

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD EMERGENCY MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2018

Present:

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

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Brian Krause, Linda Molde, Sheriff Roger Marcoux, Gordon Smith, Dan Noyes, Greg Tatro (GW Tatro Construction), Justin Day (GW Tatro Construction)

Eric called the meeting to order at 5:00.

Eric said GW Tatro has been unbelievably cooperative. They didn't get the green light to start work until Friday night and they had a crew here Saturday morning. On Saturday our intent was to get an excavator into the river to try to open up a channel. Unfortunately they were not able to find any shelf where the excavator could get into the river. They were finding 3 ½ to 4 feet of ice and 5-7 feet of water in the Lamoille, even though the gauge upstream was indicating 2 ½ feet. The ice jam is definitely having a damming effect, artificially raising the water level higher than it should be.

Eric sent out a text last night to Vermont Emergency Management asking them to contact the Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory and the National Weather Service and tell them we were just punching holes in the river ice for pressure release and ask if that would do any good. They thought it would be helpful. It can provide a place for water to go instead of pushing the ice up and a place that will start the melting effect more quickly.

This morning an excavator started pecking away near Lendway Lane and another found great access to the river behind Harvey's trailer park. They are making good progress. Both are behind the trailer park for now.

GW Tatro located a much bigger excavator in Massachusetts. Vermont and New Hampshire were very cooperative about giving permits to transport it. Massachusetts was less cooperative. They were going to force us to use their escort services at a high cost, around \$10K. But some people in Vermont kept pushing and it looks like they finally made progress. It looks like the excavator will be coming up.

Justin Day explained that the excavator from Massachusetts is a 50 ton excavator with an extended reach boom that can reach 20-30 feet further out into the river than the ones they are using now. It needs permits for transport because it is overweight, overwidth and overlength.

Eric said the rain and warm weather predicted for Tuesday and Wednesday is projected to result in an 8 foot rise in the Lamoille, which will definitely impact the Gihon. He has reached out to the National Weather Service to make sure the projection is based on good data they feel comfortable with. They are comfortable with it. The predicted amount of rainfall has increased a bit. We normally wouldn't worry much about a depth of 10 ½ feet but with the ice jam there are parts of the river that are already 5-7 feet deep. If we add 8 feet that brings it to a high flood stage. It would be safe to anticipate another event like the one in January or worse.

Eric said he has been in contact with the postmaster. He hasn't talked to Sterling Market yet today and he hasn't talked to Jeanne Engel at the library yet. They were already taking precautions.

Eric asked for a rough estimate of the added cost for using the larger excavator. Greg said he would guess probably another \$10K or so. It depends on how much they use it. He thinks they could work all day today and tomorrow with the current excavators and still be below the original estimate.

Mike asked if the larger excavator is Tatro's. Greg said no, it belongs to another company. He feels they will be fair with the price.

Mike asked what size excavator Blow & Cote has. Greg said the same size that is already here.

Dan asked if they can tell if there is any current. Greg and Justin said they haven't found any. Eric said this morning the excavator operator opened up a hole then stopped for a breakfast break and found when he went back that it was all filled with ice again. There are apparently big chunks of ice flowing beneath the ice jam.

Greg said he thinks this is the perfect opportunity to work with the state and get some islands and gravel bars out of the river. He feels like that is a big problem. When he was young they always cleaned the rivers out and didn't have the problems we have today.

Dan asked if they have had any luck doing that anywhere else in the state. Greg said they did that kind of work in Underhill a few years ago because the gravel was upstream of the town clerk's office and they were worried about the potential for flooding. The town reused the gravel.

Nat said there is a lot of river science that says the deeper you make the river the faster the water moves and the more problem you cause downstream. The state will tell you that and they have pretty good science to back it up.

Greg said he is not talking about going below the water level, just taking out islands down to the water level.

Justin said Tatro trucks are on the way to pick up the larger excavator. They will pick it up as early as they can in the morning.

Eric said it may not be able to provide a lot of benefit to us by the time it gets here but there are issues up in Coventry as well. The projected river rise keeps getting earlier. Originally it was going to peak late in the day on Wednesday. Now they are predicting the peak will be in the middle of Tuesday night. He is not sure how much the excavator will be available to work on Tuesday. Greg said they will do what they can. He thinks it would be interesting to keep an excavator here while the event is taking place. There may be something they can do that would be helpful. They plan to put the big excavator behind the trailer park where they have already been working. He hopes it will get here by 10:00 or 11:00 am.

Greg Tatro and Justin Day left at 5:24. Doug and Linda Molde arrived at 5:24.

The board reviewed some messages Brian Story had drafted for the public – a shorter one for Vermont Alert, a longer one for Facebook, Front Porch Forum, etc. and a bulletized version for Roger to use when he goes on the radio. He plans to be on WLVB and he will try to get on the college radio station, too.

Eric said the state did a reverse 911 call for us during the January event. They said those who don't have Fairpoint as a provider did not get the call. And their system is so powerful that it can overwhelm a small town exchange. That kept some people from getting the call, but they have been able to throttle their system back. We probably wouldn't use a reverse 911 call again unless there was imminent danger.

Brian S. said the National Weather Service can issue warnings. There are quite a few rules about that but we will be in contact with them. Eric said he thinks Vermont Emergency Management can issue warnings. He noted that Vermont Emergency Management has been very helpful. He can't say enough good things about them.

Gordy suggested that Tuesday evening after the post office closes they should get it sandbagged and after Sterling Market closes they should put up their flood gates, perhaps with the help of the fire department. Then they should remove the gates Wednesday morning.

Eric said Vermont Emergency Management is supposed to have a sandbag machine on the way.

Nat asked if we can help the library with the same preparations as the post office and Sterling Market. Eric said yes. They already have sandbags in place but they probably could add some.

Doug said he wonders if we should suggest that these places not open during the potential event because if they are open they won't have time to get flood protection in place. Brian S. said perhaps they should not open at all on Wednesday and should close early on Tuesday. Eric said as we get closer to the event we will know more about what is likely to happen.

Gordy said there are quite a few sandbags in the fire station ready to go. Brian K. said the highway department has 500 unfilled bags.

Eric said he may not be available for the selectboard meeting on Tuesday, depending on what is happening but it may not have to be cancelled. He may just turn it over to Doug.

Doug suggested a change in wording on one of the public notices and there was a discussion about the best wording.

Eric said he and Gordy had already set up a meeting for 2:00 on Tuesday, before they knew this weather event was coming. The purpose of the meeting is for department and agency heads to plan for a flood event as severe as the 1927 flood, with the town split in half and resources needed on both sides of the river.

Roger asked what Eric thinks about prestaging the Red Cross. Eric said they have seemed reluctant to do that in the past. Roger said even just having the cots at the college could be helpful. Eric said he had suggested that to them and they didn't seem inclined to do it. Roger said he will pursue that.

Gordy suggested notifying Vermont Electric Coop. Their building isn't in the floodplain and won't get flooded but they could have trouble getting through the village. Brian S. agreed to do that.

The board reviewed the short statement that will go out over Vermont Alert. It was agreed to add the Johnson phone number to the message.

Roger said if the town is getting overwhelmed with calls to the town number he can see about getting extra dispatchers in.

Brian S. said he and Rosemary need to figure out how to forward calls from the municipal building if it needs to be evacuated. Eric said if we have to leave this building the telephone exchange building will be under water. Will all landlines in the village be dead? Rosemary said our regular phone is Comcast. Roger said a town person dedicated to answering phones could work out of sheriff's dispatch if needed.

Mike asked if there is a plan to pick up records if there is flooding at the municipal building. Rosemary said they could be brought upstairs.

Gordy said the community warning system is working now. A verbal message can be sent out from someone at the fire station and sheriff's dispatchers can also activate the alarm in an emergency, though they can't put out a verbal message. Roger said a message should go out letting people know what to do if they hear the siren.

Doug said he wonders if someone should give Sterling Market a heads up. Eric said the manager has been in communication with him all weekend. Gordy asked about contacting the Community Bank. Eric said he doesn't have contact information for them. We would want them to know. Roger suggested Union Bank could also be affected.

Roger said he will bring this up with dispatch and will get extra people lined up for Tuesday and Wednesday.

Doug asked under what circumstances we would cancel or reschedule Tuesday's selectboard meeting. Eric said he thinks only if people are unable to get to the building. Doug said he was wondering if it could be more helpful to spend the time moving town records. Eric said if we get here and flooding seems imminent we can do that.

Eric said it would be part of Brian S.'s job to coordinate volunteers. Maybe he could start compiling a list of potential volunteers. Brian said the only job he knows of now that volunteers could help with would be filling sandbags.

Nat asked if we are still in a state of emergency from January. Eric said he never completely closed it so he would deem we are.

Brian S. asked if we have a pile of sand to use for filling sandbags. Brian K. said no. We would have to get some from Nadeau's. Ours is too stony. Brian S. said we will have to have someone onsite while sandbags are being filled who can operate the loader. Brian K. said he may have the backhoe there because he wants to get the loader out on Tuesday cutting down snowbanks by roads so water can get through.

There was discussion about whether there are other locations in town where there might be ice jams, such as near the Scribner Bridge. Eric suggested that Brian K. check that area.

Gordy said Meredith has been working on having a way to pump sewage if the sewer pipe on the Pearl Street bridge is damaged.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:57.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths