

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

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Duncan Hastings, Eben Patch, Mark Woodward

Others: Tom Galinat, Doug Molde, Charles Flaum, Tina Bradley, Bruce Whitehill, Casey Romero, Howard Romero, Ron Rodjenski

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call Meeting to Order

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:30.

2. Consider Additions or Adjustments and Approving Agenda

Tom added salt bids and acknowledgment of David Butler's passing.

3. Consent Agenda

The consent agenda included the minutes of October 2, 7 and 21, 2024 and retroactive approval of all action taken at the October 21 meeting. **Mike moved to approve the consent agenda, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.**

4. Planned Purchases

The board reviewed the quote obtained for backhoe tires. Mike said we only have one quote. He did some research and found tires he feels are comparable for about \$2100 less. He would like to do more research and maybe come back with a better quote. Eben asked Tom to let Jason know that the board is looking for more quotes and would like to know if there is a reason he chose to go with the specific tires quoted.

5. Road Foreman Report and Action Items

Eben listed recent accomplishments of the highway crew from Jason's written report: equipment repair and maintenance, grading and de berming roads, and putting up a split rail fence at Grow Cemetery. Current projects include working at the town gravel pit. Upcoming tasks include fall maintenance, equipment maintenance, and two culverts to fix on Class 4 roads.

6. Acknowledgement of David Butler's Passing

The board discussed David Butler's long service on the planning commission. It was agreed that Tom should work with Paul Warden to write a sympathy letter to his two daughters for signature by selectboard and planning commission members.

7. Rail Trail Committee

Doug Molde said the rail trail committee has received a \$20,000 grant from the Vermont Community Foundation and a \$4100 donation from Eddie Gale. The village trustees agreed to allow placement of bike racks at the Cold Spring and agreed that the village will install and maintain them. They wanted to have Nate Brigham and Erik Bailey approve the siting. They want the town to pay for the concrete to mount them. The total cost for bike racks, shipping and concrete is about \$715.

Doug said in September the selectboard authorized the rail trail committee to apply for a building grant to finish off the Ted Alexander Welcome Center. We were awarded a grant with a 50% match, which is \$6,425. The Vermont Community Foundation is happy to let us use \$6,425 of their grant funds to cover the match. Brian Raulinaitis gave a cost estimate but we need to put out an RFP.

Doug handed out information on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Community Grant program. The grant application is due December 20. The types of projects that are eligible would be very useful to the town. One idea the rail trail committee has is stone steps to go to Old Mill Park from the trailhead

building. An Act 250 permit is needed to put them in so the rail trail committee was not able to submit that project as part of the last grant. There are other possibilities for the grant. He can't say yet what the committee will propose. The selectboard has already granted authority to apply for the Act 250 permit but the rail trail committee hasn't moved on it yet. Other potential uses of grant funds include public art, improving parking, benches or signs. He is asking for approval for Randall Szott to work with the committee to submit a grant application for projects to be determined by the committee. The grant has a 20% match, which would come out of the money the committee already has. A complicating factor is that the Lamoille County Planning Commission is applying for a grant on behalf of several Lamoille County towns under this program. Doug asked Randall if we can apply separately or if we are prohibited from sending in an application if we are a member of the consortium applying through LCPC. We voted to be part of the consortium and pay part of the cost for a large map of the rail trail.

Mike asked, nothing that Doug talked about will be paid for out of the town coffers? Doug said that is right.

Mark moved and Mike seconded to authorize the rail trail committee to apply for a Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Community Grant, to authorize Randall Szott to help them with the grant application and to authorize the committee to expend existing funds as proposed.

Doug said Randall doesn't know yet if we are prohibited from applying due to the LCPC application.

Mark asked how much of Randall's time this will use. Doug said his time will be appropriate for the job and the amount of money that is being applied for.

Duncan asked, the concern with the grant is that LCPC is definitely going to submit an application and the Johnson rail trail committee signed on as a participant in that application so there is a question as to whether the committee can independently make an application? Doug said yes. Randall thought it would be a good idea to participate in the countywide application. We don't need the map that is being developed at our trailhead because we have another display that Adrienne Parker put together but we could put the map downtown for more information. He voted to participate in that project. Maybe we should go back on it but he hopes we don't have to.

The motion was passed.

Doug gave selectboard members copies of the wayfinding guidance put out by the state. This is about providing information to people using the rail trail or state or town roads on trail friendly businesses. There are guidelines with regard to the signage. Municipalities are supposed to submit sign designs for locations with the state highway right of way, the rail trail right of way or town highway right of way. Once they are approved by the Rail Trail Council, the municipality can install and maintain them. These signs are only to advertise trail friendly businesses. Besides this type of signage, he suggests we put up signs for places like Beard Park and the arboretum. That probably will be at the town's cost. Doug said his purpose in discussing the wayfinding guide tonight is to educate the selectboard that the town has a role to play in getting signs on the rail trail, state highways and town highways. Duncan asked if the rail trail committee will be prepared to make recommendations. Doug said they can.

8. *Library Relocation*

Tom said there are 2 RFPs ready to go out for the library, for moving the building and for architectural services. We now have everything we need from the engineers to put those out tomorrow. Eben said the board already approved him and Duncan reviewing them and then putting them out.

9. *Industrial Park*

Tom said some decision-making points will be coming up soon. Hopefully he will have information on those for the November 18 meeting. Mark asked about the timeline. Tom said we are still moving forward with the NEPA review and permitting. We are still waiting to find out if agricultural mitigation is needed. It was first concluded that we would not need it but now it appears that maybe we will. Mark asked, so nothing will happen next year? Tom said he thinks it can. He thinks we should focus on trying to get it done next year because contractors will be booked the following summer for ARPA projects.

10. *LCPC Presentation*

Eben said Tasha Wallis was unable to come so we will reschedule this.

Casey Romero said she was hoping to learn more about how FEMA, the state, Re-Imagine Johnson and LCPC all work together on flood recovery. Who is the boss? Tom said for anything that requires municipal involvement the selectboard is the boss. We just signed on to a flood recovery program through FEMA. One thing they mentioned they would do is tie all the pieces together and make sure all parties are communicating. That will be part of the flood recovery plan they are working on, pulling together all the different projects so there are not competing interests and everyone is working together.

Casey asked, if Kim Canarecci is the FEMA boss of Vermont, does she make decisions, and where does the FEMA group working on the recovery plan fit in? Tom said she will make decisions on how state FEMA funds are spent in Vermont. She will verify our work and receipts and release funds. She is gatekeeper to the money. Casey asked if she also doles out the Vermont matching funds. Tom said he is still trying to figure out where the ERAF money comes from. He is trying to figure out who will give us the ERAF money we haven't gotten yet. We should be made whole as the legislature intended but he doesn't understand yet how that will happen.

Casey asked if the selectboard has the option of reallocating funds among various town projects. Tom said our funding will be reimbursement. If there are unexpended funds at the end of the year the board has the ability to allocate those. Eben said FEMA reimbursement for the 2023 flood is reimbursed by FEMA, with a portion from the state. With hazard mitigation grants like the one we have for Holmes Meadow, the town is also reimbursed.

11. *ROW Arboretum Update*

Tom said the arboretum ROW agreement has been completed.

12. *Website Redesign Bid Review and Award*

Tom said the board tasked him, Shayne Spence and Charles Flaum to look at the website redesign bids and make a recommendation. Their number one recommendation is to use Town Web and their number two recommendation is to use Davis Hill Designs. Eben said he thinks we could probably afford the cost of Town Web's proposal.

Charles Flaum handed out a report explaining the recommendation. He said both providers addressed all the RFP points and had professional designs. Davis Hill has not designed sites for any other municipalities. Town Web has designed sites for about 800 municipalities. Town Web has a platform

that is made especially for towns. The back end is easy to use for people who are not comfortable with computers. With Davis Hill we have to find out about any available upgrades and ask for them to be added. Adding new plugins requires extra training. Town Web will offer new capabilities to us as they become available. That will be easier for us. The additional training needed will be minimal. They offer automatic minutes and documentation creation. They have built-in email integration that is very easy to use. They can show town meetings on the town website so we don't have to use Zoom. Davis Hill does not offer any integration of village systems for paying electric, sewer, water and taxes. With Town Web we could have the ability for customers to view and pay their bills online. Town Web has dedicated IT support. We will be able to get support with one call. They are easy to get hold of. He has talked to them. There is greater platform security with Town Web. Davis Hill would provide in-person training initially and other than that there would just be written documentation. Town Web has a library of videos for assistance. Davis Hill had a lower cost but the Town Web cost is not a huge amount more and he feels we would be getting a lot more. Davis Hill Designs had a great design but the WordPress platform it would be using involves a lot of third-party apps.

Casey asked which company does the best job of figuring out who needs to know what. Charles said that will be decided by people within the town. Some towns have committee members making website changes. Others want it controlled by one or two people. The system is designed so a committee can be restricted to just making changes to certain areas. Tom asked if Davis Hill will also do that. Charles said maybe. They use WordPress, which can have user restrictions.

Tom said one of the main differences is that when we go with a smaller web design company we will be telling them what we want. Town Web will guide us. They provide the services municipalities need to offer versus what we think we need.

Duncan said at this point we don't know for sure if the village wants to participate in the website redesign. We will decide tonight which vendor to use based on our needs and if they want to participate that is fine. He asked if Charles's recommendation would be the same if the website was for the town only. Charles said yes. Duncan asked, if the village wants to participate and wants to integrate some of their systems, will it cost more money? Charles said it probably would. But he interviewed four or five town clerks using Town Web sites and for those who have integrated billing they have found that about a third of their customers use it and do not have to have paper sent to them. It would make sense for the village to do that.

Mark asked if Charles envisions that property tax bills could go out through the site. Charles said that is a possibility.

Tom said we have legal ADA requirements for the website. Any company we use needs to understand those requirements.

Charles said the two proposals are about \$1,500 apart. Eben said Town Web has an \$1,800 setup fee and a \$2,620 per year annual fee. Davis Hill will charge \$4,000 for the website redesign but the yearly fee would be only \$1,140. Charles noted that Davis Hill's cost does not include all the charges for plugins we might use. With the plugins their yearly cost would be closer to Town Web's. Tom said Town Web is \$800 cheaper for the initial setup but \$1400 a year more expensive annually. Charles said there is a big difference in capabilities.

Mark moved to select Town Web for website redesign.

Mike said before he approves anything he would like to see all the costs added up on paper for each company.

The motion was seconded and passed with Mike opposed.

13. *Grow Cemetery*

Duncan prepared a deed for lots at Grow Cemetery. He said the way the deed is written now, it allows not more than 3 cremains for lots 2-7, for a total of 18 burials of cremains. There has been interest expressed in increasing that to 4 per lot, which would be 24 total burials of cremains. The deed was based on the one from Evergreen Ledge Cemetery, which allows one body or 3 cremains in each lot.

Peter asked what the reason would be not to go with 4. It seems like there would be plenty of space. Bruce Whitehill said each lot is 4 ft. by 13 ft.

Duncan said there are 6 lots left. The deed is to Gary Whitehill, Bruce Whitehill and Tina Bradley.

Tina Bradley said the town crew did a fantastic job putting up the cemetery fence but there is only one gateway on the side. People have to walk through private property to access the gate when there is also road frontage. Tom said he will talk about this with Jason. The gate put in by Gary's property was for maintenance only. They have talked about possible locations for other gates. There were issues with all of them.

Mike moved to approve the cemetery deed prepared by Duncan for the Whitehill plots at Grow Cemetery with the change of allowing 4 cremains per lot and to authorize the town administrator to execute the deed. Peter seconded.

Duncan said this deed supersedes any previous agreement that might exist. Gary has said his mother has something on paper but he doesn't think she could find it.

The motion was passed.

14. *Town Sewer Service Area*

Duncan said he has reached out to Alex Jones of LCPC to try to get us a revised map. He thinks one other section of the Town Sewer Service Area should be modified. He knows that the original ordinance included an allocation formula based on the initial allocation of 25,000 gallons to the two service areas. No one has maintained accurate information on the actual allocations. The ordinance calls for issuing only so many gallons per year. He would advocate getting rid of that language. We have not had any issues of meeting that threshold and the village has indicated that they want more customers. Once we reach the 25,000 gallons it will be up to the village whether they want to issue more capacity

15. *Interlocal Kennel*

Duncan asked if Tom has heard anything more from Crystal about her ability to provide kenneling. Tom said it might be complicated and it might take more time to set up than we have.

16. *Joint Properties*

Eben said he and Duncan discussed that before the selectboard appoints two members to work with two village trustees on details of separation of property, it would be a good idea to put an advisory article on the town meeting warning to get a sense of what the voters want before we spend a lot of time on it. The board agreed to that concept. Ron Rodjenski said it would be important to make sure the question to the voters is clear. Tom said if we don't have a clear plan there might be a lot of

questions. He suggested maybe both boards could have a rough agreement that could be explained to the voters.

17. Gravel Pit

Duncan said he thinks the board will need to discuss in a work session ideas about what to do next for the gravel pit. Tom said we have one more summer with the one we have so we need a solution by next fall. We may be able to extend the existing gravel pit by purchasing a couple more acres. Test pits have been dug in that area. We need to decide if it would be cost effective. If we buy gravel and have it delivered the cost is \$14/yard. Currently we are buying it at \$8/yard and hauling it ourselves. Ron Rodjenski noted that floodplain restoration projects can be a source of gravel.

18. Salt Bids

Tom said Compass said they no longer sell to towns at the state contract price, but the contract with the state mentions towns. He needs to get confirmation of whether the state will enforce that provision of the state contract or if we are on our own. If we can buy through the state contract it would save us \$8,000 a year. Jason would like to continue using Compass rather than Cargill.

Duncan said Compass is \$5 per ton more than Cargill. Eben said we went with Compass last year because of the quality of the salt. It was more expensive but we would need to spread less.

The board did not want to decide yet which company to buy from if we cannot buy from Compass at the state contract price, but agreed that if we can get the state contract price Tom can move forward to sign a contract with Compass.

Eben moved to authorized Tom to sign a contract to purchase salt from Compass at \$79.42 per ton as per the state contract, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.

19. Cash Flow

Tom said we will be doing five major projects next year. We should probably take out the maximum amount for a tax anticipation note in the form of a line of credit. There would be zero interest unless we use it. There might be a time when projects overlap and we need to borrow until reimbursement for one project comes in. We will be spending big dollar amounts but then will be reimbursed for the costs.

Eben said Rosemary had previously indicated that we could use the tax anticipation reserve fund. He is hoping to get her thoughts. Tom said there is a chance we will have to spend more money than we are able to borrow from ourselves. If we borrow money there will be interest, which is a cost to taxpayers. He would recommend using the tax anticipation fund to offset the interest at the end of the year.

Duncan asked if we authorized Rosemary to execute a line of credit if she feels it is necessary. Tom said he thinks that board did not get to that point.

Eben asked if there are other reserve funds that we should ask the voters to change the potential uses for on town meeting day in order to reduce the amount of interest we pay. Mike said he thinks the short-term interest will be a small cost. Tom said it looks like we can float \$450,000 based on our own reserves. Duncan said he will be happy in the future to make a motion to authorize the treasurer to take out a line of credit. He noted that Rosemary has done that for the village.

20. *Executive Session for Employment Evaluation*

Peter moved to enter executive session for employment evaluation under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3), inviting Tom to be present for part of the executive session, Mike seconded and the motion was passed at 8:35. The board consented out of executive session at 9:41 with no action taken.

21. *Adjourn*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:41.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

UNAPPROVED