

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING MINUTES

March 7, 2017

Moderator David Williams called the meeting to order at 9:11 a.m. He noted that there is now same day registration so any resident who is not a registered voter can register and vote today. He asked all adults who are not registered voters in Johnson to move into the bleachers.

Eric Osgood recognized organizations present at the meeting – the library board, JSC student government, the skate park committee, the historical society, the tree board, the conservation commission and the Johnson Arts Council. He read information about the JES student art displayed on the walls.

David Williams thanked Rosemary Audibert for providing him with a gavel used for more than 25 years by William Sinclair when he was town meeting moderator. He read the warning.

Article 6. To review the reports of the town officers and others as included in the Town Annual Report.

Selectboard members introduced themselves. Eric Osgood called for a moment of silence in honor of Harlan Adams, a regular town meeting participant who recently passed away. He also recognized Bobbie Moulton, a community member who recently saved a neighbor from a fire. There was a round of applause.

Eric presented Frank and Barb Dodge with a copy of the town report dedicated to them.

David Williams said Harlan Adams and those like him (one of whom is Walter Pomroy) serve a valuable function. They sit down and really read the town reports that are sent out, something he would guess no more than half a dozen people in the town do, and then they come to the meeting to inform and critique. The town is better for having people who perform that function.

Duncan Hastings moved and Katie Orost seconded to approve the reports of the town officers and others as included in the Town Annual Report.

Duncan Hastings said he wanted to recognize the efforts of the selectboard to try to increase participation. Walter said Harlan set an example that encouraged him to ask questions at town meeting. He asked about how the new system for reappraisals will work.

Eric said it is a rolling reappraisal. Every year a quarter of the town will be reappraised and in the fifth year the whole Grand List will be updated. Instead of hiring a firm to do a townwide reappraisal as we used to do, the assessors will do a quarter of the work every year.

Walter asked if property owners will have their reappraisal applied in the year it is done or wait until all are done. Eric said all will be rolled out at the same time in the fifth year. Walter asked if the data will be used as part of the CLA calculations in the year the reappraisal is done. Eric said

CLA is provided to us by the state. The selectboard's hope is that having a rolling reappraisal will prevent us from ever having to have a townwide reappraisal done as we used to.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 7. To establish the rates of compensation for the Town Officers.

It was moved and seconded that compensation remain at \$1200 for the board chair and \$1000 for the other board members. The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 8. Shall the Town vote to adopt the proposed budget for the Fiscal Year 2017-2018 (July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018) in the amount of \$2,551,056.19 with a portion thereof in the amount of \$1,583,158.58 to be raised by taxes?

Eric Osgood and Casey Romero seconded that the town approve a budget of \$2,551,056.19 for Fiscal Year 2017-2018 with a portion thereof in the amount of \$1,583,158.58 to be raised by taxes to meet the expenses and liabilities of the town.

Duncan Hastings moved to amend the motion to change “in the amount of \$1,583,158.58” to “in the estimated amount of \$1,583,158.58.” The motion was seconded. He said he proposes this amendment because the number is really an estimate that can go up or down slightly based on what happens with the Grand List.

Carl Powden said he is not comfortable with an estimate. If the Grand List changes, that does not change the amount to be raised from taxes. It changes revenue. He is more comfortable with town meeting setting an amount to be raised from taxes.

Eric said he thinks both Duncan and Carl are correct. The board doesn't know exactly what the tax rate will be. It is an estimate until the Grand List is set. The amount to be raised by taxes could change if we found the state was going to give us more or less money. One reason he has never included the amount to be raised by taxes in his motion is that the budget number is what we lock in. We can't go above that number. Until we finalize the Grand List the other things are estimates

Duncan said in previous years the number the town has voted on has been the budget number, not the number to be raised by taxes. We have done that because if additional resources come in, if the wording is as in the original motion we are locked into raising a certain amount of money from taxes even though we might not need that much. His amendment allows the board flexibility to set the tax rate based on the information they have at that time.

Casey Romero asked if the board would be comfortable if the tax amount was worded “not to exceed.” Eric said that would probably be a safe additional amendment. If revenue from other resources were reduced the selectboard wouldn't be able to increase the tax rate, but he doesn't see that happening. It would expose the town to some degree, but he doesn't think the town would be critically exposed.

Beth Foy said adding the word “estimated” when it is not defined makes the statement ambiguous, so there is no point including it. She feels we need to define what “estimated” means, for instance within 10%.

The amendment passed 45 to 41 by a counted standing vote.

Eric said Duncan Hastings gave the town 15 years and is still available for consulting as needed. He is also serving the community on the Historical Society. The selectboard appreciates what he has provided and continues to provide to the community. Eric introduced new town administrator Brian Story. His position combines the positions of economic development coordinator and town administrator.

Eric reviewed the budget summary page. He noted that revenue from state and federal sources is nearly 22% of our total revenue – a little over half a million dollars. State legislators are concerned that the federal budget is not set yet. They may have to meet again in the fall once they know what we are getting from the federal government. The state and Johnson are exposed because there could be changes to federal revenue.

Total revenue less taxes in the proposed budget is \$911,714. That amount is 35% of total revenue. The budget includes use of \$108K in cash on hand to reduce taxes. The amount to be raised by taxes is about 60% of revenue.

On the expense side, public safety is about 26% of the budget. There is about a 3% increase in public safety expense. Total general government expenses are a little less than 60% of the total expense budget. General government expenses increased by about 3%. Highway expenses are a little over 40% of the budget. They are increasing by almost 10%.

Eric noted that line 374 was mislabeled. The amount shown in that line is the increase from the previous year, not the estimated deficit.

Eric reviewed the amounts budgeted for state and federal revenue – state aid to highways, current use, PILOT, etc. The estimated year end amount for the Coddling Hollow FEMA project is \$320,124. We expect to finish out that project this year.

The budget includes \$20K in revenue from the reappraisal fund. We have a reserve fund that was used for reappraisals. The selectboard’s thought is that with rolling reappraisals we will never need another townwide reappraisal. The last townwide reappraisal was done around 2004 or 2005. It cost the town about \$100K. We have put a little of the money we get from the state to maintain the Grand List into a fund to cover reappraisal when needed. That fund now has around \$90K and the board plans to start drawing it down. We won’t take it all out at once in case rolling reappraisal doesn’t work out. We have stopped contributing to it the last couple of years.

There is \$26K in income from the Historical Society. They have been paying half the loan for Holcomb House. The loan principal for Holcomb House (\$50,853) has to be shown as revenue under accounting rules, even though it costs us.

The tax stabilization amount is \$8,036. That represents tax reductions Sterling Market and Marvin's are getting due to tax stabilization agreements the town entered into with them. This is the last year Sterling Market will have a tax reduction.

Office administration salaries have increased somewhat. We eliminated the community and economic development coordinator position and combined it with the town administrator position. We gave a 2% pay raise to employees. The cleaning service is now shown as a part-time employee. There is no longer any lister salary. The Listers Contracted Services item (\$32K) represents what we pay the assessors. Public safety expense is over a quarter of our budget. NEMS is level funding this year. The sheriff's department patrol budget amount went up about \$17K. Total general government expense is \$1,467,835, a 3.1% increase.

We built this budget with the assumption that we will be back into our gravel pit. We added \$10K for investigating more land to use for gravel excavation. We have about 2 years left on the current gravel pit before it is depleted. Equipment fuels and oils was reduced by \$5K because fuel prices have been lower. The small equipment purchases amount was increased so we can buy a disc to pull gravel back in from berms at the edges of roads. The board feels it will pay for itself over time because we will have to apply less gravel. Line 347 shows the amount that will be taken out of the reserve fund and spent for large equipment.

The estimated cash on hand is \$126K. The board is proposing to put \$108K of it toward reducing taxes. They propose putting \$7400 into the tax anticipation reserve fund and leaving \$10K available as needed. If the state makes any cuts in their contributions it would give us a little buffer.

The estimated tax rate is 1.33 cents, a 1.82% increase. We won't know the exact number until the Grand List and tax rate are set at the end of June.

David Williams interrupted the discussion to allow legislators Rich Westman, Dan Noyes and Matt Hill to address the voters.

Rich Westman said Johnson was well served by Mark Woodward for a long time. He cared deeply about Johnson. There was a round of applause. Sen. Westman is on the Transportation and Appropriations Committees. The biggest issue in the legislature this year will be around the budget. There is a shortfall of around \$50 million. Proposals that have come from the governor's office have centered around more money for higher education and childcare and holding the line on spending for K-12 education. In 2015 our K-12 spending per capita became the highest in the country. We are dead last in the country in our funding of higher education and near the bottom in funding for childcare. Asking school districts to hold their budgets to zero may not make it this year but it has opened up discussion about the appropriate level of spending. Spending on higher education concerns him. What happens with the Vermont state college system is an area he is most concerned about.

Matt Hill said he was born and raised in Johnson. The vital importance of the state college system is of utmost importance to him. He submitted a bill to increase funding for the state college system after talking with state college administration because it was apparent they were trying hard to make sure all campuses stayed open and were doing all they could do. Now he

feels it is the state's job to help out. We are at the bottom of the pack as far as state funding and with the \$4 million in his bill we still would be last. He is on the Commerce and Economic Development Committee. This year they are tasked with looking at workforce development. A great place to start is our state college system. We have a skills gap now. A lot of young people don't have the skills, certifications and credentials to get good jobs. It is vitally important to make sure state colleges stay open.

Dan Noyes said he serves on the Human Services Committee. They are looking at policies and budget recommendations around the Department for Children and Families and the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living. They have been looking at Meals on Wheels and foster care programs. The number of children going into foster care is up because of the opiate crisis. There is a bill coming out of his committee related to helping people with in-home services or in nursing homes.

Eric Nuse said he is confused about the message from the governor about school budgets. He knows there has been a lot of discussion in the legislature about using money from K-12 to fund higher ed and preschool. There has been talk about the problem that at the local level towns keep approving school budgets. But the governor didn't say not to approve them. Ours seems pretty moderate. He asked Sen. Westman if he could shed any light.

Sen. Westman said the governor made a proposal that school districts should level fund budgets. He doesn't think that has met any traction within the legislature. In fact, a lot of school district budgets were already warned as that proposal came forward. But when a governor only has a 2-year term he needs to throw everything on the table right at the start. The idea of level funding is dead in the legislature. We spend nearly \$90 million a year on teacher retirement. That comes out of the general fund. There is a somewhat bipartisan feeling in the legislature that the school spending that comes out of the ed fund and the education related expenses that come out of the general fund ought to be together. How we fund education overall needs to be looked at. Can we afford to be #1 in the country for K-12 education spending when child care and higher education are so woefully underfunded?

Beth Foy said Vermont's cost of living is pretty high, especially compared to other rural areas. In these discussions about Vermont education spending, is there consideration of the cost of living?

Sen. Westman said he thinks legislators question that every day. There is a lot of concern about families leaving here. Since 2008 payback time for college debt has gone from 8 to 15 years. The average cost of childcare is \$10-16K in this county. If there is a young couple still paying off college debt and paying \$25K for childcare, he doesn't know how those people live. That is part of the overall discussion we are all having, particularly given the fact that Vermont is losing younger people at a higher rate than in the past. We need people working here. We can't have a shrinking workforce.

Matt Hill said there are two aspects to the cost of living in Vermont. Goods are expensive but also wages are low. We have one of the highest graduation rates in the country but a high percentage don't go on to post-secondary education. That is adding to the problem. A lot of kids could be making more money than they are. He thinks we need to push post-secondary education more.

Jeff Corey said people are leaving the state because they can't afford to pay those college bills. Is there a state committee for economic growth to make jobs and businesses more attractive? Rep. Hill said that is his committee. They try to bring ideas about how to make Vermont more attractive. There is a whole division of state government that lobbies companies to come to Vermont, but companies see a population with not enough people trained to their needs. Attempts to get large businesses to come to Vermont are lessening. We have more opportunities for entrepreneurs and small business growth. Jeff asked if the corporate tax is so large that Vermont is not attractive. Rep. Hill said no, there are programs that allow businesses to get tax rebates. If the corporate tax were a serious problem we would have zero large businesses. Jeff said we need to be more creative. Maybe we should have a group of businessmen come in to work on ideas. Rep. Hill said the state also has a workforce development board. Half of that board is businesspeople. They are also trying to find creative ways to get businesses to come to Vermont.

Offie Wortham asked how it was calculated that Vermont was the worst for funding higher education and what ideas legislators have to address that. Sen. Westman said budget proposals are part of how we move from the bottom. We send about \$80 million from the general fund budget to universities and state colleges and the VSAC grant program. The struggle we are going through is how we can best serve people with the resources we have.

The legislators left at 10:47 and discussion resumed on the amended motion.

Walter Pomroy said the highway capital reserve fund has been increased by \$293K. That is over \$26K a year for the 11 years covered by the capital reserve budget plan. In that 11 year time frame the tax rate will be increased by 1.7% per year on average. We can probably absorb the increase today, but over the next 11 years it will gobble up our budget. We are going to have to cut all programs over those 11 years just to pay for these trucks. This is not a recipe for success or happiness. He would like to hear comments from the selectboard on what he just stated.

Eric said a lot of what Walter is saying is true. The highway department is a huge part of the town budget. The selectboard bumped the scheduled increase to the capital equipment reserve fund by \$2K, so instead of a \$100K contribution there will be a \$102K contribution. Our plan was a 12 year replacement schedule for the big tandem trucks, but the first one purchased is coming to the end of that period and last year its maintenance expenses were high enough that we could have been making loan payments on a truck. That one could be a lemon and the others may last 12 years fine. We don't know that yet. But the board added money to the reserve fund because we may need to start replacing the tandem trucks at a 10 or 11 year interval. Other communities tend to fall into 3 main types of replacement schedule: every 5 years, every 10-12 years, or waiting until they are ready for the scrap pile. We thought the best use of our money was to be in the mid range. We are at the outside edge of the mid range. We funded so we could move in the direction of replacing the big trucks sooner, but we haven't developed an updated plan yet. We will be doing that this summer. We will be looking at the data. But the concern is that that the first tandem truck coming up to the 12 year mark is not maintaining as it should. We may extend the replacement time for the grader and loader to 15 years instead of 12. Other communities seem to be doing that. We have financed the capital reserve fund as if we were

going to move in the direction of a shorter replacement time for tandem trucks but we don't know if we will need to keep funding it at that rate.

Walter said he had an amendment ready to propose but he will hold off on it for now. He hopes the board will do due diligence this summer. The village trustees have a similar fund for their fire trucks. It is a valuable budgeting tool. They have been able to create an affordable, sustainable fund. They increase it 2% a year and it can meet their needs. The town needs to get to that level of sustainability.

Duncan Hastings said last year there was a motion made to approve a budget amount. The motion didn't include the amount to be raised from taxes. When the board goes through the process of redoing the capital budget plan he believes public hearings are required. He would encourage everyone to participate. Of the total end of year surplus about \$10K is proposed as undesignated. In the past the board has proposed what to dedicate surplus funds to. As he understands it, the board just wants to keep that \$10K available in case adjustments come from the legislature. He thinks that is responsible.

Duncan said we are spending a lot of money on law enforcement. This year the proposed budget has a reduction in the amount of revenue to be brought in from law enforcement fines and penalties. It always seemed to him that that number was pretty low. He knows the proportion of warnings to tickets has been a concern of the board. He thinks we should be seeing a little more money coming in from fines and penalties. He also noted that our 3-town contract with the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department is at the whim of the sheriff. If Roger Marcoux didn't run or didn't get re-elected, it would be up to the new sheriff whether or not to continue that contract. The 3 towns don't get a lot of input on reducing costs. One possibility is going from a 24-hour contract to something more like 18 hours. That hasn't been viewed favorably by the sheriff. Has any thought been given to creating a regional police force run by a 3 or 4 town consortium?

Eric said we haven't given a lot of thought to that. He suggested that some law enforcement questions could be answered by Nat Kinney, who is the selectboard's representative with LCSD, or by the deputies. The selectboard had a concern about the ratio of warnings to tickets. We thought we were out of line with other communities. Nat can address that.

Nat said we have had concerns about there being a lot of warnings and not so many tickets. Warnings give less incentive for people to slow down. If we look at the data over a 12-month period there are about 2 warnings written for every ticket and that is true for Johnson, Hyde Park, Wolcott and Elmore (which is not one of the 3 towns covered by our contract but contracts with LCSD.) Whether the ratio should be more or less is an ongoing discussion but we are satisfied it is consistent between towns. The sheriff's department budget for the coming year is actually about level, but there is a 3.8% increase in what we pay because last year we were credited \$48K because a detective position was vacant for some time. We don't get that credit this year because the position was filled. A multiple town police force hasn't been seriously considered since Nat has been on the board. He believes there was some previous discussion of the idea.

A sheriff's deputy said it is against the law to require an officer to write tickets to meet a quota. Whether to issue a ticket is the officer's discretion. If the board were to say they wanted to increase tickets by a certain amount, that would be a quota.

Kim Dunkley asked what we get for the extra \$17K and what happens if we don't apply it. She also asked about animal control and health officer expenses. She had an issue with garbage across the street attracting animals. There was no response from the health officer. What is the health officer and animal control money going for?

Eric said some of the expense is for training the health and animal control officers. Some of the animal control expense is for kennel fees, which we have to pay if no owners claim the animal. We have not talked about a 3 town police department recently but years and years ago we looked at it some. A lot of the sheriff's salary comes from the county budget and his building is paid for from the county budget. So we do not need to pay for a police chief and a separate building, which benefits us. Eric asked if some of the \$17K increase is because there is now a full 6 member force. A deputy said no, there is not currently a full force. Eric said he thinks when the budget was being developed they were at full force and Roger Marcoux was trying to maintain that.

Kim asked what happens if we don't pay the \$17K and what we get for it.

Eric said the loss of \$17K would probably mean a part time or overtime expense Roger wouldn't be able to finance. If there is a special event going on in a patrol town LCSD often supplies officers. Those kinds of things would probably be cut. He doesn't know whether LCSD could absorb a \$17K cut to the budget and maintain the same force.

Arthur Hooper talked about money he saw wasted by the National Guard. He said that kind of waste costs the American taxpayers money and it makes him mad.

Walter said he mentioned last year that he felt the LCSD annual report was deficient. He feels the same way this year. We aren't being given any feedback on whether we are getting our money's worth. He knows LCSD is under a lot of stress with the opiate epidemic. But the report doesn't show whether the crime rate is going up or down. Are conviction rates going up or down? He is being asked to fund a budget and he has no idea if it's working. When we hired a detective people said criminals would move to another town. Did they? He would like to see more information in the future about conviction rates or arrest rates.

Eric Nuse said measures of effectiveness in law enforcement are tricky. Arrest or conviction rates are not the best measure. Compliance with the law is the best measure, but that is hard to count. If the arrest rate is up, does that mean crime is up or does it mean crime is going down because people are being arrested? If the arrest rate is down, does that mean that officers are doing less work or that there is more compliance? We could come up with some benchmarks of how to measure compliance. One might be speeding. We could come up with funds for a speed reader that starts flashing when people go over the speed limit. He suspects we could measure how many people got the flashing. If we combined that with some patrol that writes tickets, that could reduce the speeding problem.

Nat said electronic speed signs are very popular. Everyone seems to agree they are a great idea. The sheriff has committed to buying one for each contract town. In terms of patrols, one advantage we get is that the sheriff is able to leverage state and federal money. He got some to

increase patrols on holiday weekends. That was quite effective. He thinks Eric spoke well about the question of benchmarks. He sees the sheriff's department bringing some value to our community that is not necessarily seen on a daily basis. The sheriff has identified the major issue of the opiate problem. There have been recent overdoses in our community and a couple of arsons related to the drug issue. The sheriff is taking the issues seriously. He had a community forum in the last year that brought in all the parties in the state dealing with the opiate issue for an open forum. He has a drug takeback day a number of times a year, which gets drugs out of the community. Officers are carrying Naloxone and are trained to use it. He thinks there is a lot of value the sheriff's department brings to our community. Walter is probably right that we could do a better job of communicating what that is.

Duncan said he is not suggesting that we shoot for quotas. Eric is right that the goal is to get the majority of people to comply with the law. His purpose in raising the issue was to get the selectboard to think about the fact that if a new sheriff comes in he doesn't have to continue the contract.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 9. Shall the Town vote to collect property taxes to the Town Treasurer in four equal installments (32 V.S.A. § 4792), as listed below; with delinquent taxes and assessments have charged against them an eight percent (8%) commission after the fourth installment (32 V.S.A. § 1674) and interest charges of one percent (1%) per month or fraction thereof, for the first three months; and thereafter, one and one half percent (1 ½%) per month or fraction thereof from the due date of such tax? Such interest shall be imposed on a fraction of a month as if it were an entire month (32 V.S.A. § 5136). Payments are due in the hands of the Treasurer by 4:00 p.m. on the below due dates.

First installment to be paid on or before Thursday, August 10, 2017

Second installment to be paid on or before Friday, November 10, 2017

Third installment to be paid on or before Monday, February 12, 2018

Fourth installment to be paid on or before Thursday, May 10, 2018

Dean West moved the article as printed and the motion was seconded.

Duncan asked if someone could explain why this article was included. Eric said what the voters are being asked to approve is exactly the way tax bills are sent out currently and have been in past years. Rosemary found out that this should be presented to the taxpayers annually for approval. We could change it. Some towns have different numbers of installments. We are at the maximum for penalties and interest rate. This article will be seen on future warnings.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 10. Shall the Town of Johnson increase the number of elected Justices of the Peace from 10 to 12?

It was moved and seconded to increase the number of elected Justices of the Peace from 10 to 12.

Eric Osgood said increasing the number of Justices of the Peace requires action by the voters. We have enough voters in the community that we are eligible to have 12 rather than 10. With same day registration, Rosemary will need more help manning the polling place.

Duncan said he understands the value of increasing the numbers, but as a practical matter in the past it has been hard filling the positions and filling them with people who are active.

Eric agreed. At times we have had trouble getting people to run and participate. He thinks we are doing pretty well now. This gives an opportunity for more people to get involved in the community, which we are trying to encourage. The work required is only on a few days a year. Part of the job of a Justice of the Peace is to serve on the Board of Civil Authority to help hear appeals of assessed value.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 11. Should the Town of Johnson enter into negotiations with the current owners regarding the ownership and responsibility to maintain the clock tower at 17 Lower Main East, knowing that the clock tower is in poor condition and in need of an unknown amount of repair.

Doug Molde moved the article as printed and the motion was seconded.

Doug Molde said his understanding, in his 40 years as a practicing attorney in this town, was that the Masonic Temple owned the clock tower and the town was responsible for maintenance. When he was doing a title search he came across a deed dated April 19, 2017 transferring the building that is now the Masonic Temple from the trustees of the Baptist Church to the Masonic Lodge. It said that the Masonic Lodge was accepting any rights the Town of Johnson might have in the clock. What that meant to him when he read it was that the tower was conveyed to the Waterman Lodge but the clock was not, so the town didn't own the tower and there would be questions about the town's obligations or rights regarding maintenance. There is a question of responsibility for future maintenance. Concerns have been brought to the selectboard regarding the condition of the tower. The scope of repairs needed is unknown. As a lawyer, he would say that the clock came to the town and the building came to Waterman Lodge. The selectboard wanted to present the issue to the community. Steve Engel has a lot of information from the Waterman Lodge point of view and an interest in the history. The selectboard wanted direction before picking up the obligation to do maintenance. Even if Waterman Lodge were to convey the tower to the town, the tower is not sitting on the ground. We want to make certain there is a building underneath it.

Steve Engel, a member of Waterman Lodge, talked about the history of the clock and clock tower. The Masonic Temple was once a Baptist church. It was built on Clay Hill in 1833. It was originally a one-story building. In 1855 it was disassembled and reassembled in its current location. Another floor was added and the tower was extended, but not to its current height. In the late 1870's a Johnson resident named Dexter Whiting decided a town clock would be a good

idea. The clock wound up on the Baptist church. There was an agreement with the town that the town would take care of the clock forever. The tower had to be modified to accommodate the clock. The bell was put in in 1884. It was cast in Troy, NY. The clock works were made by George Stevens in Boston. The date on the clock works is 1879. The clock has to be hand cranked. It has been maintained by a lot of people. Mark Woodward is the current custodian of the clock. Mark said it loses 30 seconds a week. It was rebuilt about 25 years ago. It is in good working order.

Steve said the tower has been repaired by different companies. The latest repairs were done in 1989. The company didn't do a perfect job. A few years later another firm had to come in and shore up the tower. In the course of maintaining the building the Masons brought in structural engineers who went up into the tower. They said it is not in excellent shape and needs some work but is sturdy. A retired structural engineer said a hurricane would probably bring it down but otherwise it should be around for a while. An expert on clock towers pointed out that one thing giving the tower more stability is that its beams are attached to the interior of the building. A lot of towers are only attached to the roof. It needs some trim work and paint but otherwise is not in too bad shape.

Ownership of the tower is a gray area. There have been things written in history saying the town owns the clock. The Masonic Lodge pays the maintenance and electric bills and they have done so for years. They don't have the resources to take care of the clock tower. One reason it could make sense for the town to own it is that there are grants available to the town that are not available to the Freemasons. It would be great to clear up the ownership question. If the Freemasons are the owners, they would be happy to work with the town or sell the tower to the town for a dollar. On March 3, 1885 there was a resolution introduced at town meeting expressing gratitude to Dexter Whiting for purchasing and presenting the clock to the town.

Arthur Hooper talked about another situation where he saw money being wasted.

Gordon Smith said back in the late 1950s when his parents bought a house on Clay Hill the story was that Dexter Whiting wanted to be able to see the clock from his house. Steeples are part of our identity. He feels we need to protect all the steeples in Vermont. The town and village are working to market our community. We need to protect the clock tower.

Dick Cross said we don't have a good tax base in this town. He agrees the clock is a historical landmark and he wants to support it, but where is the money going to come from? Our taxes keep going up. We have no lodging in town, though we have the rail trail, rivers, and nearby ski areas. We must build a tax base. A town can't exist if it can't finance itself. Most of the businesses we have here are non-profit. He thinks we need to look at building a tax base in this town or it will die.

David Grozinsky said he loves that clock tower. It is beautiful – one of our great treasures. He feels we should fix up the clock tower. Maybe the town could purchase it for a nominal fee like a dollar and assume ownership and maintenance and at the same time maybe the Masons could start paying taxes on the property.

Duncan said he agrees with what others have said. The clock is a treasure. Clearly the town owns it. The question is who is responsible for the tower. The motion as worded just authorizes the board to negotiate with the Masons. There are some structural issues with the underlying building that affect the operation of the clock. He would want the board to be sure of the soundness of the building itself before investing in the clock. When Doug McCarty looked at the tower his opinion was that it should be taken down, rebuilt on the ground and replaced. There was some initial discussion about removing the clock and bringing it to the town office building as a working, functional clock. Maybe that can be thought about.

The meeting was recessed for lunch from 12:15 to 1:16.

Kim Dunkley asked if the motion could be amended to call for leasing the tower rather than buying it. David Williams said the article does not authorize purchase or lease. It simply asks for authority to talk with the Masons about how title issues could be settled and what participation of the two parties could occur if renovations had to be done to the tower. It does not enable or commit the selectboard to expend any money.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 12. To transact such other business as may be properly brought before this Town Meeting.

David Williams reminded everyone that no motion passed under this article has any binding effect on any agency of the town.

David Grozinsky said he would love for the townspeople and the selectboard to consider the possibility of hiring a permanent recreation coordinator. We have Tuesday Night Live, the rec committee, and the skate park. Generous citizens have given of their time, but people can get burned out. It would be a shame to let these things fall to the wayside. Other towns have rec coordinators. This ties into the opioid epidemic. The more activities we can provide for kids, the better.

Gary Clark said the Studio Center owes the existence of the two buildings that caught fire in the past year to the fire department. He thanks them. The Studio Center is well on its way to being able to restore the Church building this year. There is magnificent structure in that building. He invites anyone who is interested to tour the building while all the beams and trusses are exposed. VSC will be restoring the building to be used as a studio building. They will do work on the building and foundation, improve energy efficiency, put in sprinklers, etc. so that in the future the building can serve any role in the town. Anyone who wants to walk through the building before the renovations should call the VSC office.

Beth Foy said the Studio Center has done huge things for this town in terms of economic growth and building restoration. She has often wondered why we have separation of the town and village. She doesn't recall anything on village financials in the town report. She knows the village owns a lot of heavy equipment. When we are talking about funding heavy equipment, how can the two groups work together to make things as effective, efficient and cost effective as possible? She doesn't know if we need to discuss the two entities being a single entity. She

believes that would be a big process and discussion. It is just an idea she wanted people to think about. She has often wondered why the two are not a single entity.

Eric Osgood said they are two completely separate entities. Combining them would be almost like combining Johnson and Hyde Park. Neither has authority over the other. The village budget is not discussed at town meeting because they have a separate annual meeting. Village residents get their annual report and can attend their annual meeting in April. There has been discussion in the past about looking at a merger but it has never gone far. We do look at equipment we can share between the town and village. We share a backhoe and tractor. The rest of the equipment is pretty unique to specific jobs. For instance, Bobcats are used to plow sidewalks. In the office there are a lot of shared employees. The town and village have taken advantage of opportunities to work together. Walter Pomroy said Eric's explanation was good.

Arthur Hooper said he remembers hearing about the idea of extending sidewalk as far as the Jolley store but that hasn't happened. When walking, it is a relief to get to places where there is a sidewalk.

Eric said sidewalks are the village's responsibility. He would encourage Arthur to talk with the village. They did originally have a plan to put sidewalk all the way to Jolley but they had to trim down the project due to cost and that was eliminated. He doesn't think it is planned for the immediate future but he thinks the village would like to do it if money were no object.

Peter Moynihan seconded the thanks to the fire department. There was a recent fire near his home and he is thankful for the fire department. It seems ironic to him that David Grozinsky suggested the Masons shouldn't be tax exempt (an idea he disagrees with.) David was probably speaking for himself, but he is employed by Vermont Studio Center and VSC was looking into being tax exempt. He believes they took the town to court over that.

Kyle Nuse thanked the volunteer boards who set up displays on the work they have been doing. Without them our town would be a very bleak place. The selectboard board is very grateful for the volunteer boards. While our town is blessed to be volunteer rich we are always looking for more to participate. She thanked Gary and Roland Clark for playing music today. There was a round of applause. She thanked Katie Orost and David Manning for letting the preschool room be used for free child care this year. She hopes child care will be used more and more each year. She thanked all who make things happen in this town.

Duncan said there are a lot of really dedicated people in the Historical Society. He encouraged people to visit the Holcomb House. He said the Historical Society did an incredible job of putting together exhibits on Johnson history.

Brian Story said he started the Johnson Arts Council this year. The organization is finishing up work on bylaws, etc. and will start working this year to bring art to the community and bring people to art in the community. He encouraged people to stop by the Arts Council table and come to future Arts Council meetings. He said the Beautification Committee is also being revived. There are ideas about expanding it and looking at housing issues in the area. LCPC has some interest in working with us on housing studies and developing an action plan for housing.

We would like to connect Johnson residents to existing grant and loan programs. He encouraged people to volunteer for the Beautification Committee.

Lois Frey mentioned the painting the Historical Society is going to raffle. Alice Whiting added a slice to the Historical Society's pie model, representing an additional \$30K that has been donated by generous people. She thanked everyone for supporting the Historical Society.

Walter Pomroy moved to adjourn and the motion was seconded and passed by a voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 1:41.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths