

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, APRIL 4, 2022

Present: Selectboard members: Beth Foy, Duncan Hastings, Eric Osgood, Mark Woodward

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Lois Frey

Absent: Eben Patch

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Beth called the meeting to order at 6:33.

2. Selectboard Issues and Concerns

Duncan asked if the next agenda will include official action on taking the ARPA standard allowance.

3. Additions, Changes to Agenda

Updates on the Holcomb House and the Sinclair Road speed limit sign were added to the agenda.

4. Sinclair Road Speed Limit Sign

Beth said the speed limit sign for Sinclair Road has been updated from 30 mph to 25 mph.

5. Review Invoices and Orders

The board reviewed and discussed invoices and orders. Brian was asked to get more information about what the Duramax purchase was.

6. Review and Approve Minutes of Meetings Past

Duncan moved to approve the minutes of March 21, 2022, Eric seconded and the motion was passed.

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

Eric moved to approve liquor license renewals for Sodexo, River Valley Store, Johnson Jolley and Dollar General and to issue the standard letter to the businesses, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.

8. Review Planned Purchases

Brian said there is one planned purchase over \$1000 – half of the payment for the trompe l'oeil for the Ted Alexander Welcome Center. We are paying half up front and half upon completion. The previous board saw a basic outline of Howard Romero's proposal. There will be photos edited and placed to look similar to a train car on the side of the building facing the trail.

Beth said the contract we signed with the Alexander family specifically stated that Howard was to do the trompe l'oeil. Eric said Eben thought the board should approve every photo. Eric feels as long as we have approved general guidelines, like nothing offensive or politically motivated, he doesn't see any reason to approve every picture. Duncan said he knows a little about the photos because Howard spoke to the Historical Society about borrowing a uniform. He believes one is an 1890's couple and one is a World War II soldier in uniform with a woman in a nurse uniform. Lois said she thinks the third is a 1920's flapper.

Duncan moved to approve payment of half the cost of the trompe l'oeil for the Ted Alexander Welcome Center, Mark seconded and the motion was passed.

9. *Holcombe House Update*

Brian said some Historical Society artifacts and a portion of the Holcomb House were damaged today due to a spill in the apartment upstairs. It appears the tenants spilled enough soda to soak through the floor and go into the space below. Brian Raulinaitis is assisting with cleanup and repairs.

Lois Frey said what appeared to be soda landed right on a very old historical chair. There were a couple of other spots on the ceiling where it was leaking. Donnie went upstairs and found at least 50 to 100 cups and containers with unfinished soda in them that had been left as trash and tipped over. Brian said he spoke to the tenants and they indicated it was soda. There was no dispute that they spilled it.

Eric asked if they cleaned out the room. Brian said Brian Raulinaitis was going to assess the damage upstairs. Brian S. hasn't heard his report yet. Brian S. instructed the tenants to do everything they could to clean it up immediately. They have taken some garbage out. He hasn't inspected it to see if it has been properly cleaned up.

Beth asked when their lease is up. Brian said May 31. Beth asked, we are required to give the tenants 30 days' notice no matter when the lease is up, right? Brian said that is right. The lease can be terminated any time with 30 days' notice. Mark said that doesn't mean anything if they don't want to go. Brian said notifying them starts a process.

10. *Selectboard Planning and Priorities*

Duncan asked if the board could go through the previously created list of priorities. Mark asked if the selectboard talked to the Planning Commission and other town groups when coming up with these priorities. Eric said the board created the list with everyone who was in the room at the time. Brian said he doesn't believe the Planning Commission was present. Mark said it seems like they would be the people thinking 10 years down the road.

Beth said she is thinking that the priorities identified tonight will help dictate what is on the board's priority list for meetings throughout the year. If something is at the bottom of the list it is unlikely to see the light of day. If it is near the top of the list she feels we should talk about it frequently and see progress.

Brian reviewed the list from last year and explained each of the items and what progress has been made. The highest priority item was the light industrial park.

The new website was second. Brian said we now have a new website host and the website got some minor changes because some features we had been using were no longer available but it still needs more of an update.

Next was flood mitigation. Brian said that covered flood mitigation on town properties, the Silver Jackets program, research and information about ice jams and general flood preparation. Mark asked if included roads – ditching, etc. Brian said yes. Duncan asked if there were specific grant opportunities we were looking to pursue. Brian said we hadn't

identified anything beyond the Silver Jackets program. Duncan asked Brian to explain what that program was. Brian said it is a research group out of New Hampshire that works with the federal government. We were eligible for that program based on the ice jam flooding we had in 2018. They came in and did some additional modeling and we have received a rough draft of their final report with recommendations of things we can do between flood stages and how we should deal with future ice jams.

Building maintenance would include maintenance on the municipal building or on any other town property.

Financial security covers updates on our policies and procedures. Brian said we have made some progress. We have gone out to bid for auditing. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns has hired a financial consultant who can help us prep for our first audit. Rosemary and Brian completed a checklist that outlined good financial practices and policies. We scored well on practices and not so well on policies. The VLCT financial adviser can help us with that as well.

Brian said we have made some progress on the town/village merger item. A subcommittee has met a handful of times.

Ground has been broken on the arboretum. Signage has been installed for it.

Our current gravel pit is nearing the end of its life. There is some interest in acquiring property adjoining our current gravel pit. We are continuing to discuss that with the property owner. Duncan asked how close we are to not being able to get any sand or gravel out of the existing pit. Brian said he would say 3-4 years.

We haven't made much progress on branding and marketing.

Regarding cybersecurity, we have had a few discussions, a couple of trainings and some improvements from our IT support group. Brian said there is still a lot more to do.

Multi-use trails and rec development is a project in and around the former talc mill property.

Progress on economic development includes setting aside money in next year's budget. This item will also include grant seeking.

Town clerk plan means planning for Rosemary's retirement. Duncan asked if a better title for this would be "town clerk/treasurer plan." Brian said yes, that is an important part of the role. Duncan said we are a lot more at risk of getting a less qualified person for the treasurer position. Mark asked if the board has discussed making the position appointed rather than elected. Board members said yes.

The Scribner Bridge item also included Rocky Road. Rocky Road has been repaired. We are hoping to hear soon about an engineering grant for Scribner Bridge. The bridge is open but we want an engineering report on needed repairs to it.

The school merger item can be removed from the list.

We are doing background checks on rec program volunteers who work with kids, but we don't have a child protection policy yet. We have good practice but not an adopted policy.

Beth said she doesn't understand why road maintenance and improvements is on the list. It is something we are required to do. Brian said he believes this item was a way to consolidate a number of different ideas such as reclassifying roads and possibly mud abatement.

There is a proposed pedestrian bridge between Old Mill Park and the skatepark.

The sewer service item is about expansion of sewer service outside the village. Brian said in past discussions the village has been interested in expanding their service area. Beth said expanding into the Gould Hill area to allow development there has been discussed. Brian said the selectboard has also expressed an interest in having a smoother process for approving or denying requests from individuals who are in or near the town sewer service area. Eric said we have charged the Planning Commission with determining where it makes sense to expand sewer service. Duncan said there is case law and Act 250 decisions on expansion of sewer service areas.

Brian said our revolving loan fund is active. We are not making as many loans as we would like. He has a meeting with someone next week about a possible business loan. We need to make more loans.

Beth said she thinks the employee accountability plan item led to development of a policy outlining who employees could report issues to so they would not necessarily need to go to their direct supervisor if their direct supervisor is part of the issue. Brian said that was a whistleblower policy. He wants to double check whether the board actually adopted it.

The final 4 items on the list were Class 4 road policy, broadband, equity, and snow machines in the village.

Everyone present, including Rosemary, Lois, and Donna, was invited to put up to 10 items on the wall they thought should be priorities.

The items posted on the wall were:

- Public service awards ceremony (to recognize people with at least 20 years of service)
- NVU – recognizing its importance and considering how to support its continuation
- General priorities for federal grants
- ARPA funds – public process
- ARPA funds – specific projects
- Revolving loan fund
- Economic development
- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Town/village merger

Clerk/treasurer plan
Light industrial park
New website – including communication portal for volunteer groups
Union contract negotiations
Cybersecurity
ATV ordinance
Building maintenance – incl. building maintenance plan and plan for Holcomb House
Gravel pit
Road reclassification
Mud abatement
Decarbonizing the town
Multiple use trails/ecology plan for talc mill property
Bridge improvements
Class 4 road policy

Everyone was asked to distribute up to 10 dots among the priorities to indicate relative importance. The items that received the most votes were ARPA funds, economic development, light industrial park, ATV ordinance and decarbonizing the town.

Beth read off the total number of votes for each item and she read the list Eben had emailed of his priorities: light industrial park, new website, flood mitigation, building maintenance plan, financial security, town/village merger, gravel pit, cybersecurity, economic development, town clerk plan, Scribner Bridge, and road maintenance plan.

Beth said the light industrial park got the most votes. Next was the ATV ordinance. After that ARPA, economic development and decarbonization were tied.

Eric said economic development and the light industrial park might almost be the same thing. Mark said he was thinking getting an economic development person on board would be a focus.

Brian said we had the recommendation that our best option for using ARPA funds is to incorporate them as lost revenue. That frees us from a lot of strings attached. Most organizations are recommending taking the \$10 million standard exemption and putting the money into the general fund. It was agreed to put a vote on doing that on the next agenda.

Duncan said the ARPA funds can be used as a match for other grant programs. His belief is that we should use those funds to create the biggest bang for the buck we can by leveraging other grant programs. Brian said if we decided not to incorporate the money into the general fund as lost revenue then we could not use it as matching funds. If we can't use it as matching funds the scope of what we can do with it is greatly reduced. He thinks we should use it for matching funds.

Eric said if we put it into the current year's budget as lost revenue we will show a very large surplus at the end of the year. We will have to think about how we craft our proposal for spending that money when we present the budget next year. Brian said a public participation

process is not required if we use the money as lost revenue but he thinks public participation in selecting projects is important.

Brian said he wants to send a letter of intent to apply for a Northern Borders Regional Commission grant. Northern Borders Regional Commission works well with the Economic Development Authority and the EDA has also shown great interest in supporting our project.

Duncan said he supports the idea of a public participation process but at end of the day this board will make the decision about how the funds get spent. If we have a public participation process there could be half a dozen competing interests. Beth agreed but said she thinks we have heard loudly and clearly that there is interest in the light industrial park. Mark said he thinks it would be nice if we could coalesce on an idea and sell it to the public. Duncan said he thinks at a future meeting we have to talk about what a public participation process will look like.

Brian said we will not necessarily need to spend all our ARPA funds on one project. We may be able to use ARPA money as seed money for more than one project.

Duncan said the village is also getting \$450K in ARPA funds. We need water, sewer and electric service at the industrial park. Should we suggest that the village contribute some ARPA funds to that? Eric said he thinks that is a worthwhile discussion but they have quite a bit of their ARPA money allocated to balance their budget and a lot of the rest is intended to pay for work on their building that has mold issues.

Beth asked if we would have to put the money in this fiscal year's budget or if it could be in next year's. Brian said he wants to do more checking before answering that. He had wanted to bring it into next year's budget but he is not sure if that is possible with the deadline for committing to using it for lost revenue. Beth asked what the deadline is. Duncan said he thinks it is April 30. Eric said even if it goes into this year's budget we don't have to have a plan for spending it until we are presenting the budget for the next fiscal year. Brian said it will show as excess from FY22 when we are proposing the FY24 budget, because the FY23 budget has already been approved. Duncan said we have received half and we won't get the next half until after July 1, so half will be in one fiscal year and half in the next.

Lois asked if there is a timeline that could be put together for people in the town to have a sense of what is going on with the ARPA funds. Beth said she thinks we need a 3-month rolling plan showing deadlines and what needs to be accomplished in the next 3 months. And at some point we should think about a more long term plan. The longer-term road map view doesn't need to talk about what we are spending the money on, just the milestones along the way. We should make it clear that we intend to get public comment and when we need it by.

Duncan said if we are going to hire someone for economic development he thinks we should hire someone as soon as possible. We will need to decide on the job description. That will drive some of our discussions. Some of what Beth is looking for may be some of what the new economic development coordinator gets tasked with. Brian said we won't have money to hire that person until our FY23 budget starts on July 1. Beth said she doesn't think the

economic developer should be directly responsible for understanding ARPA fund use. She would be more comfortable having Brian keep doing that and having the economic development person talk about economic development things we could use ARPA funds for. Mark said he thinks that gets back to the question of the job description. He noted that it may be difficult to find someone to fill the position right now. Duncan said he is not sure he agrees with Beth. To him, the core of the position is dealing with grants and grant programs. He thinks it will require both people.

Brian said the decarbonization priority fits well with developing a building plan. We know we need some significant upgrades to the heating system at the town garage. Mark suggested that we start thinking about our vehicles. Eric pointed out that we are getting power from a solar array. Beth said no one knows that. How do we make that known?

Beth said she will make sure the top 5 priorities hit our first meeting of each month. If there aren't significant developments in one of them for a month or two we will want to ask ourselves what we are going to do about it. Some other items further down on the list will also work their way up in importance and we will need to address them.

Beth suggested that in addition to discussing these items at work session meetings once a month, a board member could take each of them and try to push it along or see if other community members are interested.

Duncan said one thing that didn't get a lot of votes is NVU. He thinks that is tied into economic development and other things. He thinks it is important. Beth said someone from NVU will be at our next meeting. Duncan said he would like NVU to know that there is contact person on our board if they need help.

11. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:36.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths