

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
VERMONT STATE UNIVERSITY – JOHNSON
THE ELLSWORTH ROOM, WILLEY LIBRARY
MONDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2023

Present: Selectboard members: Beth Foy, Duncan Hastings, Eben Patch, Mark Woodward
Others: Tom Galinat, Rosemary Audibert, Jeanne Engel, Kelly Vandorn, Brian Raulinaitis
Absent: Shayne Spence

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Beth called the meeting to order at 6:33.

2. Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

Tom said planned purchases for consideration are a service manual and a fuel filter.

3. Selectboard Issues/Concerns

Mark would like to meet with the planning commission sometime. Tom said they will be meeting November 9.

Eben said there is still some flood debris out there. That is concerning.

Duncan said we rented two portable toilets and we intended to have both picked up. Do we know if that happened? He noticed one behind Bob Hoag's and didn't know if it was ours. Tom said he can check and see if both of ours were picked up.

Beth said Elisa Clancy, who set up our website hosting, encouraged us to put our town credit card on the WordPress account. Currently her credit card is the one on the account, so she receives the invoice and reinvoices us. Beth would also like to upgrade our account from one that costs \$8.99/month to one that costs \$13/month because then she would be able to make a copy of the site to test some changes. We do not currently have a contract with Elisa Clancy. The one we had ended. Elisa suggested it might be wise to have a contract with her.

4. Planned Purchases for Consideration

Tom said Jason would like authorization to buy a Caterpillar service manual for the grader for \$1500. The board agreed that other items he would like to buy totaling \$566 do not require authorization under the procurement policy. Beth asked for more information on what the service manual is. Tom said it contains step by step instructions on how to perform maintenance and repair on the grader. He talked to Jason about whether we should have Cat do all maintenance rather than doing it in house. Jason said he would like to continue to do maintenance but he is unfamiliar with the machine. Beth asked if it cancels our warranty if we do maintenance. It was agreed that Tom or Jason should check with Milton Cat on that question. (*Jeanne Engel, Kelly Vandorn and Brian Raulinaitis arrived at 6:48.*)

5. Holmes Meadow

Tom said LCPC has started a title search on the Holmes Meadow property. The title work has already been done by Stackpole and French. If we had our attorney do it, it would be duplicative. Is the board okay with completing the closing with the title work done by LCPC's attorney or does the board want the town's attorney to review the document before the closing? The board agreed there is no need to have our attorney review it.

6. *RFP for Municipal Building and Library for Emergency Preparedness Measures FEMA*

The board reviewed the latest version of two RFPs – one for spray foam insulation for both buildings and one for general construction to make the lobby of the municipal building accessible to the general public and winterization of the library. Tom said he met with Brian Raulinaitis and the company that recently put in spray foam insulation at the fire station and they helped him figure out what work would need to be done by whom and in what order. The RFPs have been reviewed with the FEMA contractor.

The spray foam will be transitioned to fiberglass at 24 inches at the municipal building and transitioned to dense pack cellulose at 48 inches at the library. Duncan asked if there may be some portions of the library walls where the existing dense pack cellulose was not affected. Tom said there are unaffected areas, areas where the status is unknown and areas where a lot of insulation fell out. The plan is for the contractor to bring a thermal imaging camera to show where the voids are. Also included is some demolition at the library to remove plaster and lath that was behind bookshelves where there is currently no insulation. Those areas will now be insulated. Drywall will also be removed in one library room to make a space to blow in insulation. Brian suggested changing the height of the drywall to be removed in that room to 48 inches to match the rest of the building. It was agreed to make that change, to add use of a thermal imaging camera and to correct page numbers.

Eben moved to approve the RFP for emergency protective measures – insulation for the municipal building and the library – with the changes discussed, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.

In the other RFP, it was agreed to remove the mention of thermal imaging, to add replacement of a storm window at the library and to fix the page numbering.

Eben moved to approve the RFP for general construction for emergency protective measures for the municipal building and library with the changes discussed and the motion was seconded and passed.

Eben said he doubts the Conservation Commission would be interested in weighing in on this work but their original request was to be notified about any project on town property. Mark said this is within the footprint of the buildings.

Brian asked, these RFPs are just for emergency work to prepare the buildings for winter and then there will be a follow-up RFP for the buildings? Tom said phase 1 is protective measures and emergency response. This is part of that. Phase 2 is remediation – putting it back the way it was. That was the intent of the first RFP that went out. Phase 3 is mitigation – protective measures for future events. At the last meeting the board chose mitigation, which slows the process a bit. Phase 2 will hopefully be soon so people can get back to using the space. LCPC will be able to connect him with engineers and architects who can help with plans for mitigation. Jeanne Engel asked, said so we are starting over with the RFP? Tom said yes. The hope is that we will have both phase 2 and phase 3 together in the next one. The two buildings may or may not be together in one RFP.

Duncan said the advantage of going the mitigation route is that if we come up with an accurate estimate of the actual damage that is recognized by FEMA we can get twice that amount from

FEMA. That could help us pay for flood gates or other improvements. Otherwise they would only pay us for what we lost.

Mark asked, spray foam is not considered mitigation? Tom said FEMA is calling it temporary. Duncan said it could conceivably be a permanent fix. Tom said if some has to be removed at a later stage, because FEMA considers it temporary they will pay for that.

7. ***VLCT Uninsured Motorist Coverage Decision***

Tom said VLCT's current uninsured motorist coverage is \$250K. The standard is \$10 million. VLCT is requiring us to make a decision to increase our coverage or keep the existing policy. If we increased to \$10 million our cost would go from about \$60 annually to about \$400 annually. VLCT said they do not see many municipalities take the higher rate. If an employee is injured by an underinsured motorist, workers' compensation would kick in first.

Mark moved to continue with uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage of \$250,000 and to authorize Tom to sign the Vermont League of Cities and Towns Coverage Direction Form for uninsured/underinsured motorist coverage, selecting a \$250,000 coverage limit. The motion was seconded and passed.

8. ***Lamoille Economic Development Corporation Local Development District Contract Approval***

The Lamoille Economic Development Corporation has agreed to contract with the Town of Johnson for the role of Local Development District. This is required for the NBRC grant for the light industrial park. Duncan said what they will be doing is reviewing quarterly report submittals – not preparing them, just reviewing them and passing them on. There is still a need for assistance for Randall in preparing the reports. He doesn't want to lose track of that. LEDC wanted to be able to hire LCPC to do some aspects of the work. Beth said we still need to talk to NBRC about that. Separate from that, we need to contract with LEDC to be our Local Development District. The funding for this will come out of the Northern Border grant.

Eben moved to authorize the chair to sign the General Contract for Services with the Lamoille Economic Development Corporation, Mark seconded and the motion was passed.

9. ***FY25 Draft Budget***

The board reviewed a draft budget prepared by Beth.

Duncan asked, since we will experience some loss of tax revenue, should we send out a note to all departments asking them to reduce tax-supported spending by a certain percentage? Beth said she wants to do that and she wants the request to be to decrease net spending. They can spend the same amount that was budgeted if they raise more in revenue. If they say they are going to raise more revenue, she thinks it is important for them to have a strong business case for how they will do it and a statement of what they will do if they do not raise it. The board discussed what the target for reductions should be.

Beth said she would like Rosemary and Tom to link the budget to the cash on hand sheet.

Tom suggested the possibility of waiting until after July 1 to spend for the NRBC and stormwater grant work so we can get reimbursement in the same year we spend the money.

Beth asked if Tom can insert year end projections for FY26 in the budget.

Tom said he thinks we will get a lot of FEMA reimbursement this year. He thinks we may be able to reduce loss from flooding to less than \$30K with the grants we can get combined with being more conservative.

Beth said she thinks to be safe we should not count on being reimbursed for debris removal at all.

Duncan asked if Rosemary has any worries about cash flow. Rosemary said not now, but the next school installment will be due at the end of November.

Duncan said the idea of not getting reimbursed before July 1 doesn't bother him. We will book anticipated revenue for any reimbursement we have not gotten yet.

Eben said one thing to consider is that there are 22 abatement requests. That could add up to a considerable amount of money, depending on what the Board of Abatement decides.

The board discussed asking for a 5% reduction in net expenses. Eben said he thinks we should ask for 10%.

Mark moved and Duncan seconded to ask town departments and committees to plan and execute a 5% reduction in net expenses in the current year. Beth said she thinks a 10% reduction would just hurt our community. **The motion was passed with Eben opposed.**

Duncan asked if we want to set a target for the next budget. If so, we should let departments know we would like them to limit their budgets to that target. Eben said he prefers to call it a number not to exceed rather than a target. Beth said she would like as many committees as possible to have budgets as close as possible to a net zero increase for next year.

Duncan suggested asking the sheriff's department, the fire department and NEMS to limit their increases to some amount like 3%. It was agreed to discuss that at the next meeting.

Tom will come to the next meeting with year end projections.

Tom described the budget development process used by the last town he worked for. He went to the department heads and got their best budgets and then the selectboard chair met with them to ask initial questions. Then when the full board met to discuss the budget the discussion was focused on chair-driven questions. Beth said she can't do that. Tom said it could be any one of the board members. A lot of the budget is costs the board has no control over. The questions for the board to discuss have to do with the parts that are under the town's control. Mark said it would be nice to eliminate the parts we don't have to make decisions about and not spend time on them.

Tom will ask all departments and committees to make a 5% reduction in costs in the current fiscal year and present net zero budgets for next year. He will try to get year end projections at the same time.

Tom noted that anyone applying for a buyout is not likely to pay taxes while they are waiting for the buyout. Mark and Beth agreed that assumption is probably reasonable and we should increase the amount of delinquent taxes we budget for to account for that.

Duncan said for year end estimates it makes sense him to adjust everything where we are already over budget for expense or revenue and to assume that everything else will match the budget unless we have good reason to believe otherwise. That has always worked in the past. If we are asking everyone for a 5% reduction that could make it harder to figure out year end projections. Beth said we can have 2 different projections, one with and one without the reduction, and we can see the range. Duncan said the year end figures determine the year end surplus, which can go towards reducing taxes.

Eben suggested moving to using audited surplus values instead of estimated year end figures. Duncan said he likes going with audited amounts. We are now on an annual audit cycle. If we are going to do an annual audit we should try to get use the annual audited figure for the budget. We will always be a year behind but then we can do away with the whole issue of trying to estimate year end surplus. It would still be good to do year end projections, just not for the purpose of determining the year end surplus.

It was agreed that the second meeting of the month will be focused on the budget.

10. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths