

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2024

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Duncan Hastings, Eben Patch, Mark Woodward (remote)
Others: Tom Galinat, Rosemary Audibert, Margo Warden, Adrienne Parker, Peter Hammond, Rob Rodriguez, Charles Flaum, Peggy Williams, Casey Romero, Howard Romero, Charles Gallanter

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:01.

2. Consider Additions or Adjustments and Approving Agenda

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. Public Comment

Peggy Williams said the news about the library getting the grant is extraordinary. She thanked everyone involved with getting the grant.

4. Public Q&A for Prospective Selectboard Candidates

The candidates were asked to introduce themselves. Rob Rodriguez said he has lived in Johnson for about 27 years. He is currently on the Planning Commission. He has been on it for at least 5 or 6 years. He has a couple of kids at Lamoille Union who went to Johnson Elementary. His wife spent 8 years on the Rec Committee.

Charles Flaum said he originally lived here in the late 70s and 80s and he moved back here almost 20 years ago. He lives on 100C. He works for himself. He is currently on the Tuesday Night Live Committee. Before that he was on the Form Based Code Committee.

Peter Hammond said he moved here 4 years ago from northwest Connecticut. He had been coming here since 2010 because his son went to Johnson State College, graduated, stayed in the area, got married and now has two young kids. Peter is on the Conservation Commission and the fire department. He volunteers for the food shelf and Salvation Farms and works part-time as a minister with the United Church in Newport.

Adrienne Parker said she moved here 3 years ago with her wife. They live on Dukes Road off 100C. They are both graphic designers. Her work involves user-focused design that considers how users interact with things. She is on the Planning Commission, the Rail Trail Committee, and the Bread Oven Committee. She is chair of the Beautification Committee. She has only lived here for 3 years but she has really fallen in love with the town.

Margo Warden said she and her husband have lived here for about 32 years. She worked at the college and now that she is retired from there she is working as a counselor at People's Academy. She served on the school board and then the selectboard and the Recreation Committee. She is currently a justice of the peace, which includes serving on the Board of Civil Authority. She and her husband chose Johnson because of her job at the college. She raised two kids here and has deep love and caring for this town.

Howard asked Margo if she thinks she would ever get a stop sign ordinance done if she was on the board. She said it would not be a priority for her. Howard explained that this was something the board talked about when Margo was on it and has failed to accomplish in all the years since.

Casey said she knows Charles Flaum has an interest in the website and making it more efficient through a redesign that opens it up to more people using it. When she first heard the notion of allowing committee chairs to use the town website her reaction was that she didn't want to. Others may feel the same way. She asked him to talk about the users and the audience.

Charles said in his mind there are two purposes for the front end of the website. One is to be a community and communication platform for our constituents. Our constituency needs more interaction. The website needs to function better to bring people to a locus where they can access information easily. A lot of that is done graphically. The other purpose is marketing with a unified message directed towards people looking at Johnson. If we are going to pull ourselves out of the rut this town is in, one way to do it is to show information about the jewels of this town to people with businesses that might come to the industrial park, people who would like to live here, or people who would like to stay at an Airbnb as they travel on the rail trail.

Howard asked Adrienne what she thinks about the website. Adrienne said one of the first things she looked at before coming to Johnson was the website, to see what Johnson was like. She thinks it is important to put all the highlights of what makes us a great town on the website.

Peggy Williams said she is on the Rail Trail Committee. They have been talking a lot about what they should post online and how it can link to the town. The whole idea is tell people what is here.

Peggy asked all the candidates what one or two issues they think we really need to address to achieve resilience post-flood.

Rob said he thinks of resiliency in terms of flooding. One thing that bothered him about the first Re-Imagine Johnson meeting was that there was a lot of talk about everyone's idea of a perfect Johnson, but at the end of the day if we can't control the water it doesn't matter what the perfect Johnson is; it will continue to flood. He thinks the state needs to come up with better flood mitigation ideas or practices. He doesn't think what they are doing now works. On the Planning Commission they talk about this quite a bit. His main focus in terms of resiliency would be to push for better flood mitigation/water control.

Charles Flaum said he agrees with everything Rob said. He believes we are going to have to figure out what to do with the buildings bought by FEMA. Resiliency means much more than infrastructure. He agrees with managing water but he feels we are going to flood again and again. Resiliency means considering how to use the FEMA buyout areas in ways that benefit the town but can be overrun with water and come back to life. If the grocery store does not get its grant we will have to figure out what to do with that space. Maybe it can be a green space or park. He also looks at resiliency as positive thinking. One example of positive thinking is the Jewett property. The town had a vision of buying it and maybe someday putting an industrial park there. That is resiliency. He thinks we should foster interest in the jewels of the town – the Long Trail, the rail trail, the SHAPE Center at the college, etc.

Peter said earlier he neglected to mention where he lives – right across the street from where the library will be when it moves. He thinks building a resilient community involves building a positive sense of community. He is concerned about the atmosphere that sometimes surfaces here (though not at selectboard meetings.) People seem very much in opposition to each other. We need to find ways to work together to solve problems and respect each other along the way. At Re-Imagine Johnson he first

had the same reaction as Rob: What kind of resilient community can we be if we keep flooding? He is happy to learn that there are people working on that very technical problem. Assuming we can find ways to be resilient in the face of flooding, one thing we need to address is how people can afford to live here. There need to be a variety of options. How do we encourage a community where people who grew up here can afford to stay? Where will the people who mow lawns or the nurses live? That is important. He doesn't know that it necessarily impacts the work of the selectboard. He doesn't think the board wants to be a housing developer, but they can be looking at housing and supportive of providing it.

Adrienne said flood resiliency means we have backups to backups. For instance, we might have a grocery store and also a co-op. We should have more than one option for all our basic needs. We have to do things differently. We need to re-imagine the whole system of the town and restructure it completely. We need to see what didn't work before and do new things. If she were on the board, with every decision she made she would have flooding in the back of her mind. For instance, would filling in one area affect other areas? She thinks that needs to be interwoven into all decisions. Flooding affects housing, schools, the grocery store, etc.

Margo said she really appreciated Re-Imagine Johnson. It brought a large group of community members together. It was facilitated aptly by people from outside the community. At the second meeting she thought about Maslow's hierarchy of needs – how some needs have to be satisfied before people can take on meeting other needs. Places to live and get food are primary needs at the bottom of the pyramid. Above those is safety – addressing flooding and a need for better communication so people feel safe that there is a plan. Then comes a feeling of belonging. How can everyone feel they truly belong? She thinks the Re-Imagine Johnson meetings really helped with that. She has been thinking about how we can continue community conversations in ways that connect us, including the college. Things at the college are changing and it is important for us to be at the table if we can be.

Charlie Gallanter arrived at 6:27. Peggy told him she had asked everyone to speak about the notion of resilience and share one or two things related to that they feel are most important to address.

Charlie said there is talk about doing the same things we have done over and over and expecting different outcomes. His idea for the grocery store is to have a smaller one like we used to have long ago. Sterling Market was wonderful, but we don't have a location that would not flood. Moving the library to Legion Field would be a temporary fix. Legion Field will flood. Our flood maps are old and out of date. To him, Legion Field is not a suitable location.

Duncan said he echoes what Mike said about the interest in the position. He is stunned that there are 6 people interested. He hopes the candidates here tonight will think about running for office in March. There will be a couple of vacancies.

5. *Executive Session to Discuss Potential Candidates for the Open Selectboard Position*

Charlie Gallanter said he doesn't think the board should go into executive session to interview candidates. Executive session is warranted when premature general public knowledge of the matter to be discussed would place the body or persons involved at a substantial disadvantage. The board is making a decision on appointing someone to what is usually an elected position. He thinks the public is entitled to know the questions the board asks.

Eben said the Vermont League of Cities and Towns said the board has the right to go into executive session for this. Charlie said he is not saying the board can't do it; he is saying they shouldn't.

Tom read from the applicable statute. The board can go into executive session for appointment, employment or evaluation of a public officer or employee provided that the final decision to hire or appoint is made in open meeting with reasons given.

Charlie said he thinks it is important to see how the board reaches the decision.

Mike said it has always been done the way the board discussed doing it tonight – interviewing candidates in executive session and then picking one. He feels the board should stick with past procedure.

Duncan moved and Mark seconded to enter executive session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to interview candidates and deliberate on the candidates, with Rosemary and Tom invited to remain and the candidates invited to join the board one at a time. The motion was passed at 6:35.

The board came out of executive session at 9:14.

Duncan moved to appoint Peter Hammond for the remainder of Shayne Spence’s term for the reason of how he interviewed, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.

6. *Adjourn*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths