

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2023

Present: Selectboard members: Beth Foy (remote), Duncan Hastings, Eben Patch, Shayne Spence, Mark Woodward
Others: Carl Rogers

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Beth called the meeting to order at 5:05.

2. Review and Discuss Joint Meeting Agenda Items for Board Alignment

It was agreed to discuss joint meeting agenda items 1-4 in executive session.

Beth said she thinks the old mill house warrants discussion. She doesn't know of specific plans we have for it, other than that it has been on our maintenance list and was included in our prioritized list of properties for efficiency analysis. Duncan said he has concerns about painting the building without any preparation done, which GiGi Beach has suggested could be done, therefore not falling under state lead abatement rules and regulations. He would be strongly opposed to that. He would like to see us consider other alternatives. Painting it under lead paint removal regulations will be very expensive. He thinks long term we should consider removing the existing siding and replacing it with some other form of siding as an alternative to painting. He also has the idea of subdividing so that building is on its own lot and selling it. Ideally it could support rail trail development, for instance by being a hostel. Mark said he doesn't think we would want to remove the existing siding. He thinks siding right over it and not disturbing any possible lead is the preferred alternative. Duncan said his thought is to explore any alternatives to painting. Eben said he supports that. Shayne said it would be prohibitively expensive do lead abatement. He agrees with GiGi that the building is an eyesore, but he doesn't think we should encourage her to handle it on her own. Eben said that is a large liability. The board agreed to ask the trustees if they are open to discussions about future use and alternatives to painting.

Eben said he thinks there will be a question about whether to turn off the heat and water service at the lower storage building. He doesn't think turning the heat off is the best thing for the taxpayers of the town or village. Duncan said he agrees. He suggested it might make sense to get a qualified heating and ventilating contractor to come and give an opinion. Greg Tatro thought it would be shortsighted to turn off the heat because that could damage the radiant floor heating. Eben said we could ask if the village is interested in sharing the cost of having an expert give an opinion. Mark said he is in favor of keeping the heat on at a low level, maybe 45 degrees.

Duncan said he hopes we don't make any actual decisions tonight. He thinks we should not agree to anything specific without talking about it again as a board. He thinks we made a mistake when we agreed to sign the original MOU with the village. He thinks we would have benefited from having further discussion about that.

Eben said Jason told him that the town highway crew thinks it would be good to keep the current backhoe. We need to redo the capital equipment purchasing plan. If the cost analysis works out on an excavator he thinks that would be a better buy for the town.

Beth asked if there is anything the board needs to discuss regarding the merger topic. Shayne said the agenda item is “Discussion on the costs and feasibility of proposed merger plan” but there is no specific proposed merger plan. Eben said the voters of the town and village voted to continue merger discussions. There was overwhelming support for a merger. He believes costs need to be shared 50/50 between town and village to move forward. Beth said she thinks we need to be careful with how we talk about the votes. They weren’t for a merger; they were for study and to continue discussions. Carl said he doesn’t think there has been a merger plan. Shayne and Eben said no; we got a quote to prepare a plan. Shayne said the consultants were clear that they want buy-in from both entities before putting together a plan.

Mark said he thinks the first thing to discuss with the trustees is whether they would be willing to share the cost of having a merger plan developed. Eben said the proposal we got was \$59K. That was from January 2023. The cost may have gone up since then. Duncan said we haven’t specifically said we would agree to pay 50% of the cost of developing a merger plan. If the trustees agree that they are willing to do share the cost then we need to agree on whether we want to pay the other half. He agrees that the trustees should share the cost. If they say they won’t, then it is a different ballgame. One option would be for village residents to circulate a petition. Mark said if one body is not willing to pursue a plan, then the village and town voters need to hear that.

Carl asked if the town budget for the fiscal year starting July 1 includes money for a merger plan. Eben said no. Duncan said we have a line for selectboard consultants and services. Mark said using ARPA money is another option.

Duncan said he doesn’t know that he wants to continue having joint meetings with the trustees. He thinks we may be at a point where some things can be ironed out through written communication or communication between administrators. He feels these joint meetings are not productive.

3. ***Executive Session to Discuss Legal Opinion***

Eben moved to find that an executive session is needed to discuss agenda items 1-4 from the June 14 joint selectboard-village trustee meeting agenda because premature general public disclosure of the information to be discussed would place the town at a substantial disadvantage, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.

Eben moved to enter executive session as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to discuss confidential attorney-client communications made for the purpose of providing professional legal services to the body, inviting Carl to remain, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed at 5:32.

The board came out of executive session at 5:57 with no action taken.

4. ***Adjourn***

The meeting was adjourned at 5:57.