

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING / REMOTE PARTICIPATION BY ZOOM
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2022

Present:

Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Beth Foy, Nat Kinney, Eric Osgood

Others: Brian Story, David Williams, Walter Pomroy, Diana Osborn, Neil Shepard, Stacey Waterman

Absent: Eben Patch

Moderator David Williams called the meeting to order at 4:02. Brian Story explained the meeting procedures.

Eric Osgood thanked Mike Dunham and Nat Kinney for their service on the selectboard. He noted that the town report is dedicated to Anne Mullings and David Williams and in memory of Carl Powden. He acknowledged Carl's accomplishments and contributions.

David Williams asked if there were questions or comments on Article 3.

Brian said the opening question raised at the last meeting was what it would mean for this article to pass. The intent was to ask if the voters want to leave the PK-6 portion of the district and remain in the middle and high school portion. The advice from our attorney was that this article would not do that. If it passed it would mean we would leave the entire PK-12 school district. But the lawyer also said it would not be possible to craft an article about leaving only part of the district. The district governs PK-12 so if we leave it we leave the whole thing. But we could negotiate as part of leaving that we would rejoin for the middle and high school. No article could accomplish exactly what was requested by the voters. Accomplishing that would have to happen as part of negotiating leaving the district.

Walter Pomroy said based on what the attorney said he is just going to leave it to the voters. He doesn't think the union is doing us any favors and is costing us money. He will leave it to the voters and they will decide on Tuesday.

David Williams asked if there were questions or comments on Article 4. There were none.

David Williams asked if there were questions or comments on Article 5.

Diana Osborn said before she left to hike the Appalachian Trail last year she was on the law enforcement study committee. They collected some information and then she left for 7 months. She didn't have time to follow up on that while she was on the trail but she is still interested. She believes the sheriff's department expense is the biggest single line item in the budget. That and dispatch are big expenditures. If that has been studied, she hasn't seen the results. She knows the committee suddenly disbanded when the chair quit and she hasn't seen any follow-up.

Eric said Johnson, Hyde Park and Wolcott each chose selectboard members who are continuing to meet and have discussions with Sheriff Roger Marcoux. Nat and Beth are the representatives

from Johnson. It is correct that the sheriff's department expense is our most expensive single line item. That is true in most communities. Public safety is very expensive. It is the choice of the people if they want that service or are willing to take their chances without it. Johnson has historically opted to pay for it. There are different options being explored.

Beth said she has a similar reaction every time she sees that line item. The selectboard members from the three towns have met a number of times. One of the things they discussed was the budget for this year. Collectively the towns agreed with the sheriff's department to keep the 3% increase for this year. They will have to dig deeper on how to handle the budget in following years. A lot of activity needs to occur around that. Some of what is discussed in their meetings is confidential. There are other activities they are looking at in terms of how we interact with the sheriff's department. The town has chosen over the years to have 24/7 coverage and she thinks we need to have dialog around that. There are pros and cons and differing opinions on changing to less coverage. The towns have agreed to continue to work together.

David Williams asked if there were questions or comments on Article 6.

Diana said she thinks this is an unnecessary expenditure. The last development project on Main Street resulted in the street looking a little better but her business and others were forced out of town. They were impacted by the construction and the lack of communication during the project. Internet connectivity is a problem she has been dealing with. She thinks asking people to come to town to start businesses or develop our economy when the infrastructure available to businesses is so lacking is a bad expenditure of money at this time.

Beth suggested watching the recording of the prior informational meeting where Eric talked about the economic development coordinator building foundational plans for grant money that could come our way over time. She hears and supports Diana on the internet topic. Her personal opinion is that the economic development coordinator could facilitate pushing forward efforts to improve internet connectivity. Some areas in town do have high speed internet infrastructure that can support business needs. She agrees we need to fix internet infrastructure but she doesn't think it hurts to set ourselves up so we can apply for big grants that can help our town's future and current needs.

Beth noted that the prior informational meeting had a lot of discussion on a number of topics, including economic development, leaving the school district and some of the budget lines. The recording is available on YouTube. Eric said that one was more like a traditional town meeting with discussion on every article. It would be more informative.

Brian suggested looking on the town's social media for more information on the sixth grade fundraiser.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:28

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths