

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 2023

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

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Stacey Waterman, Dean Locke, Casey Romero, Joie Lehouillier, Kyle Nuse, Sen. Rich Westman (remote), Rep. Dan Noyes (remote), Lois Frey (remote), Andrew Moskovitz (remote)

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

**1. Call to Order**

Beth called the meeting to order at 6:01.

**2. Additions, Changes to Agenda**

Beth added discussion of the spigot at Legion Field and discussion of a celebration of Eric's years on the board.

**3. Review FY24 Town of Johnson Library Budget**

Stacey Waterman said she had already talked with the board about why revenue has been down for the past 2 years. The library board tried to cut some costs but there have been increases in some costs.

Eben asked how the library board came up with the increase for salaries. Stacey said it is based on the increase the selectboard decided on for town employees. There is 6 months at a 6% increase and 6 months at a 7.4% increase. Eben said he doesn't see how that leads to a 10% increase. Stacey said it is because the 7.4% increase is on top of the 6% increase.

Duncan joined the meeting. He said he had had trouble logging on earlier but he wanted to make an addition to the agenda. Beth said that could be discussed after the library budget discussion.

Eben said the library budget increased 19% last year and is proposed to increase 11% for the upcoming year. Thirty percent over two years seems very high. Beth asked if the library board discussed areas to cut. Stacey said they did and they made cuts where they could, but there are not many places where they can cut and still maintain the building, keep the heat and lights on and maintain programming.

Eric noted that even though the town's contribution may be increasing, the overall budget increase is even less than the cost of living.

Eben noted that building capital expense was quite a bit underspent in 2022 and the library hasn't spent anything so far this year. Stacey said last year they had trouble getting contractors. This year they want to start replacing some basement windows. Windows are expensive so they are trying to spread the cost over two fiscal years, the current one and the next. They are thinking they will buy some windows and hold them until they can have them installed in the next fiscal year or have some of the worst ones replaced this fiscal year and other replaced next year.

Beth said she sees effort in decreasing expenses in a number of areas and areas with increases are areas the board does not have a lot of options to control. For instance, they have to heat the building.

Stacey said circulation and programming numbers have returned to where they were pre-COVID or surpassed where they were.

Eben said he thinks we need to think about making some buildings more efficient and the library would be one of those. Stacey said if there is any help the town can provide in that area, that would be great. This year they are having more insulation added in the ceiling. Mark suggested a programmable thermostat would be a good idea to save on heat.

Duncan said he thinks the library board did a great job. It looks like total expenses are 4.3%. He would say that is a good job.

**4. *Additions, Changes to Agenda***

Duncan said he would like to formally take action on the proposal from Mumley and Associates for the light industrial park. He is prepared to make a motion to review and approve that contract tonight or he would like to make sure it is on the agenda for the next meeting. Beth said she thinks we should warn something like that. Eben said he agrees with Duncan that we can't waste time on this but he doesn't have the contract in front of him and fresh in his mind so he would rather wait until the next meeting. Duncan said he is likely to propose paying the \$32,500 cost with ARPA funds. Beth said this will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

**5. *Visit and Discussion with Local Legislators***

Beth said the board is interested to hear what legislators have in mind coming into the next session and whether we should expect anything different from what is typical with respect to the budget.

Rep. Dan Noyes said he is on the human services committee again. It is really early for him and Sen. Westman to say if there will be more money. There is a report put out every year on revenue for the ed fund but every year by the time we get to town meeting the numbers are totally different. We can't rely on those numbers. Sen. Westman said as of the end of November state revenues were up about \$80 million across all state funds. Most of that is in the general fund, and most is one-time funds. When the governor spoke today he talked about an initiative to help small towns deal with grant applications and ways to help them get grant applications in if they have sewage treatment or water problems. That might be helpful to the Village of Johnson. There is one-time money out there. The first place he wants it to go is the state college system. They are asking for \$10.5 million in one-time funds to allow them to reduce tuition and an increase of about \$2.5 million in base funding, but that will be in next year's budget. The one-time money could come in a budget adjustment for the FY23 budget. State revenues are up in a way that will only give the state money to spend one time.

Rep. Noyes said he is on the Rural Development Caucus. One thing they spoke about was the capacity of rural towns to access grants. He knows there will be legislation around investments to help towns apply for and administer grants. There was also talk about a universal grant application that would be the same for different grants so towns could apply for multiple grants from different agencies with the same form. The caucus is interested in putting in an omnibus

bill to help rural towns. They also talked about maybe having a different match formula for grants based on things like population and income.

Sen. Westman said any input the town could provide related to grants would be helpful. Beth said the selectboard has been talking a lot about grant administration. Anything to help with that would be helpful. The board has also talked a lot about how to fund larger projects for building efficiency and maintenance and how the increasing costs of materials and equipment along with things like fuel are pushing our budgets up. Sen. Westman said any information or recommendations about what the legislature could do to make it easier for the town would be great.

Mark said PILOT is critical to the survival of our town. He asked what the legislators are seeing with regard to statewide property tax and CLA in the rest of the state. Is the education fund pretty flush? Sen. Westman said as of the end of November the education fund remained ahead of forecast by about 9.5%. Mark asked, so there is a possibility that the statewide property tax might get reduced a bit? Sen. Westman said revenue estimates will come in in January. The education fund is running ahead of forecast. A majority of that is coming from sales tax but it is 3.2% ahead even with property tax, so if the numbers hold firm we seem to be in an okay position.

Rep. Noyes said there is also talk about how CLA across Vermont has drastically changed with the change in market prices. Legislators have been talking about reassessment and how to pay for it. Sen. Westman said it becomes a problem because CLAs have changed to such a large degree that many towns are facing being out of compliance. There are not enough assessors out there. The town might want to be proactive. One thing the senate has talked about in the last few years is whether the per parcel amount of money the state gives back should go up. But even if the towns had more money, there are not enough people to do those appraisals.

Eben said maybe the way appraisals are done needs to be simplified. Rep. Noyes said he has heard of a proposal to move the education fund from property tax to income tax. Beth and Eben said that does not solve the problem of doing reappraisals.

Duncan said we are going to be operating without a town assessor. We entered into a service agreement with two other towns to try and hire an assessor through the Lamoille County Planning Commission but as of tonight LCPC has not had a single person respond to the ad for that position. We have also talked about sharing a position on a regional level for community or economic development. It might be appropriate to think about amending the statutes to allow greater flexibility for towns to do intermunicipal contracts. Sen. Westman said that is a very useful suggestion that legislators can bring up in the right places.

Eric said he is wondering with the drop in the workforce what we might be looking at for reduction in income tax revenue to the state. He is also wondering about the amount of PILOT money. In the current budget year the state provided about \$750,000 to Johnson for aid to highways, PILOT etc. He would hope none of that is in jeopardy because we are depending on that as revenue.

Sen. Westman said in the short term he doesn't see anyone changing PILOT payments but our workforce has dropped by 26,000 since 2019. We have one-time money now so he thinks for the next year we are okay but going beyond that the signs don't look good.

Beth said law enforcement is about a quarter of our budget. It is expensive for us. In her view much of the cost of law enforcement is actually social service cost. It concerns her that our costs are going up so much and we have very little control over that. We need to figure out something to do there.

Beth said we are going to pay \$32,000 or \$33,000 for a study that is not going to give us a design or plan. How do towns like ours manage that? We have to bring someone in to do construction project management. Those types of economic development projects are important to make us sustainable and bring people in. We need infrastructure to support people moving here. People can't afford to live here because we don't have infrastructure to build economically. We are a big enough community that we should be able to support white collar communities with regard to internet, electricity, etc. Having state support in bigger economic projects and visionary projects would be very beneficial. Duncan noted that the Mumley proposal would be to update an existing engineering proposal and it would get us to the point of being able to submit for an Act 250 permit.

Sen. Westman said the whole mental health system needs to be looked at. Places like Lamoille County Mental Health are stretched to the limit. That is affecting local law enforcement and the hospital.

Rep. Noyes said legislators are working with the sheriff's department in trying to help them with their retirement by allowing the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department to get into the 20-year retirement plan. That would help with recruitment and retention. Beth said that won't cut the cost of service. It will just add more people. She is not saying we don't need more people but that is a different problem.

Sen. Westman said board members should send any feedback or ideas in writing to Brian. Legislators welcome doing this more often. It is easy for them to join the board if something comes up. Beth said if something comes up that they want to talk about they should reach out to the board. *(The legislators left at 6:47.)*

#### **6. Review FY24 Town of Johnson Budget**

The board reviewed the proposed Rec Committee budget. Brian said revenue is down a little. Duncan asked if the gymnastics revenue figure is correct. Beth had previously noted that it seemed low. Dean Locke said he has been trying to find someone to provide gymnastics instruction but he has not been able to find someone who is interested in volunteering. Beth said even though we have always paid for gymnastics instruction we still get a good amount of revenue. If we feel we cannot offer gymnastics that would be a reason for revenue to be as low as it is in the proposed budget, but if we think we can offer gymnastics she thinks revenue should be higher. Dean said he also has been unable to find a dance instructor. Beth said she thinks the revenue for gymnastics/dance should be increased if we think we will have gymnastics or dance.

Eric noted that currently revenue and expense are the same. If we don't get additional revenue we also will not have additional expense. Beth said but if we offer it, expenses will be less than revenue. Eric said it won't harm us if we leave it as it is and get extra revenue. Duncan asked, don't we always face uncertainty about whether we will be able to offer all programs? He advocates budgeting as if we are going to have each program. He suggests adding more revenue and increasing expense by a lesser amount.

Beth said for basketball the estimated final amount for the end of FY23 is \$2000 but the amount proposed for next year is less. Shouldn't the number for next year be the same as our estimated final amount for this year?

It was suggested that the unused phone and mileage lines could be removed. (*Kyle Nuse arrived at 7:03.*) Eben asked, isn't the mileage line for mileage reimbursement? Brian said we cover that under General Office.

Duncan said we paid Lisa Crews for detailing her car because she had never submitted any mileage claims and she felt there was wear and tear on her vehicle. If Dean is not submitting mileage, he encourages him to do so. Dean said he is.

Duncan said he tends to think mileage reimbursement for the Rec Committee should stay in the Rec Committee budget rather than being in General Office expense. Eben agreed. It was agreed to keep the mileage expense line in the Rec Committee budget and to move \$150 from the mileage expense line under General Office to that line.

Eben asked if we know where we are planning to do facilities maintenance work that is budgeted. Brian said a significant amount will be continuing grounds maintenance at Old Mill Park. Beth asked for more information on what needs to be done there. Dean said there is still work to be done on the fields to get them back to sustainability. Two of them were deteriorating due to damage done the year before. We now have a new playground. And the Rec Committee is looking into using the kiosk area where the bathroom is in a better capacity. The original vision was to have concessions available there. There are some things that need to be done to make it usable. But the biggest amount is going to maintaining the sports field and grounds. The line item also includes the portable toilet cost.

Beth said she is concerned about recreation because expenses compared to revenues are going in the wrong direction. Expenses are going up and revenue is going down. Part of proposing the rec coordinator position was trying to make these budget lines net zero.

Duncan said he thinks he heard Dean mention a year-round portable toilet at Legion Field as part of what is included in this budget, but at the last meeting the board discussed removing that. Does the Rec Committee think it should be there year-round? Dean said it is helpful to have it available for people who are using the skating rink. Beth said there are about 4 months between the end of Tuesday Night Live and the time when the skating rink starts being used. It could be removed and then another one could be delivered when the rink is in use. Dean said he could look into that. It is still there right now. Eric said it won't be needed for March to July. Duncan said in the past we had a skating rink there but no toilet. Dean said now the pizza oven is there

too and there are community gatherings at the oven. Beth said the oven committee has their own budget if they want a portable toilet.

Beth asked Dean to bring her comments about revenue to the Rec Committee.

Duncan asked if there is any reason we want to increase or decrease the amount budgeted for PILOT revenue. Beth said it sounds like not this year, based on the conversation with the legislators. (*Dean left at 7:19.*) Eben said he thinks for accurate budgeting it would be good to increase that amount but there is nothing wrong with being conservative on the revenue side. Eric suggested increasing it by \$10K and it was agreed to do that.

Duncan said he would recommend having the amount brought in as revenue from the restricted fund for records preservation equal the expense for records preservation, which is \$7,500. We need to have something shown under revenue to show money is coming in from the reserve. It was agreed to put \$7,500 for both.

Duncan suggested reducing listers contracted service expense from \$25K to \$24K but it was agreed to keep it at \$25K.

Duncan said line 234 has \$7,000 as a placeholder for work on the Holcomb House. He would be okay with lowering it to \$3,000 if we were to dedicate some of our surplus and put it into the capital buildings and reserve fund. It was agreed to readdress this after deciding on how to allocate surplus funds.

Duncan said he thinks Casey Romero was thinking we might dedicate some ARPA funds to the skatepark but we haven't done that so he wonders if we should change the amount budgeted for the skatepark. Beth said the amount does not include ARPA, just planned expenses for grant applied for that the skatepark committee expects to receive. Casey agreed.

Duncan said he was thinking the contract we have with Pike was going to be completed in this fiscal year. Is that correct? Brian said that is our expectation. Duncan said if that is correct his recommendation is in line 366 for the estimated year end paving amount we should put in either the contracted price or a sum equal to the \$100,000 that was budgeted plus the amount in a dedicated reserve, which he thinks is \$163,680. If we do that, then he thinks we need to bring in \$163,680 as revenue somewhere. Eric said the net effect of that is zero but it is more transparent. The board agreed to do that, adding a new line to show the money coming in as revenue. Eric suggested using wording for the line item that would apply in other future situations as well.

Beth questioned whether the numbers in lines 222 and 223 are correct. Both are heating related. Eben said we asked Brian to recalculate the numbers and they were presented before as what is shown in the budget now. Brian said he thinks they are correct as they are now. He will check the figures to be sure.

Eben asked if we are trying to span two fiscal years to spend for a fence for Grow Cemetery. We had \$6,000 allocated this year and he believes the fence cost is around \$11,000. Eric asked if the contractor would just put up fence on two sides in this fiscal year. Brian suggested maybe

we would put all the fence up at once in June and pay half the cost in one fiscal year and half in the next. He is not sure if they would put up two sides initially and then put up two more later. Eric said if we use everything budgeted for cemetery maintenance on the fence then we will not be able to have any stone work done. Eben suggested increasing the amount in line 227 to \$7,500 to pay for the fence and also try to catch up on stone maintenance and the board agreed to that. Duncan brought up the possibility of using volunteers rather than a contractor to put up the fence.

Eben proposed increasing line the amount budgeted for paving capital from \$100,000 to \$105,000. He feels we are severely underfunding this and should catch up. The board agreed to that.

The total estimated cash on hand balance at the end of this fiscal year is \$209,547.97.

Duncan asked Rosemary if she thinks we will actually spend \$7,500 on records preservation by the end of the fiscal year. Rosemary said yes. Duncan asked, if we do, should we bring in offsetting money from the reserve fund for this year? Rosemary said we could. Eric asked why we would do that now since we are thinking we will end the year with a positive balance. Duncan said to make the positive number bigger. Beth said that would give us more of a cushion. Eric said if we got toward the end of the fiscal year we would have the ability to move funds in if needed. It sounds like we are talking about pulling money out of the reserve fund so we can add it to cash on hand and use it for something else. Eben said we would be using the money from the reserve fund for what it is intended for and using surplus from other lines for something else. Beth said we have a reserve fund for this purpose and we would be applying it for this purpose. Eric said if we got into a deficit situation he would advocate bringing that money in but he wouldn't do it yet. Eben agreed. Duncan said he is okay either way.

Brian said the bulk of the estimated cash on hand balance is from the balance left over from FY22. Mark asked if it is atypical that we only expect \$4,000 surplus this year. Brian said not really. We try to have a pretty conservative estimate at this time of year of how the year will end 6 months from now.

Brian said traditionally we have dedicated a certain amount of surplus to lower the amount that needs to be raised by taxes. He put in \$125,000 to start with to lower taxes. The risk is that that number is used to set the tax rate so if the expected surplus is less than expected we might have set the tax rate lower than it needed to be. Mark said \$125,000 seems conservative to him. Eric said we typically apply about half of the surplus to reduce taxes. Once that amount is approved by the voters it is locked but there are other places we can move money around if it turns out we have less surplus than expected. For instance if we were short \$20,000 and we had planned to allocate \$20,000 to the buildings and grounds reserve fund we would not have to make that allocation.

Casey asked if it is possible to use part of the surplus for a possible grant match or other economic development costs. Eben said if it is approved by the voters the money can be used in any way. Mark said that is not a bad idea.

Duncan said we could also propose leaving a certain portion of the surplus as dedicated for other purposes. That has been done in the past. If the voters approved that then his understanding is that it would give the board flexibility to spend the money on what the board determined were other purposes.

Duncan suggested adding an article to the warning seeking authorization to apply reserve funds for the purposes the board proposes. He thinks that addresses Walter Pomroy's concerns.

Duncan said if we apply \$125,000 of the surplus to the budget then there would be a 5.3% increase in the amount to be raised by taxes. He would be comfortable with that.

Duncan suggested that if the article on the budget has a phrase stating that \$125,000 will be taken from surplus to reduce taxes, then voter authority to do that is crystal clear. He also proposes an Article 7, which would be a specific article asking the voters to grant authority to the selectboard to spend the surplus on two or three different items and one of those could be "dedicated for other purposes." He thinks that of the estimated \$209,000 surplus, only \$205,000 of it (the cash on hand figure from the end of FY22) is pretty certain. Eben and Mark said that is assuming everyone pays their delinquent taxes.

Duncan suggested allocating \$15K of the surplus for highway capital reserve, \$40K for buildings and grounds reserve and \$25K for the reappraisal fund. Mark said he would like to spend money on efficiencies. Brian said that would fall under buildings and grounds. Duncan said he thinks there will be grants for that. Mark asked if we should dedicate any money for grant matches. Duncan said he thinks we should not because we don't know of any specific grants now. Mark said he disagrees. Eben suggested \$30K to the buildings and ground reserve, \$40K to the reappraisal fund and \$10K applied to the grader principal. He said he agrees with Duncan that we should plan for \$80K cash on hand after the \$125K is applied to reduce taxes (based on \$205K rather than \$209K.)

Eric said one thing we could do is to show in the budget how we are proposing to apply all the excess cash on hand. He thinks there is an advantage to that. Or we can have an article as Duncan is suggesting. The only problem with an article is if the voters vote on it then we are committed to those allocations. We can't move the money around if the situation changes. Duncan thinks we will definitely have \$205K so he thinks that is not an issue. Eric, Beth and Eben all said they prefer to show the proposed reservations in the budget rather than having an article. *(Duncan left at 8:34.)*

Brian summarized the changes he plans to make based on the discussion. He suggested he could write up suggestions to reserve funds based on ideas he heard this evening. Beth suggested using the average of the different numbers that were proposed

**7. Review Invoices and Orders**

The board reviewed invoices and orders

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

It was agreed to postpone minutes approval until next time as a couple of corrections need to be made.



**9. *Selectboard Issues/Concerns***

Mark said he has been noticing what some other towns are doing with their ARPA funds. Westford and Craftsbury are doing some creative things. Brian said there will be a roundtable discussion on uses of ARPA funds at the next conference of his professional association and he thinks he will have some good ideas to bring back next time.

Rosemary said we got our new CLA. It is down to 89.67%. Eric said at 80% we have to do a reappraisal. He thinks we probably will have to do a statistical reappraisal next year.

Rosemary said Joann Benford is not going to run for reelection for auditor. In the past the other auditors have said that once she is done they may also be done. Beth said she had asked Rosemary to post the process for running for selectboard. It was agreed that Rosemary should also mention the auditor position in that post. Rosemary said some towns have done away with the auditor position if they have a professional auditor. That would have to be approved by the voters. Eben asked if that should be considered. Brian suggested that we try to find someone this year and see if we are successful. We might be better informed next year.

**10. *Review Planned Purchases***

There were no planned purchases to review.

**11. *Johnson Beautification Committee Grant Application for Vermont Community Foundation***

Brian said the Beautification Committee is interested in applying for a Spark Grant for continuing the mural project on the town garage. Kyle Nuse said the committee would like to flank the current mural with two others showing humans in action in Johnson-specific scenes. The committee will decide with the artist what scenes they choose. They would like to get this mostly grant funded with no match involved. We tick most of the boxes for the Spark Grant so she thinks there is a good chance of getting it. They will apply for the maximum \$5,000 and for any cost beyond that they will use some of their yearly budget, fundraise and try to get materials donated. Applications are due no later than March 7. They will know by May if they get the grant. The same artist who did the other mural would be able to work through the summer again on the new murals and they could be installed in the fall. No match is required. The only thing they are asking from the town is some of the public works department's time for installation, like last time.

Eric asked what the committee will get for \$5,000. Kyle said for the Humans of Johnson mural they paid Finn Watsula \$2,500. They are hoping to get two murals, one for each side of the existing mural in a more horizontal orientation. Eric asked what it would cost to get paintings done like the ones on the silos in Cambridge. Kyle said she would imagine hundreds of thousands of dollars. That painting had to be done outside with lifts the whole time. She thinks Cambridge got bigger grants. Eric said the artist did a wonderful job on those paintings. Mark commented that they have held up very well.

Kyle said the Beautification Committee felt that Finn executed the mural very well. Finn is a recent NVU graduate and the committee valued the connection with NVU.

Beth said there has been a lot of feedback on the mural. She suggests taking that feedback as constructive and assessing possibilities based on the feedback rather than the committee already deciding that they are doing the same thing. But she is all for the grant itself.

Kyle said maybe what the committee will do is get the word out about when their meetings are and that they will be talking about this and that everyone is welcome to come. One piece of constructive feedback they received was that people wanted to see more action. They plan to speak to Finn about that. Another piece of feedback was that people wanted to see more landscapes and things that were specific to Johnson.

Eben said he would love to see something more along the lines of what they have in Cambridge. Certain members of Johnson have wanted to brand Johnson as the art capital of the state. He thinks going for the grant is great. They were complications with the timing of the installation last year. He is not committing to any specific time for the public works department to help. He would like to see sample artwork before the night of the meeting where the board selects the design.

Kyle said Finn has already drafted some preliminary sketches. She showed some sketches that had been done. They are not really specific to Johnson. The Beautification Committee would like something more tailored and recognizable. They are hoping people will read the information by the murals and learn what places are depicted.

Eben asked, so the committee wants a plaque too? Kyle said it is common to have an information plaque accompanying artwork. Eben noted that the plaque would draw people toward the building, which is a heavy equipment area. That creates a hazard.

**Eric moved to authorize applying for a Spark Grant for the mural project on the town garage, Mark seconded and the motion was passed.**

***12. Legion Field Spigot***

Eric asked, the village is now going to turn on the spigot on Legion Field? Brian said, as he understands it, yes. Eric said there are frost-free lockable spigots. He is not sure if the village looked into that. Mark said he would be surprised if they didn't. Beth said her concern is that this is not budgeted. Eric said it looks like there is extra money in facilities. If we get rid of the portable toilet that is not being used we will have money to pay for the water. Eric said the village estimated a cost of \$500 for installation of the spigot but he wonders if they got a frost-free one. Mark said they must have. Beth said she thinks we could say that if the Rec Committee can fit the cost into their budget then we are fine with it. The village wants approval from the selectboard to move forward. Eric said if they have a conventional spigot that will not work. He suggested maybe the Rec Committee should come in and make their proposal. It was agreed to ask them to come to the next meeting.

***13. Review Draft Town Meeting Warning***

Brian said the only article we have at this point that is not a required one is a request from the Tree Board to establish an arboretum reserve fund. The first part of the language was provided by the Tree Board and he added some language. He has "to be funded annually by unspent funds" but Sue Lovering doesn't really want it funded by unspent funds. She is looking for a place where money can go when people make donations. The Tree Board might also make contributions with some of their budget.

Beth asked how we handle donations now. Rosemary said there is a Tree Board revenue line. Beth asked what Rosemary thinks about donations going into a dedicated fund. Rosemary said sometimes they use donations toward their current year expenses. If there is a note with a

donation saying it goes to the reserve fund it would go to that. We have gotten checks saying they are for the arboretum. She keeps track of the amounts, but not in the budget. Eric and Brian said if it goes into our budget as revenue it becomes general department revenue at the end of the year.

Beth suggested that the article should say that both unspent and donated funds can go into the reserve fund, giving them flexibility by saying it can be funded in both those ways. She suggested telling Sue that we think it is beneficial to have the wording refer to both unspent funds and donated funds.

Eric said he thinks Article 6 on the budget should include the word “estimated” when referring to the amount to be raised by taxes because we won't know the true amount until after the grand list is set.

Beth noted that the budget article is worded differently from last year's budget article. Mark noted that last year's article does not use the word “estimated” either. Eric said we didn't use to put in the amount to be raised by taxes. Brian said the recommendation from VLCT and our attorney was to add the amount to be raised by taxes. He noted that the wording he used was the same wording used the last time we had an in-person meeting.

Eric asked if it is correct to say “Shall the town vote to adopt.” Should it be “Shall the town adopt.” Brian said he thinks we can change it to “Shall the town adopt.” Both versions have been approved by VLCT and our attorney.

Brian said he will change the wording to what we used last year. He asked if board members want to add the word “estimated.” He knows it is not in the VLCT model warning. Eben recommended adding it. Beth suggested maybe we should get feedback from our lawyer. Eric noted that some other towns don't have as much non-tax revenue as we do.

Kyle said the Beautification Committee was hoping there would be an article about hiring a gardener. She thought it had been discussed that that would go before the voters. She was surprised not to see it. Eben said he thinks there was a discussion about it but he doesn't remember the board saying it would go before the voters.

Beth said when a different committee requested an article to be on the warning the selectboard asked them to write up their proposed wording. There are two ways to get on the warning – through the selectboard or with a petition. She doesn't see why the Beautification Committee should not bring their requested article to the Selectboard, since they are a town committee. If the board supports it we will put it on. If not, the committee could petition. She asked Kyle to send proposed wording to her or Brian before the next meeting. The committee could have a special meeting if needed. The next selectboard meeting will be the last one to approve everything for the town report. Eric said the board will have to meet another time after that just to approve the warning because petitions could come in until January 19. Beth said the language needs to be submitted in properly written article format. Brian said the Secretary of State's office has resources to help citizens with writing articles.

Beth said she thinks we should have an article on the warning about an economic developer. She read the article that was on last year's warning. Eric asked why that \$40,000 isn't in our estimated year end. Brian said the estimate assumes we will spend it. Beth said we could spend it but we probably won't.

Eric said he thinks we have to either show an economic developer in the budget or have an article for it. Mark asked how we propose to convince the voters to vote for it. Eric said we would have to talk about it and explain it. Mark said it will be harder to convince people if we haven't spent the money they approved last year.

Beth said if we add \$40,000 to our expenses that will make our tax rate change 7.3%. Eric said adding it will not actually affect the amount to be raised by taxes because the additional \$40,000 approved in the article was part of the amount raised by taxes last year.

Eben said he would prefer an article. But last year's wording was very vague. He would like a little more direction from the voters.

The board agreed to add an economic development article.

Brian asked what the board decided on adding the word "estimated" to the budget article. It was agreed to add it for now and the board can discuss it at the next meeting.

Brian asked how much money the board wants to request for economic development. Eben suggested \$40,000. The other board members all preferred \$50,000. Beth said Brian should come up with better wording than last year's article.

***14. Discuss Rent Rates for Holcomb House Caretaker's Apartment***

The current rent for the caretaker's apartment at the Holcomb House is \$490. Mark said he thinks the bare minimum he would rent out a similar apartment for would be \$650. Brian said Donnie does do some caretaker work. Eben said last time Duncan proposed \$525 and he proposed \$550.

**Eric moved and Mark seconded to increase rent for the Holcomb House caretaker's apartment to \$525 per month with 2 months notice and to increase rent to \$550 per month starting July 1.**

Eben suggested a friendly amendment changing the amounts to \$550 and \$575 but Eric did not agree to that. Eben asked what Donnie's caretaker duties are. Brian said he did more when we had another tenant. He handles trash. He makes sure the heat is on when there are areas that could freeze. He alerts us if there is any problem on the weekend. He keeps the outdoors tidy and clean. He shovels. Mark said he thinks it would be too large an increase to raise the rent all at once to fair market value. Beth asked how much we would pay for shoveling. Mark said he pays someone \$35 to shovel if there is 1 inch of snow.

**The motion was passed with Eben opposed.**

Brian said he will bring a lease with the new figures for the board to approve next time.

**15. Celebration for Eric**

Beth said Eric is leaving the selectboard after serving for 27 years. She and Eric have talked about having a celebration on March 4 and inviting people he has worked with over the years. She suggests spending money to get it catered. She has reached out to Jenna's Promise about renting the space.

Eben said he supports buying a cake and bringing it to Eric's last selectboard meeting, not spending taxpayer money. Eric said he would like to have an opportunity to thank all the people he worked with over the years. He would not expect a lot from the town as far as expense. He can pay for hosting it at Jenna's Promise. He is thinking of inviting the selectboard members, committee members, legislators and emergency personnel he has worked with.

Mark said he is fine with paying for an event at Jenna's Promise. Beth said she thinks we should do something for anyone who has served the town for 20 years or more. Eben said there are employees who have been here a long time that we have done less for. There shouldn't be a higher level of recognition for a selectboard member. Mark said he thinks there should be because Eric didn't get paid to do it. Eben said we don't do this job for the money. He has never taken a penny. Beth suggested that board members think about this for next time.

**16. Discuss Employee Review(s) and Compensation Adjustments**

**Mark moved to go into executive session to discuss employee reviews and compensation adjustments as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3), Eben seconded and the motion was passed at 9:42.** The board came out of executive session at 9:58.

**Eben moved to adjust Jacob Earle's pay retroactively to 6 months after his hire date, pending written union approval, Eric seconded and the motion was passed.**

**Eben moved to recognize Ryan Stygles for the grader operator skill and to adjust his pay accordingly, pending written union approval. Mark seconded and the motion was passed.**

**Eben moved to recognize Mark Lehoullier for achieving Master Road Scholar pending receipt of his class paperwork and written union approval. Mark seconded and the motion was passed.**

**17. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:59.