposal.

Kyle asked if we have talked to David Butler about coming regularly to give reports. Brian said he went to their last meeting and talked about that and they said they will do better about making sure someone shows up for that report.

#### Graffiti removal on Powerhouse Bridge

Brian said the easiest solution is painting the bridge. It is nice to have old wood but it is hard to get graffiti out of old, porous wood. Nat said he used a stiff nylon brush and brushed off quite a bit in about 20 minutes. He thinks power washing would do quite a bit. He thinks it is lower priority. Brian said he thinks this will have to wait until spring. Maybe we should hire someone to do power washing. It is non-urgent because we have to wait until spring.

#### Old mill house

Brian said Jim Rose is very interested in that building. He won't be able to get a loan for it unless at least an environmental assessment is done. Once it is done there are a lot of funds that might be available to Jim or to us for cleanup. Doug said Lea Kilvadyova said LCPC has run through their hazardous waste funding but they can submit funding requests to other districts. Brian said if we did an environmental study a purchaser could at least get a loan. Maybe we could make the purchase price low enough so the purchaser could afford to do the cleanup. We have to work with the trustees on this since it is a jointly-owned building.

Doug said he thinks we should start pushing on the whole Tatro property. Eric said he thinks this is important but not urgent. Kyle said the Roses are trying to plan their future. There is big potential there. It could be a catalyst for some good development. Brian said the trustees were deadlocked on what to do with the old mill house at the joint meeting. Mike said that was because their whole board was not there. Brian said we could ask them to consider it at their November meeting, in advance of the December joint meeting. Nat said he thinks it is on their agenda tonight. It was agreed to make this a bit less urgent than the industrial park.

#### Redesign of Lendway Lane/Old Mill Park/highway department area

Brian said the highway department is sometimes having trouble getting in and out of the garage because too many people are parking near it when the rail trail parking is full. People are not using the parking in Old Mill Park enough. He thinks this is not especially important but somewhat urgent because it's a problem. It could be a safety concern at some point but it's not so far. We can delegate to the public works department to put up signage. Doug said he thinks this is a safety concern because it is not clear to drivers in that area who has the right of way. Nat said the whole intersection needs a design change. Perhaps LCPC can help us with that. People can't see the entrance to the park. That is probably why they are not going there to park. Pulling out of Old Mill Park can be challenging. It looks like the road goes into the highway department, and then the rail trail is there. We need some serious

planning. Brian said that is the ultimate solution. We need serious help to do that level of work. The short term solution is putting up some signs telling where additional parking is. Eric asked how often this is an issue. Brian said it is a problem on weekends during pretty much all of October and some other weekends. It is not as much of a problem for the highway department on Saturdays and Sundays but the problem often starts on Friday. Doug brought up the potential for accidents and liability questions because the right of way is not clear. It was agreed to put this after the old mill house for priority. Nat said the problem is that we don't really have the resources to do it. We need to contract with LCPC or someone else.

#### Bridge from Old Mill Park to skate park

Kyle said she put this up as a dream item. Eric said it is not important and not urgent. Brian said if we had a good opportunity to do something about it he would like to take the opportunity, but we are not really trying to make it happen.

#### Development on old mill property

It was agreed that this is somewhat important but low urgency. We don't want to do too much development without an overall plan.

#### Pedestrian paths

There could be a path to improve connection to the college on Clay Hill. Nat brought up connectivity to Old Mill Park. Doug said the Planning Commission did plans for this about 20 years ago. Brian said he has talked to the arts committee about an art walk in Johnson from Old Mill Park to the college. Having a walking and cycling path for that would be great. Kyle said VSC is now talking about that too. They want to create an arts corridor with Johnson at the epicenter. Eric said we are not actively working on this. Brian said realistically we would not invest much money in this. If it involves sidewalks, that would be the village. He doesn't see a lot of town funds going for this. Brian suggested not making this completely non-urgent. If there were an opportunity to do something, we should act on it but he doesn't see that happening easily and we are not doing a lot to actively pursue it.

#### Logging on Tatro property

Nat said the board had agreed to do some logging but he is not crazy about it. Eric said it is not urgent. Nat said he thinks this goes with overall plans for the Tatro property. It was agreed to put this in the same vicinity as the general old mill property item.

#### TAC planning for Route 15 east of the village

Brian said this is about the accident-prone area on the hill east of the village. We have never asked for an official safety audit of that area. When we did preliminary research we found that although there are a lot of anecdotes about that area there are not as many accidents. Eric said there have been some high profile ones. Brian said a lot of people think of that as a very dangerous area. It is not hard to ask for a safety audit. Mike said he thinks that is a dangerous area. Brian said AOT can deal with the way the road is sloped and pitching down. What we can do to encourage that is get TAC to assign a higher priority to it. We can also ask for a safety audit.

#### Update capital equipment fund

Brian said we need to do this before we do the budget. It is important and urgent.

#### Development of Parker & Stearns and Manchester properties

Brian said it will take some effort to get Parker & Stearns redevelopment moving and keep it moving. Chan Parker doesn't appear very comfortable with the environmental assessment process so LCPC and the town need some involvement to make him more comfortable with available funds he can access. The property needs an environmental assessment. Everything is waiting on that. We have people interested in parts of the property. We might be able to get someone to buy the whole property knowing they will have enough tenants. Mike said Chan wants to sell the whole property as a package. Brian said there are funds that would be accessible to a new owner. Chan would not be on the hook for cleanup himself, but he needs to be helped through the process. It was agreed that this is important and urgent.

#### Community involvement in the budget process

Brian said we had talked about having people sit in on the budget making process. He thinks that is urgent because of timeliness.

#### Roles and responsibilities for selectboard

Mike said this was his suggestion. He had in mind something like a code of conduct – things we should expect from each other. Nat said he doesn't want to get into policing members but we can discuss this at a meeting. Mike handed out some suggested guidelines he adapted based on something from the British government. Brian suggested the board discuss it at a future meeting.

#### Cemetery near Parker & Stearns

Eric suggested this is important but not urgent. There was a cemetery laid out across from Parker & Stearns. Where it may become urgent is that we have a restriction on all of the property owners. If they are going to dig anything they have to let the town know. If any property owners want to sell and can't get title insurance they will come to us.

#### Town website

Mike said he thinks we need a nice website. Kyle said she thinks this goes hand in hand with town branding. She knows people good at doing this kind of work but it costs money. Websites and branding are really expensive. It was agreed that this is important but not very urgent.

#### Stop sign ordinance

It was agreed to place this near the other policies and ordinances, but it is one of the less important.

#### Town sewer districts

This will be given to the Planning Commission. It has to come after the Class 4 road policy in priority.

#### Trash cleanup on town property near rail trail

Brian said there is a perennial problem with an area where people like to take garbage such as old appliances and shoot at it. Nat said this is important but not urgent. Brian said if we have a good opportunity to do something with this area he would like to. He thinks one of the best solutions would be to build a parking lot into this area and pave it over. Nat asked if we

can clean up what is there. Brian said we do occasionally. Donna Griffiths has also done some cleanup herself.

#### Town clerk succession planning

Nat said this is very important but not urgent. Eric said the thought was that we would go to the voters and ask to make this an appointed position after Rosemary retires.

#### Checkerberry Field access

Doug said access is in the deed and that is that. Nat and Brian said it needs to be better enforced. Brian said there was a question about whether we need to have baseball happening there. It would be a great location for a dog park. The tree board wants to turn it into an arboretum, which would also work well with it being a dog park. Eric said he thinks there may be something in the deed specifying that access exists as long as it is used as a ball field. Brian said he thinks this is somewhat important because we have other things we want to do with this property and somewhat urgent but not very urgent.

#### Broadband

Brian said we are waiting on a report from the broadband committee. There is not a lot we can do now. Doug said he feels the broadband committee needs to be pushed. Eric said he thinks this is important but not urgent. Doug said he feels this is most important thing we can do for economic development in his town. Houses are valued based on if they have broadband. People won't move to outlying houses unless they have broadband. We have a proposal to wire the whole community. We should be looking at it. He would not make this as urgent as the merger study but he thinks we should ask the broadband committee to come to every meeting. He thinks it should be a standing agenda item. Eric said he thought he heard they were at a point where money is an issue. Where will money come from? Brian said money is one of their problems but he thinks not the only one. Mike said the electric coop is looking into this too.

#### Law enforcement study committee

Nat said he would like to see this done before town meeting. We need volunteers. This is something we can do now. It was agreed that it is somewhat important and that this is a good time to work on it.

#### Revolving loan committee

Brian said we need to seek volunteers for this committee again. We didn't get enough volunteers to appoint a quorum. Creating the committee is important. Nat said the urgency depends on how much we have loaned out. Brian said we need to loan more. It was agreed that this has high importance and high urgency.

#### Install fishing access

Brian said the access would be on property owned by David Butler. The River Conservancy has some capacity to help on this. Mike said he bought the property in the tax sale but David can still redeem it. Brian said we have a right of way on it. Mike said if he gets the property he will give it to the town anyway. Nat suggested involving Lisa Crews on this. It was agreed that it is not highly important.

Emerald ash borer

Kyle said she thinks this is important. Nat said he thinks we primarily need to budget for it in the next budget cycle. Brian said a component of this is making sure our permit for the closed landfill allows us to put ash wood on the part of the property not being used by LRSWMD.

Municipal building entryway makeover

Mike said Linda Hill offered to help with this. Kyle said she thinks we need to loop Linda back in and get on her calendar. Brian said he thinks is fairly high priority but not super important.

Assisting economic development projects at Jenna's Promise

It was agreed this is important and high priority. Brian suggested it is a little higher than the revolving loan fund committee but not quite as urgent and important as the Jewett property.

Special events ordinance

It was agreed this is important but not urgent.

Future planning for Legion Field.

It was agreed that this is important but not urgent.

Branding for Town of Johnson

It was agreed that branding has to happen before we redo the website so it comes before that in priority.

Green Mountain Byway

Brian said we get some benefits from being part of this but it is static and a bit of a time sink. Nat said we talked about delegating work on this to a volunteer. It is somewhat important but not very urgent. Kyle suggested maybe Lisa Crews could work on it. Brian said it is not really recreation related. Doug said he doesn't think it is a good use of her skills. He would love to find another volunteer for that.

Solar speed signs

Brian said we have an electrician who says he can hook up the signs. He did it for Hyde Park. Brian just needs to get a date from him and our employees will place the signs. We are close on this one.

Clock tower

Eric said this is an unresolved question. Mike said we're not going to do anything until the Masons get the tower stabilized. The weight of the bell and clock is one of the main problems. If they are not going to do anything we should remove the bell and clock, replace them with an electric clock and bring the old works here for display. Brian said he thinks this is important but not very urgent. But if we have a good opportunity we want to jump on it. Nat said when he joined the board people were saying the tower was not structurally sound.

Gravel pit

Eric said we are within 2 to 3 years of running out of gravel. It was agreed that this is important and urgent. Brian said he has the report. He will meet up with the consultant for

help interpreting it. Nat said he thinks this is equivalent in importance and urgency to the capital equipment plan.

#### Beautification Committee chair and regular meeting schedule

Kyle said she feels the committee needs to organize itself better. The board never established a chair for the committee. Kyle said she feels that is keeping it from moving along. Angela Burton wants to join the committee. Kyle feels the committee needs a leader. It was agreed that this is important and that we can move quickly on it.

#### Ongoing rail trail maintenance

Brian said this is pretty important and we get a lot of comments on it. He suggested putting it near the Beautification Committee item.

#### Snowmobile access to village

Brian said this is not urgent. The snowmobile club really wants it but there is little action we can take to make it happen. Kyle said the snowmobile club wants snowmobiles to be able to go down Railroad Street and cut over behind the laundromat to get to the village green and eat. Brian said he thinks this is high importance but not too urgent.

#### Standing water at intersections

Brian said the spot on Railroad Street can't be fixed until we repave. The spot at the Route 15/Pearl Street intersection is due to a bad patch. The fix should be only moderately difficult but we need the state's assistance. We still need to assess the spot near the old firehouse parking lot. Mike asked what we can do for the Aupperlees. Are we ever going to dig down and remove the concrete under the asphalt? Brian said at some point that will probably need to be done to fix the storm drains. He feels this is not urgent, but is fairly important. We are not actively working on it but if an opportunity came up we should take care of it.

#### Ice dam study

Brian said we haven't heard about this since it was approved. We should ask for an update. He suggested putting it at non urgent and non important. The study is extremely important but our capacity to contribute is low.

#### Medical center in Johnson

Brian said he thinks this should rank a little higher than the other work with Jenna's Promise. Getting a medical center is very important for us.

#### Ordinance on false security alarms

Nat said the sheriff asked us to consider this. It is important but not urgent. Eric said it is pretty easy, though. Doug suggested maybe there is a canned ordinance we could use.

#### Updating VASA ATV ordinance

Brian said we have had a couple of requests for modifications and positive and negative comments. He thinks it warrants reexamination. It is not urgent or important.

#### GIS mapping

There is a state grant program we have to go out for for updating our maps. Brian feels the grant opportunity makes this a higher priority.



Encouraging development of housing and food

Doug said he added this one. He thinks we don't have enough food and housing to support use of our town's recreational assets. We could encourage people to go into business providing food and housing. Airbnb looks like it is coming to the fore in bringing people in. Brian said Johnson Works is getting in touch with Airbnb owners and giving them information on local businesses. Kyle said they are being given a laminated sheet with businesses on one side and recreation on the other side.

Reports to the public equivalent to Brian's reports to the selectboard

Brian said he is thinking of putting out reports, perhaps on Front Porch Forum, perhaps weekly, with the same update information he sends to the board. Kyle said she worries that if it is done as often as once a week the emails that come back with questions and issues could mean more work.

Water on Legion Field

Brian thinks this is fairly high urgency but not as important. Nat said Brian Raulinaitis would like the water to be all-season. Brian said that would take entirely redoing the water line. It was agreed that this item should be taken care of by July 1.

Sinclair Road right of way

The question of whether this is a 5-rod road was never resolved. Eric said it is not urgent or important.

Transfer station agreement

Brian said he thinks this is important and urgent. He would like to wrap it up this week, but that's optimistic.

Joint employees

Brian said he and Meredith are working on a report to give the boards related to joint employees.

Compost facility agreement

It was agreed that this is not urgent, but is very important. The current agreement lasts for a few more years.

Liaison with college

The college has hired Leah Hollenberger as community liaison for Johnson and Lyndon. Brian said this is important and high priority but it is already improving so there is not a lot to happen right now. Brian thinks Leah will attend a meeting soon.

Yearly workshops on social issues

Doing the racial justice workshop is the first part of this. It was agreed that this should go in the urgent category because scheduling the first workshop is urgent.

Street naming ordinance

Brian said we need to clarify what the Historical Society's role is. They feel our instructions to them are vague. This was classified similarly to the other policies.

Community wide mass business mailing

The previous mailing done by Jane Draper was funded privately. We want to do it again but funding is not there this time.

Update safety policies

Brian said this is very urgent and high priority.

Respect in the workplace training

Brian said the public works crew has asked not to get this training. They feel they are taking care of the issues themselves. So this can be taken off the list.

Holcomb House repairs

It was agreed this is pretty important and urgent. The property devalues if it is not kept up.

Relationship between town and Historical Society

Eric said he thinks this is important but not very urgent. Doug said he thinks it might be more urgent because getting repayment from the Historical Society is connected to our budget.

Nat suggested doing this again in March. Others agreed that would probably be a good time for it.

**3. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*