

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2022

**Present:** Selectboard members: Beth Foy (via Zoom), Duncan Hastings, Eric Osgood, Eben Patch, Mark Woodward

Others present in person: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Jason Whitehill, Jeff Bickford, Kyle Nuse, Scott Meyer, Rep. Dan Noyes, Sen. Rich Westman, Sophie Zdatny (Vermont State College System Chancellor), Sharron Scott (Vermont State College System CFO/COO), Katherine Levasseur (Vermont State College System Director of External and Governmental Affairs), Mary Jean Smith, Dick Simays, several other Historical Society members

Others present on Zoom: Tina Bidwell, Steve Hatfield, Lois Frey, Kirsten Owen, Paul Warden, Alex Nadeau, Diane Lehouiller, Ken Tourangeau, 2 other people

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. Call to Order**

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:30.

**2. Selectboard Issues and Concerns**

Eric said he would like to talk about an email board members got from Kyle Nuse. Duncan said he had things he would like to bring up under the agenda items related to the Historical Society and the cemeteries.

Eric said the board got an email from Kyle Nuse, which is a public document as it was sent to all board members. He read the last paragraph of her letter. She encouraged the board to think about the long-term compounding effect on the community of adding more roads for ATV use with no enforcement. Regarding enforcement, she feels having the club's buddy promoted to a position of power should be a hard no. She said that is not enforcement, that is the toxic cronyism that Johnson's leadership needs to take a hard stance against.

Eric said he supports any member of the public who wants to send a note advocating for or against any selectboard position. What he has trouble with is the allegation that one of our appointees – he is guessing it is the constable; whether he is a buddy with a club member or not, he doesn't know – would play favoritism if we chose to use constables as enforcement officers. That is a decision the board hasn't even made yet. If there was any evidence of wrongdoing by any appointee or employees he would hope the evidence would be brought to the board. To insinuate that one of our appointees would do something just by being appointed is very troubling to him because all our employees and appointees have family and friends in the community and to the best of his knowledge they do not play favoritism and they recuse themselves if there is a conflict of interest. He would like it to go on the record that we support our employees and employees.

**Eric moved to thank town employees and appointees for their service, their commitment and their dedication and to state that the selectboard supports their contributions to the community. Beth suggested the friendly amendment, which was accepted, of thanking volunteers, appointees and employees. Beth seconded.**

Mark asked if Eric has communicated to Kyle that the board has not even made this decision. Eric said no.

**The motion was passed.**

**3. *Review Invoices and Orders***

The board reviewed and discussed invoices and orders. Brian said the Duramax equipment purchase the board asked about last time was a cutting edge for the bucket on the loader.

**4. *Review and Approve Minutes of Meetings Past***

Donna said the minutes of April 1 were not finished yet. **Duncan moved to approve the minutes of April 4, 2022, Eric seconded and the motion was passed with Eben abstaining.**

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

Rosemary said expenditures to date are 67% of budget. Highway expenditures to date are 53% of budget. Brian said we are in good shape financially. We are still running a surplus. Beth said last year at this time we were at 60.4% of budget and collected taxes were at 79.85%. Where are we with tax collection this year? Rosemary said taxes are 81.22% collected. Rosemary said we have collected all state and federal highway money. At the end of April the state will do a true-up on school taxes.

Rosemary handed out a list of delinquent taxes. She said the board had previously decided not to go to collections with anything under \$1,000. Mark suggested sending anything over \$1,000 and over 2 years past due to collections.

Rosemary noted that one item on the list is a mobile home that is abandoned with over \$5,000 owed. Duncan said, so there is basically no one to go after? Mark said they still owe taxes. Beth said the circumstances should not determine whether or not we try to collect, even though it may not be as easy. Eric said typically if a trailer has been abandoned it won't even get bid on in a tax sale because it is in such a bad shape. Duncan said in that case our next step would be to grant an abatement. He would rather make the attempt to collect and then eventually if necessary abate the taxes.

Rosemary asked if the board wants to have the attorney send final collection notices to all the people she has marked on the list with check marks or question marks before we start tax sale proceedings. Mark asked what the attorney charges per parcel. Rosemary said there is a limit to how much the attorney can charge the taxpayer. She thinks it is 16%. The town pays the rest. Mark said he doesn't want to spend money paying the attorney if we are never going to collect. Eben said it sets quite a precedent if we don't try to collect.

Duncan noted that one person on the list is making payments. If they have a formal agreement and are paying he doesn't think we should send that to tax sale. He asked if Rosemary agreed with that. She said yes. Other board members agreed not to send that account to tax sale.

Rosemary suggested that maybe some of these people should be notified that the state is providing grants to help pay property taxes. She doesn't know if everyone is eligible.

**Duncan moved to send all delinquent tax accounts over \$1,000 for collections with the exception of the one that currently has a payment plan in place and to ask Rosemary to send out a letter prior to that notifying any property owners eligible for tax assistance about the available state assistance program with a deadline to respond, Eric seconded and the motion was passed.**

**6. *Representatives from the Vermont State College System***

Board members and Vermont State College representatives introduced themselves. Chancellor Sophie Zdatny said a president has been appointed for Vermont State University, which will combine Northern Vermont University, Castleton University and Vermont Technical College. He is someone with experience bringing together institutions. He has great vision, energy and enthusiasm. He will start work in July. A proposal has been submitted to the New England Commission of Higher Education, which accredits the colleges, to launch the new university July 1, 2023.

Beth asked about the current financial state of the college system and how it is impacting the schools. Sophie said a committee was formed about 2 years ago and it laid out a path forward, including bringing the three institutions together. The committee also identified the importance of the state supporting the Vermont State College system at a higher rate than it has historically and providing bridge funding as well as a higher base appropriation. That is underway. The State College system has had tremendous support from the state over the past two years and there is good news from the current legislative session.

Director of External and Governmental Affairs Katherine Levasseur said last year the state increased the base appropriation by \$5 million. It looks like the House and Senate will possibly agree to increase the base appropriation by \$10 million this year, which would be a historic increase. In addition the Senate budget puts forward the bridge funding the college system needs for FY23. The base appropriation the committee identified as needed to put the college system on the path to financial stability was \$48 million. If what is currently proposed moves through it will be \$45.5 million.

Sophie said a lot of savings will be coming from administrative consolidations and efficiencies. A year or two ago the legislature gave \$20 million in transformation funding and the college system has been able to use that to take a professional project management approach. They have four core teams and multiple sub-teams that are in the process of designing what the college system will look like as they move forward. CFO/COO Sharron Scott said additional bridge funding is allowing the college system to make the changes in a strategic way.

Eric said in all the previous iterations of the college in Johnson there has been a president on campus. What will it be like now? He wants to make sure Johnson doesn't get forgotten. Sophie said one president will oversee five different campuses but will not live on any one campus. It is anticipated that there will be a designated person on each campus to address day-to-day issues. They recognize that colleges and communities coexist and they hope that when the president comes he will have the opportunity to meet all the different communities. One of the recommendations for the Lyndon campus was a learning and working

communities concept. A donor gave a gift to pioneer the concept there. They are looking to build strong relationships with communities. They want all students to get hands-on experience. They are looking at paid internships. They are anticipating having partnerships with the community. They want to see that each campus has its own distinctive nature. They have no intention of forgetting Johnson. They would like to think about a great signature program that can be highlighted on each campus.

Mark asked how the schools are going to increase enrollment. Students in our town really influence the life of the community. Sophie said they recognize demographics are against them. There are fewer and fewer traditional age students and there is fierce competition for them. One thing they are looking at is making sure they are addressing all needs – not just traditional age students but also lifelong learners. They are targeting populations they haven't historically reached. In this state there are a lot of students who graduate high school and don't go to college. They can do a better job of reaching out to them. They will do what they can to attract students from out of state in the traditional 18 to 24 year old market but they have to be realistic about their ability to increase enrollment for that demographic.

Mark said some of his concern is retention of students. They come and don't continue on. Sophie said retention numbers need improvement. If the colleges can increase retention they can effectively increase enrollment. One of the teams is looking at coming up with a strong advising team with strong student supports.

Katherine said about 1/3 of students across the state college system can be identified as non-traditional students. They might support a dependent or work full or part time. She thinks about the additional support they need to be successful and finish their degrees. She has been excited about a program offering increased advising and tutoring support for nursing students. They are looking at that kind of thing across the spectrum.

Sharron said Johnson may be seeing some of the after effects of the announcement made in spring 2020. That announcement shook local confidence in the organization. They can rebound and recover but it will take time.

Sophie said the incoming president has talked about building stronger relationships with high schools and middle schools, making sure students know what options are here. The funding they have been given gives them additional capacity. With that investment and with being able to pool resources she thinks they will be able to do a much better job of getting messages out and building connections to high schools.

Mark said there is a dramatic need for teachers right now. Johnson used to be a teaching college. Sophie said the strength of the education program at Johnson is being carried through to the other institutions. They are trying to build on the strengths of the individual institutions.

Duncan said he thinks it is important to do outreach to high schools, tech centers and the community college and try to build a program where Vermonters can be trained to do the jobs Vermont needs done. He thinks we all recognize the value the college brings to our

community and our county, not just to Johnson. He thinks he speaks for the board in saying that the board wants to do anything it can to help the college be successful. Sophie said having ambassadors speaking with enthusiasm about what is going on at the college is valuable.

Beth said she worries when she hears that the college system is not focusing the majority of energy on traditional students. She hears that 1/3 of students are not traditional, but that means that 2/3 are. She and her friends have kids who are college age or nearly college age. When they are talking, Vermont state colleges don't usually come up. A lot of the kids are going to small campuses in New Hampshire or Maine or Northern New York. She feels that is a shame. She would hope our campus would be talked about as eagerly as those. She understands demographics are shifting, but we still have a lot of people who are leaving the local area to go not that far away because they can pay less and get that same small town feel.

Sophie said the state college system has frozen tuition the last couple of years and for the upcoming year. The state colleges have not received much state support historically and that has driven tuition up. It is a high priority of the board to try to figure out ways to bring costs down and make school more affordable, such as paid learning experiences for students. Cost is definitely a barrier. They have seen that if they take cost out of the picture Vermonters do want these programs. When the state provided COVID money, well over 1,000 people took advantage of that to take classes.

Beth asked, what is the long-term vision for the Johnson campus? How is that impacting staff and faculty now and how does that tie into economic development locally? Sophie said in terms of faculty, staff and current employees we know there has been turnover due to uncertainty. When people leave, that helps with cost but it is not strategic. It is a huge struggle right now. The Vermont State College system can't pay salaries others can pay. They are looking at internal resources. If there are duplicate positions employees may be able to train for other positions. They are not envisioning a significant reduction in force. One thing they will do is create a workforce development division with an executive director for workforce development. They are looking to partner with the community.

Beth asked how workforce development and liberal arts tie into the vision for the Johnson campus. Sophie said it is important to understand that liberal arts is also important for careers. Johnson historically has had a liberal arts focus. She doesn't see that changing. She sees its programs in education, arts and mental health counseling continuing.

Beth asked if there is something town government can do or should be that would help the state college system in a significant way. Sharron said they will be launching a new brand for Vermont State University. That would be a good opportunity to engage with the town and businesses to build excitement. Katherine said there are anticipated brand launch parties on each of the campuses. She noted that the badger will still remain the mascot for the Johnson campus.

Beth said the town can give permission for use of Legion Field if the college wants its party to sprawl. When she grew up in Johnson and the college was thriving, college kids were everywhere. If we could get that energy into town it would be great.

Duncan said the Historical Society has a number of projects they would like to engage with the college on. That might be a great work-study component. Students could be enlightened on aspects of Johnson history and the Historical Society could make use of students. Sharron said the college has archives at the library. That might be a way to partner with the Historical Society.

Sharron said there will be a celebration of the Babcock Preserve in Eden at the end of April. It is an asset that belongs to the college that hasn't had much attention paid to it.

Eben invited comments and questions from the public. Scott Meyer said he graduated from the SUNY system and he also attended Johnson State College as a non-traditional student. He noticed that SUNY schools worked tightly with the state but Johnson State was more disconnected from the state. Paul Smith's College has a certified water testing lab. If students are able to work in a certified lab that is a huge thing on their resume. Some of the research he did when he was at Johnson State he couldn't publish because the lab wasn't certified. He knows VTC is trying to move students into industry. Wouldn't it be a good idea to start working with the State of Vermont, especially with the fish and wildlife program, and have more of a tie in with the state?

Sophie said she thinks they want those relationships. Moving forward she wants to see partnerships for experiential learning with the state or private business. They are open to trying to figure those connections out.

Scott said when he first started working for the state it seemed that most people hired in chemistry or environmental sciences for the state were Johnson State graduates. Over time he has noticed fewer and fewer from Lyndon State and Johnson State and more from UVM and Norwich University. He doesn't know why.

Kyle asked what is meant by the new hybrid model that was referred to. Sophie said a number of faculty have already teamed up with other campuses so that several students from other colleges can take their classes through telepresence. They are looking to build on that. During COVID some non-traditional students were able to access classes remotely but then they couldn't continue. The college system is piloting Face-to-Face Plus, which involves trying to make courses and programs as accessible as possible so students can participate remotely or even asynchronously. They are getting ready to launch a Face-to-Face Plus pilot this summer. It won't work for all programs but for a lot of programs that can open up accessibility for students. Technology is improving fast. They want to make sure online offerings are high quality.

Kyle said she has heard talk about keeping the identity of different campuses alive. Johnson is known for its art program. She has been thinking about branding for the Johnson campus

and how that ties into the branding of the town and keeping the identity of the campus clear. Sophie said they are thinking about having a clear identity for all the different campuses.

**7. Public Works Supervisor/Highway Foreman Report**

Jason said he included in his written report information on how many loads of road sand were used on each road during mud season. He highlighted roads used by sap trucks or dump trucks that we cannot keep off the roads during mud season.

Eben said the roads are in great shape now. He would say Johnson's roads are the best in the county. He appreciates the overtime the employees put in. Our small town alone spent about \$68K on materials for mud season. Twenty-four total loads of plant mix were put on Tree Farm Road at about \$300 a load. Eric noted there were also six loads of Staymat. Eben said the cost was about \$8,400 for that road alone, which has one taxpaying resident on it. We have to keep it passable for the fire department and NEMS. The taxpayers are paying for damage done by sap haulers that fall under agricultural practices. With the technological changes that are there, they don't need to be putting punishment like that on the roads. He thinks that is something to discuss for next year. We are not the only town with this issue.

Beth said she thought Eben was going to talk about the state having supplemental grant money for towns. Eben said he doesn't think the state should be responsible for paying for towns. They should let towns manage themselves. Eric asked, the state was looking at a declaration of emergency with FEMA for mud season, right? Eben said that was to throw money at the problem, not address the cause of the problem. We spent \$68K dealing with roads during mud season and he thinks we are at the low end of the cost spectrum. Jason agreed. Jason noted that we didn't have to close one road. Duncan said over the course of his involvement with local government it seems there has been increasing desire on the part of VTrans to open up anything and everything to FEMA reimbursement. He is not keen on the idea.

Eben said he would like it if the town could post weight limits that we could hold people to so all of us do not have to pay for profit that is going to someone else's pocket. Mark asked if Eben is talking about overweight sap trucks that are on roads at the wrong time of year. Eben said he is talking about any overweight trucks but the majority are sap trucks. Mark said they are exempt because they have agricultural exemptions. Eben said he thinks the majority of them try to fall under the agricultural exemption but a lot of them actually have registered vehicles and his understanding is that when you have a registered vehicle it no longer falls under the agricultural exemption.

Dan Noyes said he would like to talk to Eben about this issue. It would be interesting to talk to people on the transportation committee about it. He doesn't have an answer but he has seen what Eben has seen.

Rich Westman said he thinks the Vermont League of Cities and Towns is one place to start. A lot of rural towns all have the same issues. The best time to get hold of legislators to talk about possible legislation is late in fall before the next session starts. He encourages the town to talk to VLTC and see if other towns have the same issue and if anyone is thinking about

what to do. He thinks both he and Dan would be happy to introduce something from the community.

Eric said H.159 opens up TIF funding for small communities. He believes the senate may vote it out tomorrow. It would be great if legislators could support that. Beth agreed.

Eric noted that some of our shortest highways incurred the most cost and loads of gravel during mud season. Eben and Jason agreed that it was because of out of town sap trucks on those roads.

Eben said he believes the mud abatement program that has been in place in Johnson has saved the town money this year. Jason said we spent a third of what Morrisville spent during mud season.

Jason asked if there is an estimated time when the 5<sup>th</sup> highway employee that was budgeted for might start. Eben said the board probably should discuss that at the next meeting.

Jason said we have spent about 50% of what was budgeted for salt so far this fiscal year. Does the board want him to spend the rest on salt now because the price probably will go up? Brian said we can stock up at the current contract price. We will lose a little over the summer from rain, etc, but not that much and it is likely to save us quite a bit of money. Beth said she thinks we should have this as an action item on an upcoming agenda. Eben asked if it would be okay if this waits a couple of weeks. Jason said yes. Eben asked for it to be put on the next agenda. Beth asked when the contract expires. Jason said he thinks July 1. Brian said he expects that it lasts through the fiscal year. He can double check and have this up for discussion at the next board meeting. Beth said she doesn't want to commit to having it on the agenda for the next board meeting. She doesn't know what else needs to be on that agenda and she doesn't want to pack too much into meetings. Eben said it could be under planned purchases. Jason said he is not asking for extra money. What would be spent is already in the budget. Duncan said he assumes we will be well within our already approved highway budget. Brian said he and Jason are bringing it to the board for input because what they propose is different from our usual practice. We don't usually stock up on salt to that degree. They think it should be done but it would mean that the board will not see the savings on salt that we had predicted. Beth said she thinks we need to look at the whole budget and include it in planned purchases at a future meeting. Eric said trucking costs are going up. If trucking costs are locked in as part of the bid price the bid for next year will likely be much higher. Duncan said he thinks it is good to look at the overall budget rather than a single line item. He suggested that Brian and Jason should look at the entire budget and decide if that is what they would prefer to spend the money on and be prepared to discuss that at the next meeting.

Brian noted that a resident on Clay Hill Road sent a thank-you note to the public works crew.

#### **8. *Historical Society Report***

Mary Jean Smith said the Historical Society feels the time has come to expand onto the second floor of the Holcomb House. They are running out of space on the bottom floor. They need more space for storage, meetings and displays. Some people in the Historical Society



are still storing things in their basements and more things keep coming in. They need board approval to make future plans. They have a spreadsheet with a proposal. Eben said he thinks this will need to be an actionable item on a future agenda. Mary Jean handed out copies of the spreadsheet.

Dick Simays said the Historical Society is trying to make this a win-win situation for the town and the Historical Society. They probably would not require the entire upstairs apartment. Part of it could be unused. Utility costs will be lower than now. They will not require water and they will require less electricity than what is being used now. They would not have a bathroom upstairs. The spreadsheet shows that if they move upstairs they estimate utilities savings of about \$2,550 a year. The Historical Society would increase what they are currently giving the town in lieu of rent. Revenue minus expenses would be about \$4500. That difference would provide a fund for maintenance costs. They don't know what needs to be done to prepare the second floor for them to move up there. But whether the Historical Society or a new tenant occupies that space there will be town expense to prepare the apartment upstairs for reoccupancy. They are offering to share the expense but not to pay all of it.

Eric asked when the current lease expires. Brian said he believes at the end of May. Eric asked, we have to give 30 days notice to the tenants? Brian said yes. The lease can be terminated at any time with 30 days notice.

Duncan said he resigned from the upstairs building committee when he was elected to the selectboard because he didn't think it would be appropriate for him to stay on it. He thinks the Historical Society is first looking for conceptual approval for occupying the upstairs and if they get that then next they will come back with a specific proposal to occupy the building. Eben suggested that board members look at the spreadsheet and come up with questions for the next meeting.

**Eric moved to accept Duncan's resignation from the Historical Society, Beth seconded and the motion was passed with Duncan recusing himself.**

Duncan said he would like to get on the agenda as soon as possible discussion of the letter from Dick Simays talking about making appointments.

Kyle asked if there is an opening date for the Historical Society building. Mary Jean said at their last meeting the Historical Society decided to hold off on reopening the building to the public because of COVID. They will see after another month, but for now it is open by appointment.

**9. *Review Planned Purchases***

Brian said there are no planned purchases over \$1,000.

**10. *Use of American Rescue Plan Act Funds***

Brian said we have to file quarterly reports on our use of ARPA funds. The first is coming up. At that time we need to tell the federal government if we will use the standard deduction.

**Beth moved and Mark seconded to submit for the standard deduction for ARPA funds.**

Duncan asked if the motion is for the entire standard deduction amount. Mark said that amount is \$10 million. Brian said we won't get that much. **The motion was passed.**

***11. Plot Cemetery Trust Transfer***

Brian said David Marvin has been taking care of Plot Cemetery. It is a town cemetery but a trust fund was established for its upkeep. Administration costs for the trust fund have been rising over time and rapidly diminishing the amount in the fund. David Marvin would like to give the funds to the town for use on cemetery maintenance.

Beth asked Rosemary if there is any issue with that. Rosemary said not that she is aware of. Brian said our attorney said there would be no problem with accepting the funds and taking over maintenance. **Beth moved to accept the donation of funds from David Marvin, depleting the existing trust fund for Plot Cemetery maintenance, and to take over maintenance of Plot Cemetery, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.**

***12. Draft Request for Proposals for Cemetery Maintenance***

Brian said he had provided a draft RFP for cemetery and gravestone maintenance. In the past we went out to bid and Duncan was awarded the contract. He did good work for the town but now that Duncan is in his current elected position we should put this out to bid again. Duncan said he will not be submitting a proposal. Duncan said he had emailed Brian some ideas he thinks should be part of the RFP. There are right and wrong ways to maintain gravestones. Duncan moved and Mark seconded to authorize Brian to work with Duncan on developing an RFP for cemetery and gravestone maintenance and to circulate the RFP.

Duncan said all the stones in Whiting Hill Cemetery have been cleaned. He doesn't think stone cleaning in that cemetery needs to be included in the RFP. He would like to see us focus on one cemetery at a time and get it done. He would say the RFP should be for repairs only and limited to Whiting Hill Cemetery. We don't have enough money to complete the work that needs to be done there in one year. Eric said in the past we had as many of the worst stones done as our money would cover. If we focus on one cemetery, what is the condition of the others? Duncan said in his time with the town we never worked on any cemetery other than Whiting Hill and we never got it done. All stones in Whiting Hill have been cleaned now. There are stones that have been knocked over or damaged. His idea would be to have the contractor deal only with broken and leaning stones. He thinks there is more than enough work for a couple of years of contracts.

Beth asked for clarification about the scope of what we are asking for. Is it for overall maintenance, including fencing, cleaning and fixing stones? She doesn't think we should approve an RFP if we are not clear on the scope of work. Eric said he thinks the motion was to authorize Duncan to work with Brian to draft an RFP to be circulated. Brian said he could bring it back to the board.

Kyle asked if this includes anything about the mystery cemetery near Creamery Road that was discussed at one point. Brian said it doesn't include anything about that. It is not town-owned and we do not have any liability there. We provide advice about it to property owners in the area.

**The motion was passed.**

Duncan said last year he got almost 2/3 of Plot Cemetery sprayed with one coat of Wet & Forget. He showed pictures of a stone that received one coat of the product compared to a stone that was not yet treated. He would like to volunteer, at no cost to the town, to apply Wet & Forget to the remaining stones and ideally to give them all a second coat.

**Eric moved to authorize Duncan to apply up to two coats of Wet & Forget to all stones in Plot Cemetery and to reimburse him for the cost of materials, Beth seconded and the motion was passed with Duncan recusing himself.**

***13. Lamoille FiberNet Appointments***

Brian said Lamoille FiberNet needs a Johnson representative appointed and we can appoint an alternate. Charlotte Reber is currently the representative and Paul Warden is the alternate and they are both willing to continue. **Duncan moved and Mark seconded to reappoint Charlotte Reber as representative to Lamoille FiberNet and to appoint Paul Warden as alternate and to authorize the chair to sign the resolution renewing Johnson's participation in Lamoille FiberNet. The motion was passed.**

***14. Discussion on Mobile Selectboard Meeting to Inspect Roads***

Brian said the board had previously talked about going out to inspect roads. He thinks a good strategy would be to pick a handful of roads based on some category of interest such as good candidates for changing classification from Class 4 to Trail or from Class 3 to Class 2. Once the topic and list of roads is identified he can prepare a meeting schedule giving a time that we will be at each road so members of the public can find us and participate in discussions. Then the board can convene at the municipal building for a more comprehensive meeting. Is there interest in scheduling a couple of mobile meetings?

Eben said he is very interested. He personally would like to go about it a different way. He suggested organizing it by plow routes. The plow routes cover every Class 2 and Class 3 road. There could be a separate time to look at sections of Class 4 road that might be candidates for reclassification. He would like to get the highway foreman or a highway department employee to ride with the board. He would like to see if we could get a bus from the college. Anyone from the public could request a seat on the bus. Brian said he thinks we could do it that way.

Duncan said he wonders if we should have a planning meeting first to get a better understanding of what roads we might want to visit. Beth said we talk about roads all the time. She would support doing a plow route but not all in one day. We spend a lot of time talking about Class 4 roads. She thinks it would be a mistake if we do not venture onto them if we are in the area. She thinks we should formally invite anyone from the road crew who wants to join, as well as the Planning Commission. She suggested we could give maps of the plow routes to the Planning Commission and ask if there are roads they would want us to look at, then use that information to figure out how to schedule a tour. She thinks we have to have meeting points and times planned because not everyone will want to be on the bus.

Scott said he was with the Planning Commission when they looked at Basin Road, which is a Class 4 road. A bus would never get down that road and it took a few hours for the Planning Commission to walk it. He would suggest leaving Class 4 roads for a time when they can be

walked and staying on Class 2 and Class 3 roads. He doesn't see it as realistic to look at Class 4 roads. Eben said under the policy we have considered the road foreman would travel Class 4 roads once a year and report on them to the board Scott suggested Jason might want to use an ATV to get onto some of the roads to inspect them. Beth said she wasn't talking about visiting all Class 4 roads, just certain ones that have been brought up to the board.

Mark said he is not particularly interested in plow routes or in seeing Class 2 roads but he is very interested in Class 4 roads. He thinks it would be very helpful to see those. Beth said one thing that is of interest to her is the Class 3 roads that are actually driveways. Mark asked what the board would accomplish by viewing those roads. Beth said she agrees with Mark about Class 2 roads and she is not sure how much she would get from driving Class 3 roads but she might benefit from something Jason might point out. Mark suggested maybe the board would not drive every plow route but just go where Brian and Jason say there are highlights.

Eric suggested doing a pilot tour with limited scope and seeing how it works. Eben suggested starting with one plow route. Brian suggested he and Jason could pick a plow route and see how many points of interest they want the board to see in that area and that will give us an idea how much time we need. Beth asked that someone from the Planning Commission be added to that discussion.

Eric suggested running this by VLCT. Probably a mobile selectboard meeting is allowable under open meeting law if the board takes no action. Brian said we will get assistance about that.

Duncan said he has a pretty good understanding of our highways. We hired Jason and the highway crew to take care of highways. If there is a particular issue of concern he would expect them to come to us. In a way the selectboard going out and dealing with this is stepping on the toes of the person we hired to maintain highways. He wonders if it is a good use of our time. Eben asked Jason and Brian if they or the employees would feel like this is micromanagement. Jason said no. He thinks it would be good for board members to see the roads. Duncan said he would recommend that each person on the selectboard ride along once a winter with one of the employees when they are plowing. Eric agreed that there is value in that.

***15. Project Commitment Form for Scribner Bridge Scoping Study***

Brian said we applied for a Transportation Alternatives Grant for a scoping study of Scribner Bridge because we want to get more details about what repairs are recommended. We ended up not going with mitigation to incorporate a low water crossing on Rocky Road but that is part of the study. The study includes repairs and stormwater improvements. They need a project commitment form from us before they will issue a contract for the grant. It says we will abide by their terms and commit the money.

Eben asked how much we are committing. Brian said our local match is around \$8K.

**Mark moved to approve the project commitment form necessary to get the Transportations Alternatives Grant for the scoping study of Scribner Bridge and to authorize the chair to sign it, Eric seconded and the motion was passed.**

***16. Noise Ordinance Waiver Requests***

Brian said we received two noise ordinance waiver requests from the skatepark. One is for Green Up Day on May 7, with a rain date of May 8. That is an annual cleanup event and celebration at the skatepark. The second one is part of an effort to raise funds to make a few improvements and extend the ramp system to include new features. The skatepark committee will also be seeking grants. **Duncan moved to approve both the noise ordinance waiver requests from the skatepark with no conditions, Eric seconded and the motion was passed.**

***17. Update on Local Cannabis Licenses***

Brian said he has been talking with James Pepper, chair of the state Cannabis Control Board. Brian has explained that our local cannabis control commission needs to see some information in order to approve licenses and we don't want to have to create our own set of paperwork. They are beginning to understand that and are working on developing a way for municipalities to get information on license applicants.

***18. Planning for Sheriff's Contract Renewal***

Brian said there are points of negotiating the sheriff's department contract that the board might feel are inappropriate to discuss in open session. This agenda item is for high-level planning about what we want to have in place before we talk to the sheriff about the contract. We haven't looked at examples of State Police contracts or municipalities contracting with each other. What does the board want to have prepared in advance?

Eric said it is not just this board that makes that call. Beth said she was involved in the discussion with other towns about law enforcement. There was talk about how the current contract didn't meet the needs of all three towns. Both Johnson and Wolcott brought up specific items. The contract we have now is very old. She would like to see new contract language but she also would like to see us working with the other towns and talking about types of services we would expect in our contract.

Eric said we really should be acting now if we want a new contract because it would start July 1. He suggested that the chair reach out to Hyde Park and Wolcott and see if there is interest in a joint meeting of the three towns. Beth agreed. She said she doesn't know that we will have new contract language before the new contract needs to be signed again but we should be thinking about what that looks like longer term.

Mark said ATV enforcement is one issue. The sheriff's department doesn't seem to want to enforce it but we are paying them.

Duncan said he thinks Eric is right that we are running out of time to make changes to the current contract but there may be a couple of tweaks we could do to address some of our basic concerns. He likes the idea of having the chair reach out to the chairs of the other towns to discuss options. We don't all have to have exactly the same contract. Roger Marcoux would like it but we don't have to. But Roger does have to sign the contract. Eric said he is not sure about having different contracts. Could we? Maybe, but we never have. Beth said

Elmore contracts with the sheriff's department and has a different contract. Eric said Elmore is not an equal partner with the other towns. They contract for a set number of hours and what they pay goes to offset our patrol budget cost. The sheriff's department is using the same manpower for Elmore when the deputies have extra time available.

Scott said this afternoon he noticed the state trooper parked at the AOT garage and a sheriff's department vehicle also doing radar on Route 15. That was duplication within a 5-mile radius. He sees cars driving fast on Clay Hill and Railroad Street and he is hearing that the sheriff's department doesn't have the resources to patrol often. When he sees them duplicating with the state on state highway he wonders if they would be better off on our secondary streets. Why are they patrolling on the state highway when the State Police are already doing it? We used to get sheriff's reports with the ratio of warnings to tickets and it always seemed lopsided, with more warnings than tickets. There are other parts of the state where if you go 10 or 15 mph above the speed limit you would get a ticket. He thinks speeding is a public safety issue. It seems unchecked.

Jeff Bickford said his understanding was that there was a town appointed committee to review the contract and what we need as a community from the sheriff's department. The last time he looked for minutes it looked like that committee was on hiatus. Is it still active? Eben said the committee ran into a roadblock and kind of fell apart. It also had members from Wolcott and Hyde Park. Beth said there also was a group from Johnson working with the sheriff's department on racial equity and other items around training and accountability. Jeff said he has been part of that group. Kyle said she and Jeff are both on that group but they don't talk about budget, just equity. That group is still meeting. It is a grassroots group, not a town appointed group.

Jeff asked if there needs to be a group discussing what we want as a town and asking if the sheriff's department wants to fulfill that. The sheriff's department contract is very expensive for what we are getting. In his work he prefers a local police department over the state police. He doesn't want to be bound to what other towns have. He thinks we should be able to put our own priorities into any contract. If we had a village Police Department we would establish our own priorities. He thinks it ties our hand if we do not say what we want for our town. He thinks we should explore studying at a town level what we want.

Beth asked Brian to send out a copy of the current contract. The board can discuss what we want to see on the contract in the short term and over the longer term we can address the approach to the contract or replacing it. She knows at least one of the other three towns was talking about coming up with a different contract.

#### ***19. Update on River Road East Stormwater***

Brian said he would recommend going into executive session to discuss some of what he has to report. On River Road East there are stormwater improvements that we have talked to the village about how to handle. There was a problem last year with a catch basin that collapsed and caused a sinkhole. There are real concerns about the future disposition of these stormwater structures. There have been disagreements about whether they are town or village responsibility. The village position is that they are the town's responsibility.

**Duncan moved to find that discussing the River Road East stormwater issues in open session would place the town at a disadvantage and therefore to go into executive session as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1), Beth seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 9:50.**

The board came out of executive session at 10:10. At that time the board consented to switch items 12 and 13 given that there was a guest who was interested in item 13.

***20. Executive Session – Attorney Communications on ATV Agreement***

**At 10:15 Beth moved and Eric seconded to enter into executive session as permitted by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1) because the town had received communication from the town attorney about the VASA Trails Program Resolution of Commitment from Municipality document and premature public disclosure of the communication may place the town at a substantial disadvantage.** The board came out of executive session at 10:34.

**Duncan moved and Mark seconded to ask Brian to write a letter to VASA and Green Mountain ATV based on the advice the town received from the attorney. The motion was passed.**

***21. Executive Session to Discuss Planning for Labor Negotiations***

**At 10:44 Duncan moved and Eric seconded that the board should discuss its planning and positions in advance of renewed labor negotiations and that premature public disclosure of the board’s negotiating positions may place the town at a substantial disadvantage so the board should enter into executive session to plan for labor negotiations as permitted by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1).** The board came out of executive session at 11:01.

***22. Adjourn***

The meeting was adjourned at 11:02.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*