

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

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

Others: Carl Rogers, Rosemary Audibert, Allison Kratzat, Kyle Nuse, Casey Romero, Carlo Rovetto

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

**1. Call to Order**

Beth called the meeting to order at 6:30.

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

It was agreed to add discussion of a potential EDA grant application, a Beautification Committee request to put flowers along Railroad Street and a noise ordinance waiver request for an event.

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

**Shayne moved to approve the minutes of June 19 and June 14, 2023, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.**

**4. Selectboard Issues/Concerns**

Duncan said he would like to know whether or not the board is interested in putting out an RFP for cemetery stone repairs and maintenance or in doing something about the Grow Cemetery fence. Eben said we got a bid on the fence last year and it was more than twice what we had budgeted for the year. Can we earmark what was unspent in cemetery maintenance last year to combine with this year's budgeted amount? (*Allison Kratzat arrived at 6:34.*) He would be interested in doing that.

Duncan said he thinks it might be worth trying to go back out with another RFP for stone maintenance to see if we could get more interest. We put out an RFP last year and he doesn't think we got any responses. His opinion is that it was not a well written RFP. Regarding the fence, we talked about putting it just along the front and one side because that would cost less than putting it around all sides. Beth said she thinks we settled on letting neighbors install it. Duncan said he is open to making it a volunteer project where we purchase the materials and neighbors install it. Mark said he thought at one time we had pulled back from chain link to something less substantial. Eben said he thinks we pulled back from white vinyl on all sides to chain link on 3 sides. Duncan said he thinks it could be split rail on 2 or 3 sides. That would cost less.

Mark asked if we are comfortable with the boundary on the Whitehill and Bidwell side. Duncan said he thinks that has been agreed upon with the neighboring landowners. He thinks we should mark it out and record it in the land records as an agreed upon boundary. Beth said we will put further discussion of the fence on a future agenda. Do board members want to put out an RFP for stone maintenance? Duncan said we used to budget \$10,000 a year for maintenance. We are already losing ground from what we used to do. The biggest issue is finding someone to do the work. Beth said she is open to putting out an RFP for maintenance. Duncan said he would be happy to work with Carl on it. But it is possible that he would respond to it so maybe it would

be better if he was not involved. Beth suggested that Carl work on it without Duncan's involvement. Eben said if we are able to use everything from last year's budget and this year's we will have \$13,500 for cemetery maintenance.

Duncan said he asked LCPC to put together information about the Holmes Meadow project. He would like the memo they sent out to be sent to all board members. Carl said he summarized it in his report from a previous meeting and he can circulate the email. (*Casey Romero arrived at 6:43.*)

**5. Review Invoices and Orders**

Eben asked about the payment from the Johnson Historical Society to Johnson Historical, Inc. Does that always happen? Rosemary said yes. Sometimes people send one check to cover both a donation for the building and their membership and she splits out the two amounts. (*Kyle Nuse arrived at 6:44.*)

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

Rosemary said the grand list for 2023 was \$2,416,998. There was minimal growth from last year. The town budget was \$2,084,369 plus the \$50K the voters approved from the articles, for a total of \$2,134,869. The tax rate based on that is .8882.

Eben said NEMS is shown as having a tax exemption but he doesn't believe they do. Rosemary said Justin is looking into that. It will have a very small effect on the tax rate. She believes their tax agreement ended March 31, 2023. If we subtract out their exemption the tax rate is .8871.

Eben said because we can't exempt school tax it actually costs Johnson residents more if NEMS does not have a tax exemption. Beth said the other towns NEMS serves do not give them exempt status. She is pretty sure they are not exempted in Newport.

**Beth moved and Eben seconded to set a local tax rate of .8882.**

Duncan said we did not improve an extension to their tax exemption. If they do not have a tax exemption and we set the tax rate at this amount it will raise more money than we actually need.

**Duncan suggested a friendly amendment to change the tax rate to .8871. Beth and Eben agreed to that. The motion was passed.**

Eben asked if we have an idea what the end of year balances look like. Rosemary said she thinks we will be fine. She should have exact numbers at the first meeting in August. The board will need to decide what to do with the \$45,000 that was budgeted for the economic development person. Beth said she would rather decide that at the next meeting.

Rosemary said an email had been sent out about a new monitor that was needed for the assessors. It turns out that the whole system, including the computer needs to be replaced. Beth said the type of computer purchased should be based on what programs the assessors need to install.

Duncan said we should look into purchasing a tablet or laptop for the assessors, with the cost to be shared between Hyde Park and Johnson. Beth asked if they also need a stationary computer. Shayne asked if they need a data plan as well. It was agreed that we need more information on the actual needs. Carl said he will start looking into it with the assessors.

**7. Review Planned Purchases**

There were no planned purchases.

**8. Update on July 15 Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Celebration**

Allison Kratzat said the governor is planning a formal stop in Johnson at noon. The Johnson rail trail committee will plan to have ice cream, water, seltzers, etc. available afterwards. A small donation is lined up from Sterling Market. The committee could use at most an additional \$150 to \$200 for everything needed, including serving things, decorations, parking signs, etc. Casey said the coordinator from the state would like the town to provide a couple more portalets. They are bringing two. They want to use the parking area in front of the highway department building for security, portalets and handicapped parking. They estimate there will be 50 to 60 people with the governor. They would like us to cordon off the parking area on the town side of the garage. Can the highway crew cordon it off the area in front of the food shelf on Friday? Beth suggested opening the gate to the highway department area instead. Casey said that should be fine as long as they have a dedicated space. Beth said she thinks it would be helpful to have volunteers directing people to where they should park and keeping them flowing. Shayne said people directing traffic should have reflective vests. Eben suggested the sheriff's department may be willing direct traffic.

Casey said Dean Locke indicated there might be things that need to be done to prepare the site that the public works crew could help with. Beth asked Carl to reach out to Dean for more information about what is needed.

**Mark moved and Shayne seconded to supply two additional portalets for the July 15 governor's ceremony and to authorize expenditure by the Johnson rail trail committee of up to \$200 for additional supplies.**

Casey said the rail trail committee has reached out to Jenna's Promise and heads of town committees to see if they want to do anything as part of the event.

**The motion was passed.**

**Eben moved to authorize the chair to provide the Johnson rail trail committee with the letter they need in order to get a donation from Sterling Market, Shayne seconded and the motion was passed.** Beth said she will let Carl write the letter. She doesn't think her signature is needed.

Kyle said the governor's office is asking towns to put out information about the event. The rail trail committee will put it on Front Porch Forum and Facebook and in the News & Citizen. Any time it can be shared on town or personal social media accounts, that would be good. (*Casey and Allison left at 7:27.*)

**9. Review and Approve Beautification Committee's Application for VCF Grant**

Kyle said the Beautification Committee did not get the Spark Grant they applied for from the Vermont Community Foundation but VCF recommended that they go for a different grant opportunity. This one has a higher limit – up to \$10,000. Because they are months behind their original deadline they are asking for more grant money and not planning on doing fundraising.

Eben asked if they plan on making any changes in materials from the first mural. Kyle said no. Last time RK Miles donated plywood but this time they are planning to apply for grant funds to pay for it. She was inspired by the way Juniper Creative Arts did a community paint night for the mural at the elementary school. She asked Finn about that and they are in favor of it so they are planning to have a community night and the grant application includes money to pay Finn and purchase materials for it. The total they are asking for is \$7,500. Eben said there was some bleed-through on the first mural because of weather. He didn't know if any changes were planned to reduce that risk. Kyle said what happened was that a clear coat was not put on immediately after the mural was finished. That has been done now. The next murals will be clear-coated right away. Finn touched up the first mural and clear-coated it.

**Duncan moved and Mark seconded to authorize the Beautification Committee to submit an application to the Vermont Community Foundation for an Arts & Social Cohesion Grant to add two murals to the town garage.**

Kyle said the grant application is due July 18 and she thinks they will let the committee know by the end of August if they got it. Finn will paint through the winter and the murals will be installed in early spring. The committee put out a survey to the community asking which scenes of Johnson people wanted to see in the mural. About 75 or 80 people responded. Finn is confident that the four most requested scenes can be included on the two murals. They are all locations within riding or walking distance of the rail trail. Beth asked if the board can see mockups of the murals before they are installed. Kyle said yes, if the committee gets the grant.

***10. Beautification Committee Request to Plant Flowers along Railroad Street***

Beth said there has been some email communication between her, Kyle, Carl and Eben about planting sunflowers along Railroad Street from the rail trail to try to get people to follow them to the village. For this year what is being discussed is planning them as far as the bridge. Maybe next year they could be planted along the full extent of Railroad Street.

Kyle said the rail trail committee believes that we need a bike lane on Railroad Street. It could potentially go where the green strip is now. The sunflowers are an alternative short-term solution. Jenna's Promise owns property in that area and the committee has talked to them about planting sunflowers in the green strip in front of the old truss building and JP's Promising Goods and down to River Road East and the bridge, eventually going down the whole strip into the village. The Tatros are very interested and will donate people power and maybe a rototiller or two. The Beautification Committee will contribute sunflower seeds, maybe varieties that only grow two or three feet tall. They will try to get other people in the community to help plant but they need to do it soon. She knows of someone else who planted sunflowers at this time of year and had beautiful blooms in September. The public works department would not be involved. The work would be done by volunteers and the rail trail committee. They just need permission to work in the town right of way up to the bridge.

Eben said the town owns the property, not just the right of way. The green strips are owned by the town so landowner permission is not necessarily needed. The public works department does not have any traffic concerns with this idea. He suggests checking with the village to see if there are any concerns with sidewalk maintenance. He asked Kyle if the committee will be able to handle maintenance of the flowers. Kyle said sunflowers are annuals and have to be planted each year. The plan is to plant them quite thickly. They sprout and grow quickly as long as there

is enough rain. It will not be necessary to weed around them. When they are done blooming there will be stalks that will have to be cut down in the fall. The committee will need a work day to plant them and another work day in late fall to cut the dead stalks down. Eben said he thinks this idea is worth trying, though he thinks it could be a target for vandalism.

**Duncan moved to approve the use of the town highway right of way on Railroad Street for planting by the Beautification Committee, Shayne seconded and the motion was passed.**

Shayne asked, if in the future we wanted to put a bench and trash barrel along Railroad Street, say at the corner of River Road, would that be too difficult if the flowers were planted along the road?. Kyle said no, because they will have to be replanted yearly. Flowers could be planted around features like a bench.

Eben suggested that the committee consider using flower boxes, perhaps made of concrete. Beth said sunflowers have deep roots and may not grow well in boxes.

#### ***11. Noise Ordinance Waiver Request***

Carlo Rovetto said he owns Positive Pie in Montpelier and Plainfield. He would like to have a music event at Keith Morris' Willow Crossing Farm. There will be about 150 people and dance music. He originally planned to have it run from 3:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m. but he is open to whatever the board agrees to.

Beth said previous events at Willow Crossing Farm lasted until 1:00 a.m. She doesn't know if there were any complaints.

Shayne asked about traffic control. Carlo said Keith is reaching out to the sheriff's department tomorrow. There will be volunteers who can handle traffic control.

Duncan said he would be more comfortable with an end time of 1:00 a.m. Rosemary suggested the last hour could be acoustic. Shayne asked if an end time of 1:00 a.m. would significantly limit the event. Carlo said he can make it work. He would prefer an end time of 2 a.m. The board discussed what would happen if there were a complaint about noise after the waiver period ended. The organizers would most likely just be asked to keep the noise down.

**Shayne moved to approve the noise ordinance waiver request for the event organized by Carlo Rovetto on July 8, 2023 as presented, Mark seconded and the motion was passed with Duncan and Eben opposed.** (Carlo left at 7:53.)

#### ***12. Review and Approve Amended Subgrant Agreement for FEMA Public Assistance Grant***

Carl said he got an email from his contact at FEMA who looked into the town's intent to apply for Category Z money for administrative expenses and suggested he contact someone with the Vermont Emergency Management. He has not yet heard back from that person. Hopefully there is a record of town staff keeping track of their time. Rosemary said she thinks Brian Story was doing the administrative work. Mark asked if she thinks there is a high likelihood we will not have documentation. Rosemary said yes.

**Duncan moved to authorized Carl to execute the amended subgrant agreement for the FEMA Public Assistance Grant for the event of October 19, 2109 and related documents, Eben seconded and the motion was passed.**

### ***13. Potential EDA Grant Application***

Carl said he got a phone call last week from an EDA representative asking if the town still needs money for the industrial park. Carl filled him in on the town's Northern Borders grant application. That person talked to someone in his office and then reached out to Seth Jensen of LCPC. Seth is asking if the town wants to submit an EDA grant. The application would be due probably by the end of July. We would be asking for funding for the same things the Northern Borders grant would fund. That would give us two shots at getting some grant money. Perhaps we would get both grants. There would be a cost for applying. It would take as much as 20 to 25 hours of LCPC time at about \$75 an hour. So the total cost might be \$1500 to \$2,000 for LCPC to prepare and file the application. If the grant application is successful he thinks that cost could be rolled into grant administration.

Mark asked how much the match is. Carl said the same as for the Northern Borders grant, 20%. If both grants come through with partial funding we could put them together and we would pay 20% of the total. Beth asked if we could use ARPA money for our match. If they both come through that would be a large match. Duncan said if we get both it could mean that we would use the EDA money instead of ARPA money and have more ARPA funds available for something else.

Shayne asked, if we got both grants would we have extra money to do more with or would we have to choose one? Carl said he expects if we hear that we are getting the full amount requested for the Northern Borders grant we probably would tell EDA that we did not need the full amount for that grant. We would tell them the amount we needed.

Duncan said the Northern Borders grant did not include much for fiber, which is critical.

Eben said historically we underspend on consulting services. He thinks \$1,500 for this grant application is a good use of money. He thinks it should come out of selectboard consulting.

### **Eben moved and Shayne seconded to authorize expenditure of up to \$2,000 for Lamoille Count Planning Commission to prepare an EDA grant application.**

Duncan asked Carl how much of his time he thinks it will take to coordinate. He would offer to assist if there is anything he could help with. Carl said Seth did not think the town would need to do anything. Most of the work was already done for the Northern Borders grant. He doesn't see it being a big time drain for him. Seth did say the application is fairly involved.

Duncan said he thinks the selectboard should see the application before it is submitted. Eben said he would also like to but he is not sure there is time. Beth said she thinks if the application is done two days before it needs to be submitted that would be enough time for some people on the board to review it. Duncan suggested that he, Beth and Carl review and approve the application before it is submitted. Carl said he can provide a progress report at the July 17 meeting.

### ***14. Update on Town Administrator Search***

Duncan said we have 9 total applicants for the town administrator position. Scott Myers of MRI said he feels 3 of those are worthy of being interviewed by him. Scott told Duncan that 2 of those 3 applicants expressed interest in a combined position. One appeared to be interested in

the town administrator position only. Duncan asked him to verify if whether or not it is a combined position is a deal killer either way for any of the applicants. He also asked him for copies of all 9 resumes and letters of interest and suggested that if confidentiality was an issue he could redact the names. If he gets them he will send them out to the rest of the board. He asked Scott whether or not he thinks we have a good pool of candidates or if we need to go back out. He hasn't heard back yet.

Duncan has heard from two people interested in the community and economic development specialist position. In his opinion only one merits the possibility of an interview. Does the board want to interview one person? He asked the person if the possibility of combining this position with the town administrator position interested him and he said he feels he would be qualified for a full-time combined position but is not interested in it. Beth said she thinks we should interview the person. Eben said he disagrees. He feels we cannot financially afford both positions. Mark said he would like more information about the potential candidates interested in the combined position before we interview this one. Beth said she would like to interview the top candidates for the town administrator position and also the one candidate for the economic development position. Shayne said he agrees that we probably should hear more information from MRI first about the town administrator candidates. Beth said she agrees but she does want to interview the economic development person.

**15. Other Business**

Beth said the LCPC annual meeting, the governor's visit and the NEMS 20 years celebration are all coming up in July. The Vermont Council on Rural Development is having a summit. There is also a request for the town to have more involvement in the Green Mountain Byway. There are a lot of events we should try to make a showing at. Duncan volunteered to go to the Council on Rural Development Community Leadership Summit. The board agreed that he should go. Beth said Doug Molde has invited board members to the July 18 Lamoille County rail trail committee meeting. They will be discussing funding and he thinks the bike lane should be part of that discussion. Shayne said he will try to Zoom into that meeting though it will be in the middle of his work day.

Beth brought up a VLCT truck picture contest. Board members suggested the grader would be a good entry. Beth said we can ask Jason at the next meeting if there is a vehicle he would like to submit.

**16. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25.