

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2018

Present:

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Doug Molde, 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 7:01.

2. Additions, Changes to Agenda

An executive session for a personnel issue was added.

3. Discuss Options for the Operation of Town Revolving Loan Fund

Information about the revolving loan fund was handed out. Eric said Ken Gibbons has reviewed the information and has input. Eric told him that the board needs to decide first whether or not to manage the fund in house. And if we do decide to do it in house then we need decide how to do it. Ken is willing to help.

Doug said he wants to do it in house. Eric said he is leaning towards doing it in house. If we find that it is more than we want to take on we can always give management of it to an organization but changing from using an organization to doing it ourselves would be harder. Brian agreed. He said there are also more opportunities available if we keep it in house. Managing it in house would be significantly more work but would have benefits. Nat said his concern is the amount of work. He feels we are already at maximum capacity. Eric said a lot of the work would fall on Rosemary. Nat said she already has too much work. Eric said she told him that she is no longer the school treasurer. That job entailed a fair amount of work that is now gone.

Nat said his other concern is our lack of expertise. We are not bankers. Brian said we can contract with expertise at the bank and with LEDC. John Mandeville has indicated he would be interested in working with us on this. Eric said when he and Brian talked about this their thought was that we would want to have a committee with training that could do background checking, etc. and come to the board with recommendations about making loans.

Brian handed out guidelines for the revolving loan fund written by this board in 2015. They have been approved. We can make changes but will have to resubmit the guidelines for approval. Eric said a red flag Ken Gibbons pointed out is that the guidelines say the maximum loan amount is \$5K. With a \$250K loan fund, that is a lot of loans. We didn't expect to have this much money in the fund at first. Brian said the guidelines will need to be revised to bring them in line with the actual size of the fund.

4. Review and Discussion of Draft Public Works Employee Pay Scale and Associated Policies

Brian said the board had talked about developing a highway department pay scale that would provide more predictability for staff and for us and would incentivize skill building. He handed out two draft pay scales. One gives employees a bump in pay whenever they acquire two of the skills identified as essential and the other gives a bump in pay for each skill. Brian worked with the highway department to identify essential skills that deserve a bump in pay. The idea would

be that highway department employees would no longer receive the annual raise the boards vote on for joint employees. They would be on this pay scale instead.

Eric said we will want the whole table to be increased annually for the cost of living. But in addition to cost of living increases employees would also get longevity increases at some interval. It could be every 5 years. And they would get increases based on acquisition of new skills. He suggested we could increase pay every year for about the first 5 years and then maybe have longevity increases every 5 years after that.

Brian said there are certain basic skills every highway employee must have. The idea is that a new employee would be on probation for 6 months and then once the probation period was over and they had all the basic skills they would be eligible for an increase. If they didn't have the basic skills by the end of the probation period there would be a serious discussion about whether they would stay on. They would earn a dollar less per hour while on probation and they would earn less before acquiring all the core competencies.

Eric said he would like to simplify the pay scale a little and not have so many longevity increases. Maybe we could also lump some skills together and require employees to acquire two of them before getting a pay increase.

Mike said he doesn't feel employees should get a dollar less during the probation period. He feels that would be too low, given the demand for CDL jobs. Eric said we have competitive benefits and year round work so we can offer a slightly lower salary than some other places might.

Brian mentioned the question of how to handle years of previous experience if we hire someone who is experienced.

Doug said if an employee makes it through the probationary period he doesn't think we should fire them later because they don't have all the basic skills. Brian said he doesn't think we would keep someone beyond the probationary period unless we were confident they could acquire all the necessary skills. Doug said he thinks we should make the call at 6 months, not later.

Mike said he thinks the drafts have too many steps.

Eric said he likes the idea of giving increases every year in the beginning.

Doug asked what turnover we have experienced historically. Eric said employees have tended to leave only at retirement.

Mike asked what Raymond thought of the proposed new pay scale. Brian said Raymond and Jason both said they wanted to be on this new system.

Doug asked what Brian Krause thinks. Brian said he and Brian Krause both feel we need to be careful about what we pay employees extra for. We don't want to pay extra for things that are really requirements of the job, only things that are above and beyond.

Nat brought up the issue of how we can identify whether an employee is sufficiently competent at the skill in question.

Eric said there are two questions – what skills we want to identify as essential and how we qualify an employee as having the skill. He thinks operating the grader and completing the Roads Scholar program should each be standalone skills meriting an increase. Maybe we could combine painting, welding, advanced mechanics and roadside mowing and give an increase for attaining some number of those skills.

Brian said he would recommend not including painting as one of the essential skills. He thinks it would be more appropriate just to give a bonus in pay to an employee who is willing to do the job of painting vehicles. Eric suggested that at first we might not want to single that out for extra pay but just list it as one of the job duties. If we single out one job employees might want extra pay for other jobs that not everyone does. The board agreed not to include painting as one of the essential skills. Eric suggested not including roadside mowing either.

The board agreed that operating the grader or completing the Roads Scholar program should be standalone essential skills. There was discussion about whether, if new Roads Scholar classes come out, employees who have already completed the Roads Scholar program should be expected to take them. Nat looked up information on the Roads Scholar program and said there are different levels. Eric suggested getting more details about that program.

There was discussion about whether employees are paid to attend classes and whether they can get overtime for attending classes. Brian said the classes he knows of that highway employees have attended were during a regular workday and they went to the class instead of doing other duties.

Eric suggested that at the next meeting Brian Krause could give the board information on the Roads Scholar program and input on what the essential skills should be. Brian said he will have Brian Krause come. In the past, he and Brian K. have talked about giving a pay increase only for completing all levels of the Roads Scholar program.

Nat said he has heard for years that we have a problem in that our highway employees' pay is on the high side compared to towns our size in the state. He is beginning to hear that is not a problem any longer. He wonders how we compare to other towns our size. Eric thinks as of last fall it sounded as if we were not that far out of alignment anymore but were closer to average. Brian said according to information Ron Rodjenski provided, pay for employees with a CDL in comparable towns ranged from just over \$16/hr to \$28/hr. Nat said he thinks we should look at total compensation, including overtime.

Brian said he is hearing that the board would like a pay scale with fewer rows and fewer columns.

Doug said he would like to see a chart of what our compensation is now. He would be interested in knowing whether other employers count prior experience elsewhere. Brian said he knows the teacher's union does. Eric said if we do it, it's very subjective. Doug said he wouldn't be

opposed to that. A prospective employee could present their work experience and we would rate it and tell them where they fell on the pay scale when we offered the job.

Brian said he can send out data from the VLCT salary survey on highway employees. Based on that, he thinks our starting pay of \$17/hr is pretty competitive for the state and it would still be competitive at a little less than \$17/hr.

Doug asked about the effect of the proposed pay scale changes on Brian Krause and Brian Story. Brian S. said that is worth considering. If employees end up making more than they do now, what will we do with the supervisor's pay?

5. *Update on Waterman Bridge*

Brian said his plan is go out for a highway structures grant to bring in an engineer to develop a maintenance plan for Waterman Bridge. It had a routine inspection in September and it has a number of maintenance issues.

Mike brought up the load rating of the bridge. Brian said he thinks the load rating is just based on the width of the bridge. Mike said we have to find out how much weight the bridge can hold. Brian said he wants to get a more concrete assessment of the current condition of the bridge from the engineer.

Eric said if the state finds any deficiencies they don't hesitate to shut down a bridge. Brian agreed. He said no critical maintenance issues were identified in the inspection.

Nat said inspection reports are online, but he doesn't know how to read the report. He would love to be able to look at it with someone who can explain what it means. There were recommendations for things like cleaning and painting that he doesn't think we have necessarily been budgeting for. Brian said we have been doing some bridge maintenance. It is becoming clear that the state wants us to do more. He has a meeting with people from VTrans next week to talk about what exactly they want us to do. It is not clear from the report specifically what they are asking us to do. After that meeting hopefully he can give more insight to Nat on the inspection report.

Doug brought up the name of a Johnson resident who he believes is a bridge inspector. He suggested he might be able to give Brian helpful information.

6. *Executive Session to Discuss Communications with the Town's Attorney*

Mike moved to go into executive session to discuss communications with the town's attorney, Doug seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 8:30. The board came out of executive session at 8:40.

7. *Executive Session to Discuss Personnel Issue*

Nat moved to enter executive session to discuss a personnel issue, Mike seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 8:41. The board came out of executive session at 9:00.

8. *Adjourn*

Mike moved to adjourn at 9:00 and the motion was seconded and passed.