

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, APRIL 3, 2023

**Present:** Selectboard members: Beth Foy, Duncan Hastings, Eben Patch, Shayne Spence, Mark Woodward

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Paul Warden, Diana Osborn, Jeff Bickford, Dean Locke, Carri Ferrari, Keith Morris (remote), GiGi Beach (remote), Lois Frey (remote), Lydia Putvain (remote), Nicole Whitemore (remote)

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

**1. Call to Order**

Beth called the meeting to order at 6:32.

**2. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda**

Brian said the planned purchases that were in the packet can be removed from the agenda. Mark added an update on investing funds. Duncan said he sees Brian has printed out a copy of the Johnson Rail Trail Advisory Committee purpose statement. He wants the board and possibly the committee to look at it and respond to it. Beth suggested that board members be prepared to discuss it at the next meeting. Duncan also added discussion of whether he should continue to work with the Tree Board on the arboretum water system. Keith Morris said he would like to request a noise ordinance waiver for June 2 and 3. Beth asked him to hold that request until the next meeting.

**3. Review Invoices and Orders**

Eben said his only question was about the Power Play Sports ski recreation reimbursement and Brian had already answered it. Brian said the Power Play Sports expense was probably over \$1000 in total but in the past it has always just been considered a regular operation expense for recreation. At time the obligation is incurred we don't know what the total will be.

Duncan said there is still a portable toilet at Legion Field. If it would cost more to take it out and put it back for Tuesday Night Live we should leave it, but if we can save money by removing it for now he suggests doing that.

**4. Review and Approve Minutes**

**Duncan moved to approve the minutes of March 20 and March 27, 2023 with an addition to the March 20 minutes stating that under additions or adjustments to the agenda Paul Warden asked that the CUD presentation be expanded to include ARPA, Shayne seconded and the motion was passed.**

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

Rosemary said there are four liquor licenses that have not yet been renewed. She sent reminder notices to the businesses last week reminding them that April 17 is the last date they can get approval. Two businesses with tobacco licenses have not submitted tobacco license renewal applications.

Rosemary said Community National Bank has a money market account that pays almost 4% interest. She will move the ARPA money into that account. Duncan asked if there are any penalties if we pull money out. Rosemary said no. Mark asked if there are reserves, cemetery funds or other cash we might consider putting in that account. Rosemary said we only have

reserve funds. We cannot move the revolving loan funds to the money market account but reserve funds could be moved. Mark said he doesn't see why we wouldn't do that if there is no penalty for pulling money out. Beth agreed that it would be a good idea to move whatever we can move into an account where it can earn interest.

**6. *Beautification Committee Appointments***

Brian said Adrienne Stevson and Blake Parker have attended a meeting of the Beautification Committee and the Beautification Committee chair recommends appointing them. **Shayne moved and Duncan seconded to appoint Adrienne Stevson and Blake Parker to the Beautification Committee.** Duncan asked if they are additions or replacements. Brian said additions. Beth said the committee has four members now and desperately wants more. **The motion was passed.**

**7. *Lamoille FiberNet ARPA Funds Allocation***

Brian said there was discussion at the last meeting about whether the board's allocation of funds to Lamoille FiberNet had been properly warned. Would the board like to affirm its previous decision? **Duncan moved to ratify the board's previous decision granting \$50,000 in ARPA funds to Lamoille FiberNet, Shayne seconded and the motion was passed with Eben opposed.**

**8. *Letter of Support for United Way for Equity Grant***

Brian said United Way is requesting a letter of support for their application for a grant to perform an equity study in our region. Beth said they already have one from Stowe and they are asking other boards. **Mark moved to submit a letter of support for United Way's grant application to perform an equity study, Shayne seconded and the motion was passed.**

**9. *Arboretum Water System***

Duncan said Sue Lovering had asked if he would be willing to continue helping the Tree Board work on getting water to the arboretum. He wanted to see if the board thinks he should do that. The project involves questions about legal easements. His assumption is that they want help with that and he is not sure it is appropriate for a selectboard member to negotiate on easements.

Beth said she thinks the board previously discussed getting a project plan as opposed to pursuing a definite project. She thinks we are still at the point of understanding what getting water to the field would mean. Eben said he thinks if there are simple things Duncan can do to help that he is comfortable with that is okay but he doesn't think this needs to be Duncan's project. (*Carrie Ferrari arrived at 6:55.*) He believes the Tree Board should be doing the majority of the work. Shayne said he is still supportive of them moving forward and if they have questions Duncan can answer, that is fine but he doesn't think Duncan needs to put a lot of time into helping them. Mark agreed. Duncan said he would be uncomfortable having specific conversations about easements. Shayne said in the long term he thinks having water at the arboretum is almost necessary. He thinks this is worth pursuing in the long term.

**10. *Selectboard Project Prioritization***

Last year's selectboard priorities were displayed on the whiteboard in order of prioritization. Beth asked everyone present to write down any items they wanted to add and put them on the board. Then she asked those present to vote on their priorities with colored stickers – different colors for selectboard members, members of the public and town employees. The light industrial park received the most total votes, a permanent recreation facility/community center was second and ARPA funds was third. When considering selectboard votes only, the light industrial park was first. A number of other items were tied with 3 selectboard votes. Brian noted that the recreation facility was the item that probably had the biggest difference between selectboard

votes and public votes. Duncan said hiring a new town administrator was not an item that ranked high but he feels it needs to be number one. Other board members agreed.

Shayne said someone mentioned that there are short-term and long-term priorities. Having those separated out might be helpful. Duncan said he doesn't think we need to separate them this year, but that is a valid point. Beth agreed that it is a valid point. She said some long-term items need to be coupled with ARPA, which needs to be addressed in the shorter term. Duncan said it is great to have priorities but it is important for the board to be able to deal with the situations that arise month to month and the prioritization should not be done to the exclusion of dealing with things that come up.

Diana Osborn said Donna Griffiths had mentioned that there are some items that have had work done on them already and although they are not the highest priority items, if they are not followed up on soon the work that has been done will be lost. Diana also noted that it was moved at town meeting to do a public safety analysis, so hopefully that will be addressed regardless of how it was ranked tonight. Eben said the vote at town meeting on the public safety analysis was advisory and non-binding.

Paul Warden asked what the town is doing with regard to NVU. He thinks that is something we should think about. Beth said she did hear that there is some kind of vote coming up on some of the restructuring, she thinks around athletics and libraries. We aren't active as a town with NVU.

After some discussion the board decided that the top 6 items should be town administrator hire, economic development hire, light industrial park, recreation facility, ARPA funds, and trails/talc mill property.

Beth asked if board members feel a permanent rec facility should be more important than ARPA funds. Duncan said if a permanent rec facility is going to be one of the highest priorities for the selectboard he will have heartburn about that. Shayne said he was the one selectboard member who voted for that item. He thinks long-term it should be prioritized. He doesn't know if he would put it above ARPA. Beth asked if he would put it above the rail trail. Shayne said he thinks a lot of the rail trail work is over with. There are some things we can do on the town level but it is almost done being constructed. It is helpful to look forward and start planning for a recreation facility and then if money becomes available or a property opens up we are prepared. Duncan said in that context he has less heartburn about it. Carri Ferrari said a permanent community center ties in with the use of the rail trail. A lot of these things are connected. She doesn't understand why we haven't been fundraising for a community center for a long time. We could have had it by now. Beth said she can't justify that being above the rail trail. We have to push marketing. A community center won't bring people to town. Diana Osborn said seeing which items got more votes than ARPA funds could give the board ideas about how to spend those funds. Shayne said he thinks this is one reason it would be helpful to have short, mid and long term categories. Beth said this is about our vision for the year.

Paul Warden said ARPA will go away as a priority if we get confirmation that we can spend the money on operating expenses. Beth said in theory. Dean Locke said economic development could encompass a vision about using the funds. Duncan said his vision is that the economic

development person would be involved in things like spending ARPA funds, NVU and the rail trail.

### ***11. Town Administrator Search Planning***

Duncan said he talked to Catherine McMains, chair of the Jericho selectboard. She said they used the Vermont League of Cities and Towns headhunter services and found them very useful. It cost \$8,000. Jeff Bickford said \$8,000 is a bargain. Duncan said Municipal Resources is another option. They are currently doing a search for Thetford. Do we want a proposal from VLCT? Do we want more than just a VLCT proposal? Having gone through a town administrative search before, he can say there is a lot involved.

Mark suggested getting a written proposal. Eben said he would like to see more than one written proposal. Shayne agreed. Duncan said he can aim to get proposals back before the next meeting. Shayne said he would be comfortable waiting up to a month to give everyone a chance to put in a proposal.

Duncan said another possibility would be to see if there is a recently retired municipal manager or administrator who would be willing to conduct a search. He did that as a contractor with a couple of towns. He can put out feelers.

Duncan said another question is whether we should attempt to find an interim administrator. That would free us up a lot. After Jericho hired VLCT to help with their search it took 4 months before they contracted with someone. It could easily take us four to six months to find a qualified person once we have someone conducting the search.

Mark said this is what Jeff Bickford does for a living. He asked if he has anything to add. Jeff said everything Duncan is saying rings true in terms of timeline. More specialized firms like VLCT that have relationships with qualified people would probably be better.

Duncan said a professional headhunting firm may well do something that VLCT would not do, which would be to invite currently serving municipal administrators to submit applications. VLCT will not do that because towns don't want other towns to take their people. That is one reason the cost for a professional headhunter might be greater.

Mark said he is a big believer in a bright, motivated individual who may not be experienced. Duncan said Cambridge hired a young person with no municipal experience and loved her. Jericho also hired someone who didn't have direct municipal experience but he said it was like drinking from a fire hose for the first year and a half. There is value to having someone with experience. Mark asked, doesn't UVM have a school for rural development? Maybe people graduating from there would be interested. He thinks it would be great to have VLCT do the search but he thinks they ought to be thinking about people just coming out of college and other options other than experienced town administrators. Beth said she likes the idea of getting proposals from different recruitment agencies and letting them know that we are not opposed to being more open-minded about someone less experienced with the right energy.

Diana Osborn said it might be worth looking at what Morristown did. They recently hired a town administrator.

Duncan said he will see if he can get proposals before the next meeting and if not he will report back to the board at the next meeting. He asked if the board wants to look into options for hiring an interim. VLCT said they don't provide that service. But he thinks if we ask them they might be able to suggest a retired person. (*Dean Locke left at 8:06.*) He thinks it is really important that we hire the right person and having an interim would free us up to make a less hasty decision about a long-term hire.

Shayne said we have a stack of resumes from people who applied for the economic development position. Some have experience in municipal government. He doesn't know if we could look at that group of people. Beth said she does not think we should reach out to them about this opening. We should post for an interim town administrator and some of the same people can apply if they want to. Reaching out to them about this position sends the wrong message because we already told them we were not going to select them and it is not the position they applied for.

Eben said he is open to the idea of an interim. Beth said she doesn't know if she is. Eben said Jericho took about 4 months to find someone. If it takes us 7 months we will be right in the middle of budget season. Duncan said Jericho had an assistant planner step up while they were without a town administrator. Mark said he thinks we should get proposals back and see what is out there. Beth said she would like to spend time talking about what an interim means to everyone. She thinks we are not quite ready to make a decision on hiring an interim. Before we even get that far we need to work through the town administrator job description.

The board agreed to have a special meeting April 9 at 6:00 to talk about the job description and job search.

#### **12. *Vermont State University Library/Athletic Public Forum***

Brian said representatives from Vermont State University are interested in providing some kind of public forum for residents and students. Senator Westman was trying to make a connection with the town. Shayne asked who would be speaking at the forum – representatives from the college board of trustees or state legislators? Brian said it would be representatives from Vermont State University. He told VSU that the town will help them if they want to have a public forum. He has talked to Sen. Westman and Katherine Levasseur of VSU and they have talked to each other.

Duncan said Sen. Westman contacted the town and he thought it was appropriate for the town to host or sponsor a meeting. Duncan wouldn't necessarily want that to be a selectboard meeting but he would be happy to sponsor or host a meeting if it would be useful or helpful. Beth said she doesn't see value in the town hosting the meeting. If the college needs someone to help facilitate the meeting they should ask an individual for that. Duncan said he thinks this was a request from Sen. Westman to host a meeting on a subject important to the community. He personally doesn't have a problem helping them set up a meeting. He sees it more as a request from our local senator. But he doesn't want the selectboard to take a position. Beth said she thinks we have every right to take a position. The college affects our town. Duncan said in the context of a public hearing he personally doesn't want the board to take a position.

Paul Warden said he thinks part of the conversation started with citizens from the town who wanted feedback rather than with the college wanting to reach out. He thinks we should

participate. We want to know what they have to say. Mark said Sen. Westman was concerned with the college not putting information out to the public about what is going on.

Brian said we can host the meeting and invite the college to come present to us and the public. Katherine Levasseur has indicated they would come. Mark said he is open to doing something like that. He doesn't know if Sen. Westman wants us to instigate it. Brian said he thinks if we don't instigate it it likely won't happen, given the outreach the college has done so far.

Beth said she would be happy to speak to people at the college about a meeting in the town and strongly suggest that they have an event for PR reasons. She is worried about us offering to invite them to a meeting. It feels complicated and not clear. Not being clear is one of their PR problems and us being in the middle will make it even more complicated and not clear.

Duncan said he doesn't think it has to be complicated. It can be as simple as suggesting a place. The college has meeting places, but will members of the public feel comfortable there or would they feel more comfortable if it were a town event at the town gym? He expects they would. He is happy to offer a location. He thinks that is all we need to do. Shayne asked if we could ask Sen. Westman to organize it and offer the space. Mark said he thinks Beth should reach out to the college and keep Sen. Westman in the back of her mind.

#### **13. *Economic Development Round Table Discussion Planning***

Brian shared an updated agenda for the economic development roundtable. He has a meeting on Thursday with Pat Ripley from LEDC and a representative from the Vermont Council on Rural Development. A date for the round table hasn't been set yet. He probably will poll invitees after the meeting on Thursday. Board members agreed that the agenda looks good.

#### **14. *Northern Borders Regional Commission Infrastructure Grants***

Brian said Northern Borders had the information session for the Catalyst grants. We got some information from that. He has a meeting set up with the state coordinator for Northern Borders. A requirement of being eligible is cooperating with a local development district. LCPC qualifies as one and engaging with them would provide continuity when his contract runs out. He thinks enlisting their services for grant management would serve us well. He has a rough draft of a letter of intent to apply for a grant. We have to have a project narrative and a budget and discuss how we will comply with the environmental review process and meet the required timeline.

Beth asked what criteria get high scoring. Brian said we will score well on most categories. Where we will lose some is that our county ranks in the middle in terms of need. But we will score well for prior investment and community support. We will score well in the section where they consider resiliency for future economic developments. This site is above the floodplain and diversifies our economic base. Beth asked how this project diversifies our economic base. Brian said most of our jobs are in or near the floodplain so they would be hard hit during major flood events. That could have a major impact on the town. Having more jobs outside the floodplain gives us resiliency.

Duncan said if this letter of intent doesn't score well we won't be invited to submit an application, so the letter is very important. It needs to be really tailored to the prioritized requirements in the grant manual. He thinks all board members should see it before it is submitted. Best said she thinks the earlier we can see it the better. Brian said he can send out the draft and the criteria.

Paul asked if this proposal is going to be strictly for the industrial park. Brian said Paul has requested that the town consider also requesting support for the CUD. Paul said he read that one thing that can help an application score higher is if it addresses different community needs. Is there an opportunity to try to broaden the grant application? Brian said in the information session they strongly discouraged a town from having more than one application, but the CUD would be eligible to apply itself. Paul said all the CUDs are applying. Brian said we would not be penalized if the CUD also applies. Paul said he is not suggesting two applications; he is suggesting broadening the application, for instance by including wiring. If he read it correctly he thinks addressing more than one topic is viewed as a strength. Brian said it is.

Mark asked, so the application might be for the light industrial park with a big fiber optic cable through it? Brian said he thinks the light industrial park meets 3 of the criteria they are looking for – transportation, basic public infrastructure, and basic community infrastructure. The community infrastructure would be if we wired it for broadband. Duncan said there already is a fiber line bisecting the property. As far as he knows it is owned by VELCO. At one point in time they were willing to make a few strands of the fiber available. It goes to the Green Mountain Power substation.

Shayne asked what we are talking about building on the light industrial park site. Brian said the proposals we have made so far have been just to build infrastructure – roads, water, sewer, electric, internet.

Beth asked if there is any update on the Mumley report. Brian said it will be necessary for our application and would be very helpful for the letter of intent. He has talked to Mumley and Mumley will be getting back to him. Duncan said even applying some factor to the numbers from the initial study might be helpful. Maybe Mumley could give us a sense of reasonable numbers.

Duncan said at this point he is less comfortable turning over grant administration to LCPC. He feels if we hire a community and economic development coordinator they could do that. He would rather have that be income that comes to the town.

**15. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:46.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*