

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD EMERGENCY MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2018

**Present:**

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

Others: Rosemary Audibert, Jeanne Engel, Amy and Dan Noyes

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

Eric called the meeting to order at 5:00.

He said there is a significant rain event expected. Not as much rain is expected as in January – just half an inch rather than the 1-2 inches we had in January. But about the same amount of meltoff is expected as in January because of the warm temperatures forecast. The peak of the event would be Tuesday night or Wednesday. Some of the models have indicated a Lamoille River level similar to what we had in January, about 9 feet. Scott Whittier of the National Weather Service is not sure that is completely accurate. He doesn't think it will be as big as in January. But we want to be cautious. One concern is the huge variable of the ice. We have an established jam, so even if the river doesn't come up to flood level there can be a flood event.

A Green River Reservoir release has been pretty much ruled out at this time because of the amount of ice between here and Morrisville. All we would be able to do is melt all the ice upstream of Johnson and spend a lot of money.

Anything we do has a risk and there is a risk if we do not do anything. We knew if we did something too early while temperatures were cold there would be a high probability that we would just move ice and it would freeze somewhere else. Now temperatures are warming. Another idea from Vermont Emergency Management and the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory is using an excavator. Using GW Tatro comes with a price tag. There is a risk if we don't do anything. If we do something there is also risk. One risk is that the ice may move to a spot where it causes another jam. If we are able to get an excavator into the river near the maintenance facility there is a very deep hole downriver from there where the excavator couldn't go. If ice jammed there it could endanger the trailer park and some homes that weren't in danger in January. It could make the situation worse for them but better for the village.

Eric talked to Justin Day from Tatro about trying to make a channel to where the Gihon comes into the Lamoille. If the ice moves downstream there is some risk it could cause problems but they think it is a fairly low risk. If they get a channel open they think the ice that comes through will keep moving.

Eric Nuse has volunteered to come to a meeting with Tatro and point out areas where they should be concerned about possible holes.

Eric thinks if we are going to do anything, it is time. He thinks the time and conditions are right. The warmer temperatures in the next few days will help us by preventing the ice from freezing back in and the channel should stay open until the Tuesday/Wednesday event.

Mike asked who determined where to make channels. Eric said he and people from Vermont Emergency Management, the National Weather Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. They were all at a meeting in Waterbury, a prescheduled spring flood seminar Eric had already signed up for. A number of experts were there. They highlighted Johnson quite a bit in the discussion. We got kudos for our drone coverage. They don't think we will have an event like the one in January but the model indicates it's a possibility.

Nat asked if Eric could show the plan on a map. Doug said there is a bend in the river that goes close to the highway, then a long straightaway. He thinks they will start after that long straightaway where it gets close to Lendway Lane and go up to the confluence of the Gihon and the Lamoille. Eric said they plan to drop into the river near the town garage.

Kyle asked how confident Tatro is about going into the river. Eric said very confident. They are proposing using two machines – a 320 long reach excavator and a 336 excavator with a 4 yard bucket.

Mike asked, we have 40 hours for each machine? Eric said that is what they are estimating.

Eric said he found out that there is some mitigation money available from the federal government for preventive measures in situations like this that he thinks would cover 70% of our cost. We do have the money in our reserve fund but hopefully we could get some back.

Doug asked if there are state water requirements related to putting machines in the river. Eric said ANR was at the meeting. They understand our situation. They are allowing machines to go in as long as they are not moving material other than ice. Nat said their tracks will be in the river. Eric said they are okay with that.

**Mike moved and Doug seconded to enter into a contract with GW Tatro for excavator services at an estimated cost of \$20,750.**

Kyle asked about the risks. Is the feeling that the risk to the trailer park is less if we do it now? Eric said doing anything is a risk to the trailer park. They weren't much affected before. If what we do causes ice to jam lower down the river that could be an issue for them. Eric said people cautioned him that we are likely to be blamed for anything that happens downstream whether or not it has anything to do with us. Doug said he thinks it is clear that we have almost a certainty of flooding in the village if we don't do something vs. a smaller chance of causing a problem elsewhere. Eric said he would agree that there is a high risk of flooding now in Johnson and the risk of affecting Cambridge is low. Mike said if we do nothing and get flooding people will say we should have done something.

Kyle asked if Eric will be there while the excavator is working. Eric said he will.

The board looked at a map and discussed where the work is proposed to be done.

Eric said the experts estimate the thickness of the new ice that has formed since the January event is the same as the thickness of the ice in January. It was extremely cold in December but

water temperatures were being brought down from warmer fall temperatures before the ice formed. Since then it has not been as cold but because the water was already cold they estimate about the same amount of ice has formed. That is why there is some concern once ice starts moving from upstream.

Nat asked if all the money to pay Tatro is in our emergency fund. Eric said the cost is about the amount we have in the emergency fund.

Eric said experts are telling us ice jams are unpredictable. They think using an excavator is very wise.

**Mike moved to call the question. The motion was passed.**

**The motion to contract with GW Tatro was passed.**

Eric said he will probably communicate tonight on Front Porch Forum. He will be on VPR tomorrow morning. He will put something on Facebook. Brian Story will do more extensive public relations outreach starting tomorrow. Do we think there is value in having a public meeting where the public can ask questions? Mike said we can say we have a regular meeting Tuesday night.

Eric said Tatro will start at 8:00 am tomorrow. He will get the message out that people will see an excavator in the river. He will explain what we are doing and caution people about the rain event that is expected.

Doug said we will know more on Sunday or Monday. At that point if we had a meeting we would be able to say what we have done and what we have found out. Eric said by Sunday or Monday we will have a more accurate forecast from the National Weather Service.

Eric said the fire department is aware of the excavator plan and will have water rescue available. Tatro asked that someone be there with a radio in case there is a problem.

Eric explained to Jeanne Engel what is predicted for this weather event. He said he will reach out to Sterling Market and the postmaster.

Dan Noyes said to let him know if he can be of help dealing with the state. He said he thinks the state should think about budgeting to pay for flood mitigation efforts like this in towns that don't have a reserve fund, maybe through loans.

Eric said Vermont Emergency Management has been very helpful. They have taken the lead in setting up meetings with experts.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:35.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*