

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
ALL PARTICIPATION BY ZOOM TELECONFERENCING
MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2021

Present:

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Beth Foy, Nat Kinney, Eric Osgood, Eben Patch
Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Hugh Albright, BJ Putvain, Lois Frey, Paul Warden, Scott Meyer, Lydia Beach Putvain, Lotty Roozkrans, Walter Pomroy, Marla Emery, Carolyn Smith, Shayne Spence, Athena Parke, Nadeau, Ken Tourangeau, Travis and B. Smith, Lynne, Rob Rodriguez, Kyle Nuse, Dave, Sheila, Bobbi Rooney

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Eric called the meeting to order at 7:00.

2. Additions, Changes to Agenda

Eric added an update on Holcomb House. Beth asked to speak about vaccination rates in Johnson.

3. Review and Approve Minutes of Meetings Past

Mike moved to approve the minutes of May 17, 2021, Beth seconded and the motion was passed.

4. Treasurer's Report / Review and Approve Bills, Warrants, Licenses / Any Action Items

Rosemary said the big item on the warrants she sent out was payment in full on school taxes for the year. With the orders that will be signed tonight general department expenditures will be about 90% of budget with 3-4 weeks left in the fiscal year. The major thing missing from income is funds that will be brought in from the reserves. Highway department expenditures will be about 84% of budget with the contribution to the capital equipment fund, the outstanding loan and tonight's orders.

Beth asked about tax revenue. Rosemary said current year delinquent taxes are about \$168K. That is about \$30K more than previous years.

5. Planning Commission Report

Paul Warden said the Planning Commission has had two meetings since he became chair. They got everyone's terms sorted out and the town website now shows each member's term and when it expires. No one seems to know where the bylaws are so they drafted a set that they will review this week. Their current task is still Class 4 roads. At their upcoming meeting they will review the redline draft from the selectboard. They have created a Class 4 assessment matrix to use in going out and grading the roads according to the criteria in Brian's letter. They will meet with Rob Moore of LCPC to review hydrologically connected Class 4 roads. They will submit a revised draft Class 4 road policy to the selectboard. Next they will be looking at creating draft criteria for the selectboard to use when considering water and sewer line extensions. They expect to start that discussion in July.

6. Discuss and Adopt Capital Equipment Modifications and Adaptations

Brian investigated some different scenarios for the capital reserve plan, primarily looking at the tandems. He found out that leasing a grader would cost significantly more than purchasing it. Lease payments for a grader are \$67-69K per year. We could lease to buy but

that still costs more than buying outright. Brian is not sure why the cost is that high. Eric asked what lease period Brian looked at. Brian said 5 years. There were a couple of other options but the general board guidance is to keep loans to 5 years or less. Leasing the grader would cost about \$80K more than purchasing. Brian also looked at lease options for tandem trucks..

With the existing purchase plan the total appropriation over the next 11 years is short by about \$16K. The reserve fund remains positive over that period but loses money. He thinks we would run out of money closer to 20 years from now. Eric said only a modest increase to our contribution would be needed to put us in the black 20 years out. Brian agreed.

Average annual expense is close to \$1400-1500 over 11 years. Beth said we need to make sure the average annual expense is calculated using a time period that includes the highest expense. It should probably be a 12-year average. We probably should increase our annual contribution to the fund by 5-10%.

Nat asked about an excavator. Brian said we don't have that on the capital plan. It is a wish list item but the finances have never made sense. It is cheaper to rent one for the amount we use it.

One scenario Brian looked at was switching to leasing tandems. The average cost over 11 years came out lower for that but that is a little misleading because those 11 years would include several years under the current system and then a couple under the new purchasing plan. Leasing tandems would not save us money. We wouldn't have the equity and we would constantly be making payments. We would need savings of about \$40K a year in repair costs for leasing to make sense and our repair costs are not that high, so it would likely not work out to switch to leasing tandems.

Eric said in addition to having little savings we would lose the ability to delay a purchase for a year if necessary. It doesn't sound like there is an upside to leasing tandems. Brian agreed.

Mike asked what Hugh thinks about leasing tandems. Hugh said he personally feels like 8 years is a long time to keep a tandem. The only advantage he sees to leasing is that it turns the vehicles over more quickly. He thinks every 5 years is a good time period for replacing trucks. We are less apt to need to replace tires if we replace trucks every 5 years. Tires are a significant expense. He is for shortening the life cycle to 5 years.

Brian suggested shortening the life cycle but not to 5 years. He thinks 6 or 7 years would still get us an improvement over what we are currently doing. Eric said we definitely had problems with 12 years but we have not yet lived through a couple of 8-year cycles to see if we have problems with that replacement period. Brian said we have not yet replaced any truck that we bought under the 8-year purchase plan.

Brian said he doesn't think he would like to go to leasing. He also looked at the lease to buy option. Over the period examined, that would be our highest cost option.

Hugh had asked about replacing the pickup truck a little bit early so Brian looked at the scenario of replacing it in this financial year. It has very little impact on our overall budget.

Eric said the only thing that jumped out at him is that replacing the pickup truck early leads to two back-to-back fiscal years with less than \$20K in our reserve fund. That would not provide a lot of padding. And an out of cycle purchase has cascading effects.

Nat said he heard discussion previously about possibly not replacing the grader next year. Hugh said he thinks it would be a mistake to keep the grader because it is so expensive to fix and we could have a catastrophic failure and be stuck with a \$40K bill. There is some technology available on new graders that would allow us to take better care of our roads.

Beth suggested we could try to change the payment schedule. She doesn't know if that is realistic or not. She feels the projected low balance in 2027 is high risk. She is thinking about mitigating that number in particular and trying to get it higher. Are there ways we can pay more sooner? Or extend payment out to help balance that number? Eric said we can't go over 5 years for a loan without an Australian ballot vote of the town.

Eben pointed out that on Brian's spreadsheet some loan payments are spread over 6 years. Eric said that will affect all the scenarios. Brian said the total cost over 11 years appears to be correct and the mistake only affected the balance at the end of each year. Fixing the mistake improves the outlook for the end of a couple of years but doesn't change the overall cost.

Brian said he thinks the capital plan might warrant spending a little more time exploring options. We might want to explore replacement at a different schedule, say 6 or 7 years. Eric said he would want to make sure that the changes Brian made don't cascade out and affect other things and that there aren't other mistakes. Nat said after Brian checks over the spreadsheet again he would like him to send out the actual Excel file so he can see the formulas. Board members agreed they are not comfortable approving the capital plan tonight.

Brian said right now our total outlay over 11 years is greater than our total appropriation. Eric asked if that is with all scenarios. Brian said leasing over 11 years is the closest but that is misleading because 8 out of the 11 years are under the purchase scenario and only 3 years are under the leasing scenario. Eric noted that if we lease we get the benefit of the trade-in value the first time but after that there is no trade-in value. Brian said the spreadsheet he has so far is not looking at leasing over a long enough period of time. He will take projections out longer. Beth said he should also look at total profit and loss over time.

Brian asked if the board is willing to go out of cycle and replace the pickup truck this year. The board reviewed the cost and the effect on the annual balances. Eric said it seems affordable.

Eben said when the idea of replacing the pickup truck early was first brought up it was mentioned that it could save the town money in the long run because we would keep the replacement truck longer. But now it seems that we are not talking about that, just shifting

the 5 years. If we are having trouble with this truck, why are we buying the same vehicle and trying to get 6 years out of it instead of 4?

Hugh said the replacement will be a diesel, which has an entirely different drivetrain. It is heavier duty and he is confident it is a much better option. He explored other brands but they are considerably more expensive so he is confident a Ram is the best option.

Eben asked if the idea is that we are replacing this one early and replacing the next one at the same time as originally planned. Or are we moving the 5-year period up? Eric said from what Brian presented we would still stay on the 5-year rotation. Brian said if we get closer to the end of life with this truck and we think it can last another year that would be a great option but we have been replacing these foreman trucks pretty consistently every 5 years. He thinks trying to get 6 years out of it is a nice idea but he wouldn't plan on it. Hugh said he wouldn't hesitate to keep it 6 years since it will be a diesel. He has put fewer miles on his truck than his predecessor did – 10,000 versus almost 20,000. Nat asked why the difference. Hugh said he doesn't know how Brian Krause was using the truck. Brian said he knows Brian Krause wasn't misusing it or taking it out of town but he doesn't have good handle on why his mileage was so much higher.

Nat said the current truck market is making trade-ins attractive but that won't last forever.

Beth moved to approved purchase of a Ram pickup truck with the quoted trade-in value this fiscal year and to keep it for 6 years, not scheduling the next pickup truck purchase until FY 27, Eben seconded and the motion was passed.

Brian describe what he intends to update in the capital equipment plan and the board agreed to it.

7. ***Discuss and Approve Access for VAST on Town Property***

Brian showed a map of the trail change VAST wants near Upper French Hill. Eric asked, they realize they have to go to the village as well, right? Brian agreed that it is town and village owned property so they will have to go to the village too. Nat said it seems like their proposed change to move more use off the highway and further away from houses seems like a benefit to everyone. Eric said a significant amount of the trail will be off the highway.

Mike moved to authorize the changed use of town/village property requested by VAST in the Upper French Hill area, contingent on agreement from the village, Eben seconded and the motion was passed.

Nat asked if there is a trail there already or if they are blazing a new trail. Rob Rodriguez said they are trying to follow an existing path but it needs some work.

Brian showed the change proposed by VAST for Gould Hill. Nat said he thought the club had already been granted access to Gould Hill Road. Rob said they have previously ridden a small portion of the road. Traveling the road is a fallback if they can't put in the trail they are hoping for. **Eben moved and Mike seconded to give VAST permission to travel on Gould Hill Road if necessary and to access the light industrial park property. The motion was passed.**

8. *Discuss and Agree to Class 2 Roadway Grant for Paving of Plot Road*

Brian said in 2019 we went out for a Class 2 paving grant for repairs to Plot Road but COVID happened before the state funded any grant application so our application was canceled and we received a small state contribution instead for road projects in general. This year they have enough money to fund projects of this type and they have come back to some previous applications that were not granted. We had already elected to do reclamation of the road out of our own funds. We rebuilt the base and topped it with gravel. We now have an opportunity to use grant funds to pave the road. Both Brian and Hugh support signing the grant agreement and doing the paving project. The grant is only for paving and they won't pay us back for reclamation we already did.

Beth asked if the grant money has to be spent on Plot Road. Brian said yes.

Eben said asphalt prices have increased more than usual this year so the money won't go as far as we expected. Brian said we don't have a new asphalt cost estimate but Eben is correct that asphalt prices are very high now. This amount of money might not pave the same length we intended to pay before. We might ask for an amendment either for increased funding or decreased length to be paved.

Nat asked if there is if there are reasons to do this other than people giving us money. Brian said it is a frequently traveled road, especially the section leading to Journey's End, but we don't have to use the grant funds if we don't see future development or use indicating it should be paved. Nat said over the long term it will be less expensive to maintain if it is gravel.

Eric asked, there is no opportunity to redirect that grant to another place in town? Brian said not at this time. He can see about writing a new application but he expects that if we turn this down someone further down the list will get the money.

A resident of Plot Road said she and her husband are in favor of paving the road. It is a really busy road and the dust is getting worse. It is a health and environmental hazard. She is sure that most people who live on that road would agree paving is something that is required.

Hugh said if we have the money he thinks we should pave it. Mike asked, the section where the Smiths live won't be paved, right? Brian said we will have to see how much we can cover with the amount of money we are granted. The length paved will probably not be as long as the previously paved section.

Beth asked if we gain something by paving it. Do we end up spending more in the long run if it is paved? Hugh said it is less to maintain. He imagines the asphalt on the road previously was 20 years old. In his opinion it doesn't really matter but if we have the money available he thinks we ought to take advantage of it.

Lotty Roozecrans said the road is incredibly dusty and cars often drive incredibly fast there. It was far better when it was paved. As a resident of that area she would be in favor of paving it.

Nat asked if we could do more dust treatments. Hugh said he is surprised at the complaints about dust. We increased the quantity of chloride applied to roads. He wouldn't think it would be any dustier than it used to be. Beth said she noticed that the newly reclaimed section is not as packed as the other parts of the road.

Nat said he thinks paving would result in traffic going faster on the road. Hugh said we can address the dust issue but we can do less about speed.

Mike moved and Eben seconded to agree to the Class 2 Roadway Grant for paving of Plot Road.

Brian said in our grant application we weren't specific about where the section to be paved started. We said we were going to pave the 2400 previously paved feet.

Hugh asked, we will have to go out for an RFP, correct? Brian said we can ask Hutchins if they will honor the quote they gave us last year but he doubts if they will. They are under no obligation to. It was agreed that Hugh should talk to Hutchins and find out how much they can get done with the money we have to spend. Brian said we will have to submit a correction to the state. Either they need to give us more money so we can pave 2400 feet or we reduce the length to whatever we can afford.

The motion was passed in a roll call vote with Mike, Eben and Eric voting yes and Nat and Beth voting no.

9. *Discuss and Adopt Contract for Fire Protection Service with Village of Johnson*
Mike moved and Nat seconded to authorize the chair to sign the contract with the Village of Johnson for fire protection service for \$90,748.

Beth asked if the contract is the same as last year. Brian said in this contract, unlike last year's, they are specifying when they want the quarterly payments.

Nat suggested changing the format of the contract so the last page is not just signatures on a blank page. Brian said we would ask the village to make the change but he wouldn't expect any objection.

Beth asked, we contract for the calendar year as opposed to the fiscal year? Eric said yes because the village is on a calendar year.

The motion was passed.

10. *Discuss and Appoint Howard Romero as Johnson Representative to Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District*

Beth moved to appoint Howard Romero as Johnson representative to the Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District board, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.

11. Discuss and Appoint Tuesday Night Live Volunteer

Beth moved to appoint Abby Gladstone-Strobel to the Tuesday Night Live Committee, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.

12. Discuss and Adopt COVID-19 Universal Guidance for Employees

Brian said we are looking at reopening the municipal building soon. The state is doing away with the requirement for the guidance document we had to write about how to handle COVID-19 modifications to the workplace. We will adopt the governor's Universal Guidance rules for employees and visitors to the municipal building.

Eric said he would like to have the next regular meeting in person for board members with participation only by Zoom for members of the public. Probably by July meetings will be fully open to the public. At that point his suggestion is that we could use Zoom to transmit the meetings but the Zoom would be only for watching, not participating.

Beth said the state has put out vaccination rates by town and Johnson's rate (51 to 60%) is a little lower than she expected. Our neighbors other than Eden and Belvidere have higher vaccination rates than we do. She would love to see Johnson's rates increase and for selectboard members to advocate for that. Nat said the emergency management team met this morning. We have a potential opportunity to host a pop-up clinic in the municipal building or other location so we will have the opportunity to vaccinate people right here in Johnson.

Eben moved that the Town of Johnson adopt the Vermont Department of Health's COVID-19 Universal Guidance for employees and visitors and the motion was seconded and passed in a roll call vote with Beth, Nat and Eben voting yes and Mike voting no.

13. Approve New Longley Cemetery Plot Deed

Brian said the Longleys made a request to move the location of their plot from the location approved by the board to one to near the western edge of the property. **Mike moved to change the Longley cemetery plot deed as requested, Eben seconded and the motion was passed.**

14. Discuss Future Law Enforcement Options and Law Enforcement Study Committee

Nat said he met with Linda Martin and Kurt Klein from the Wolcott selectboard and Susan Bartlett, chair of the Hyde Park selectboard. They have all reviewed what the now dissolved Law Enforcement Study Committee submitted and what Duncan Hastings and Diana Osborn submitted on their own. They talked about three action items for next steps. The first is to review community needs and whether they are currently being met or not. The second is to identify gaps or questions not addressed in the research done so far. The third is to look into the status of the 30-year retirement plan and the reasons LCSD participation in a different plan has been denied so far by the state. Susan Bartlett is going to look into that and why a change in the retirement plan was allowed for another county sheriff's department and denied to LCSD. It has become clear that the 30-year retirement plan is putting us at a real disadvantage. People get hired, get experience, then are snapped up by neighboring forces and a big part of that is due to the 30-year retirement plan.

Nat asked board members to email him or Beth about any needs not being fulfilled by LCSD or any areas not addressed in the report so far that need to be researched. The current contract runs out at the end of the month. The other towns have proposed making some changes to it.

Nat is not sure how that will work out with the short time frame before the current contract ends. The towns may propose a shorter interim agreement. He thinks there is general agreement that the contract is pretty vague and there is a lot of opportunity for improving it by getting more specific on our expectations for the sheriff's department.

15. Inspection of Holcomb House Apartment

Eric said he, Eben and Brian inspected the apartment at the Holcomb House. Aside from being messy there was no noticeable damage. The apartment could use some renovations but the same tenants have always rolled over without leaving it empty. They shared with the current tenants that we would probably have at lease with escape clause wording for when the Historical Society decides it is ready to take over the second floor.

16. Other Business

Brian said Lydia Putvain joined the office team this week and is off to a great start.

17. Executive Session to Provide Board Update on Employee Relations

Mike moved to go into executive session to provide an update on employee relations as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1), Eben seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 9:05. The board came out of executive session at 9:15.

18. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths