

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, MARCH 4 2024

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

Others: Tom Galinat, Rosemary Audibert, Scott Meyer, Jessica Bickford, Lois Frey, Kelly Vandorn, Jasmine Yuris, Brian Raulinaitis, Ron Rodjenski (remote), Kyley Hill (remote), Doug Molde, Linda Molde, Kristen MacDowell, Charles Gallanter, Sue Lovering, Jeanne Engel, 4 other people

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

**1. Call to Order**

Beth called the meeting to order at 6:30.

**2. Consider Additions or Adjustments and Approving Agenda**

No changes to the agenda were needed.

**3. Consider Approving Minutes for February 21, 2024**

Not all board members had reviewed the minutes so it was agreed to postpone approval.

**4. Selectboard Issues and Concerns**

Eben said there is development happening on River Road West and a lot of sediment is washing into the road. Beth said she heard material was being pushed onto the bank across the road. She thinks we need to monitor the situation more closely and not just assume it is all washing out. Tom and Scott Meyer will connect to discuss this.

Duncan said he reached out to Brian and Drew Waxler and got an email response that they are still working on the market.

There was discussion about topics that might come up at town meeting and who should address them.

**5. Clerk/Treasurer's Report: Warrants, Licenses and Action Items**

**Duncan moved to approve the first class liquor license for Sodexo, Shayne seconded and the motion was passed.**

**6. Johnson Public Library – Public Comment and Ideas for Relocation, Addition or Elevation**

Tom said on January 30 the Department of Libraries announced grants of \$300K to \$1.5 million to be used for capital improvements, specifically for improving access to internet in rural communities. Keeping the library where it is will keep reducing access to internet for marginalized populations. With FEMA funding the library is limited to \$156K for flood mitigation. If they work with the Department of Libraries they could get \$300K to \$1.5 million. The Department of Libraries has stated they would like to give an award to one library in every county and they have said ours is the worst in the state. He thinks there is a good chance that if we present a plan that checks all their boxes we can get a \$1.5 million grant. For the grant application we don't need a completed project plan. We can apply with a concept and continue to add to it before they award the grants. The Vermont Community Fund is also interested in giving money to Johnson. Some could go toward a library project. Vermont Emergency Management is offering up to \$300K to get buildings out of the floodplain. It is not clear if a grant from VEM can be combined with other grants. It looks like it can but we don't know for sure.

Jessica Bickford said the library got a letter of support for the grant application today from Lamoille North superintendent Cat Gallagher.

Charlie Gallanter said he is afraid the town will want to floodproof the existing building. The problem with that is that if you stop water from going into that building it will flood the neighbors. There is some good modeling from the Lamoille County Planning Commission that will show the effect on neighboring properties. He would love it if we could move the existing building because it is gorgeous, but he doubts we can afford it.

Tom said one mover gave an estimate of \$200K to move the building and \$150K for a new foundation. It would actually be more affordable to move the historic structure after doing the FEMA-funded work to fix it.

Kelly Vandorn said in 2017 Stevens & Associates suggested dry waterproofing the basement. When the library board proposed that to Dr. Richard Downer he said the risk of hydrostatic lift would be too high and that would not be a reasonable option.

Jessica Bickford said the library trustees met this week. LCPC gave them the draft updated flood maps so they could determine where they might be able to relocate.

Charlie said the town already owns a great piece of land – the industrial park. Duncan asked how putting the library there will increase employment and the tax base. Charlie said it will be used by taxpayers and will be less of a drain on future cash. Shayne said he agrees that an industrial park might not be the only use for the Jewett property but he thinks the library is not a good fit for it. He thinks Legion Field would be a good location. Charlie said he was being a little facetious.

Lois asked about Legion Field as a location. Tom said he met with some library trustees and Jeanne Engel last week and they staked out a potential area on Legion Field for the library. They felt the best spot was what is now a dirt parking lot near the school. The 500 year floodplain encroaches into that space. He met with the contractor for the library project. There are options to elevate the building above the 500 year floodplain. But is that responsible when there have been three 500 year floods in the last 100 years? They also looked at the part of Legion Field near the Studio Center. There are two open lots across the street but they are in the floodplain according to the new maps. We want to keep the library within walking distance of the village. Lois asked if all of Legion Field is in the 500 year floodplain. Tom said no, not the western edge.

#### **7. *Johnson Public Library – Selectboard Discussion***

Eben said he is surprised by the low number for moving the building. The plan as the library board sees it is to do flood mitigation in place then and move it? Tom said we would probably withdraw the request to FEMA to do flood mitigation. We would just restore it to pre-flood conditions, then move it.

Eben asked if the library has discussed the possibility of the Masons selling their building. Kelly said they haven't discussed that with the Masons but there are difficulties with parking and accessibility at that location. Jeanne Engel had mentioned to the library board that library use numbers have gone down in some populations because of accessibility. The library board did briefly discuss the idea of continuing to use that building for the library but they were not fully on board with it.

Beth noted that the lot directly across from the school is for sale. She can't tell from the map if it is in the floodplain. Eben said he likes the idea of putting the library on Legion Field so as not to take any more land off the tax base.

Scott Meyer asked if the weight limit on the Pearl St. bridge will allow a brick building to be taken across it. Duncan said the moving company will come up with that information after their site visit. The site visit will answer a lot of questions. We have already heard that taking the building over the bridge would require elevating the building above the level of the rails and temporarily removing lamp posts. Tom said he is working with Anne Crockett to identify poles that need to be replaced anyway.

Duncan said at the meeting of the library trustees he attended last week Kelly threw out a figure of \$1 million to get the building in place on a foundation at Legion Field. Kelly said that estimate included excavating a new 8 ft. foundation, putting in a slab and moving the building, including removing light poles and power lines. With all costs the figure should be \$1 million to \$1.5 million.

Duncan said he thinks the library trustees should consider building new vs. moving. For \$1.5 million he believes we could build a brand new building that is highly energy efficient with more space. Eben said he likes the idea of a new building better.

Jessica said if we move the building then the grade where it is now could be brought down to a natural level, creating a lagoon that would mitigate flooding for others. Duncan said we have a buyout application for an adjoining property. We could tie them together.

Mark said he loves the historic nature of the old building. It is beautiful. If we build a new building the old one can be left in place and sold to someone.

Linda Molde said one problem is that the old building is not energy efficient. Could some of the grant money be used to make it energy efficient? Duncan said all it takes is money.

A community member asked how much grant money is available. Tom said \$300K to \$1.5 million from the Vermont Department of Libraries with the possibility of an additional \$300K from Vermont Emergency Management and \$300K from the Vermont Community Foundation that would not all be used for this project. There are other opportunities as well. Eben said if we get the Department of Libraries grant, his understanding is that there is zero town match.

Sue Lovering said the library building is one thing that makes Johnson unique. She thinks we should save it. It is one of our biggest assets and we should take care of it right and do it once.

The board gave conceptual approval to apply for the Department of Libraries grant. Beth said the board would like an update based on the findings from the site visit.

Eben asked if the library board has talked to the Tuesday Night Live Committee to get their thoughts. Jasmine Yuris said Howard Romero, chair of the Tuesday Night Live Committee, is aware of the project and seemed enthusiastic about it.

**Duncan moved to sign the letter of support for the Vermont Department of Libraries grant application prepared by Jasmine Yuris, Shayne seconded and the motion was passed.**

**8. Review and Approve Buyout Applications**

Scott Meyer said he had a discussion with a property owner about the potential to sell the part of his lot where the house is currently located and build on another part of the lot that is higher up. Scott learned from the state that he would have to subdivide the property prior to signing an agreement for FEMA to buy the house. If anyone on the buyout list has higher land they may be able to build on, they would need to subdivide their property. They would get less from FEMA but they would still own property. Eben noted that they would want to deed themselves a right of way to the higher lot.

Beth questioned why the board would not approve the buyout applications received. We know each of them flooded. Scott said an advantage to the town and village is that if the buildings are removed, especially if they were built on fill and the fill can be removed, it creates more room for floodwaters. That is a huge benefit for flood mitigation. Sue Lovering said if trees are planted it will work even better.

**Duncan moved to approve FEMA buyout applications for the following properties:**

**32 Library Street  
295 Wescom Road  
187 River Road West  
399 Lower Main  
395 Main Street West  
35 Railroad Street  
2909 VT Route 15**

**Shayne seconded and the motion was passed.**

**9. Town Meeting Preparation and Planning**

Beth handed out a list of talking points for some questions that may come up at town meeting.

It was agreed to have about 100 copies of the capital equipment budget available at the door.

It was pointed out that there should be a motion to allow Tom, as a non-resident, to participate. Mark said he believes the vote on that has to be unanimous. Beth said we haven't historically done that for our state representatives. Maybe we should. Duncan said it is up to the moderator.

Beth said David Williams went to VLCT training for moderators and they suggested he ask the board for a town meeting agenda. She thinks we should provide one.

Mark said he thinks we should talk about the ARPA money and grant money coming into Johnson. The board will need to point out that the capital budget printed in the town report is not the correct version. There was also discussion about a small error in the tax rate shown in the town report. The board discussed other budget items that should be explained or that people may have questions about. (*Eben left at 7:41.*) Lois Frey said she thinks one thing that is really interesting to people is how much of the money used by the town is tax-generated vs. from grants.

Scott Meyer suggested allowing state representatives to talk for no more than half an hour.

**10. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:46.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*