

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025

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

Others: Tom Galinat, Rosemary Audibert, Charles Gallanter, Justin Mason (remote)

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

**1. *Call Meeting to Order***

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:01.

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

Tom added discussion of providing lunch for election workers on town meeting day.

**3. *Public Comment***

Justin Mason recommended sending out the property information and dog information forms in January or no later than February, rather than waiting to send them in the tax bills, because of the timeline for the grand list. He got a cost from Repro of about \$1592. The cost if we did it in house would be about \$1960. He is considering going on the radio to let people know what is happening with inspections. He reminded the board that a decision is needed about whether to offer his previous assistant her requested wage. Board members had no issue with Justin putting information out on the radio.

**4. *Budget Update, Review by Board, Questions for Board, Directives for Administrator***

Tom said he made some changes in response to questions from Eben and Duncan. He made the budget as conservative as possible, lowering revenue or increasing expenses wherever that was suggested, so this budget draft is the worst case scenario. He and Rosemary worked on transferring money from reserves for the skatepark half pipe project. That brought in \$20K more in revenue for cash on hand and made a huge impact on the budget increase percentage.

The board reviewed revenues in the draft budget. There was discussion about how much to budget for dog license revenue. It was agreed to lower the amount from \$1400 to \$1350.

Tom said last year we discussed whether to budget for expected grant revenue or only known revenue. The only known grant revenue so far totals about \$29K but we are likely to get much more.

Tom said he estimated PILOT revenue based on the new CLA.

Tom had reduced miscellaneous revenue to zero. The board agreed to increase that to \$100.

Tom said Jason got a paving price per 1000 ft. He is looking at a \$3000 project with \$175K of state grant money. Tom will tell Jason to add more paving to get up to the amount he budgeted.

Eben said he doesn't want to pave for paving's sake. He understands the thought process behind the 4 year rotation but 4 years down the road we might have a million dollar project. He personally believes we should budget for the paving Jason feels we need now, not pressure him into spending half a million dollars rather than leaving extra money in the reserve fund.

Tom said if we put \$110K into the paving reserve every year, that is \$440K over the 4 year grant cycle, plus an additional \$175K in grant money. There is efficiency in doing a lot of sections of town at once. By having Jason do larger sections of town at once we are getting more paving for our buck. At the end of 4 years we will have \$615K for paving. Jason will start his paving plan based on that rotation. Whatever the board decides to save each year will determine Jason's target for his 4-year paving plan. We will not be paving whole roads at once. We will be doing the worst sections first. We are getting closer to getting caught up so soon we will only be doing 2 inch mill and shim, which is a lot cheaper than a rebuild.

Duncan said he disagrees that we are getting closer to getting caught up. We will never get caught up by contributing \$110K per year. He thinks we need a figure to put in the budget and then Jason will pave what he can based on what is available in the budget. Tom agreed that is what he should do. Duncan said Tom is assuming a 4-year cycle because that is when we get Class 2 paving grants. He is not sure he agrees with a 4-year cycle. To get a Class 2 paving grant we need a Class 2 road to pave. He thinks we need a paving plan. He doesn't think we absolutely have to have a plan to do the budget. We can put a number in and then come back with a paving plan. He recommends putting \$110K in the budget for paving this year.

Eben said he agrees with that expense figure. For revenue, can we plan on bringing in the amount of revenue we need for the project we think we will do? There was discussion on how to show paving expense and revenue in the budget.

Eben asked if the library could be encouraged to try to increase donations. Tom agreed to talk to the library board about that.

Eben proposed that Tom work with Isabelle Sullivan on recreation revenue. Revenue does not currently match expense. There are 4 lines zeroed out and he doesn't understand why. He believes revenue for rec programs should equal expense. Tom suggested that he, Eben and Isabelle can talk about this on the phone. Mark said he thinks if recreation needs a few thousand more we should spend it. Mike said he agrees that recreation revenue should cover expenses. Peter said he doesn't feel like it always needs to. Duncan said his general preference is to have expense equal revenue for rec programs, understanding that there are other things we are funding like salaries and field upkeep. Eben said maybe this is another area where fundraising would be helpful.

Eben said the Tuesday Night Live Committee is planning more expense than revenue. Tom said their expenses are based on the previous year's donations. Rosemary said all the money they will spend was collected before June 30 but their program does not start until July. They still have \$3-4K not spent from last year. Eben said he might call Rosemary for an explanation of the accounting.

The board reviewed expenses in the draft budget.

Tom said he reduced animal control officer expense. He took out the auditor salary amount entirely because the town will be voting on removing the position. Duncan asked what happens if that article is voted down. Mike suggested leaving the amount in. Mark said he would take it out. Eben and Duncan said they would be willing to take it out.

Tom said he thinks we budgeted more than we should have last year for social security.

Duncan brought up the question of whether we should budget for 32 or 40 hours per week for the town administrator position. It was originally 32 and we increased it to 40 at one point. Peter said he doesn't think we should budget for less than 40 without having had the full conversation about what the right number is. If we put it in at 40 then we can have that conversation. Duncan said we always have surplus funds. He believes it is a 32 hour a week position. Peter said he can't imagine it being less than 40. Duncan said that is because he has never done it. Peter said he has lived in two towns that are half the size of Johnson and have a full-time first selectman, who is essentially the town administrator. Those towns spend less than we do for services. Mike asked what their revenue is. Eben asked if they have a community and economic development position. Duncan said he thinks it is really a 24 hour a week position. He did it at that. But he thinks 32 is reasonable. There is the question of what we want the position to do. He thinks 32 is enough for the basic functions of a town administrator. If we want the position to do more than that, like community visioning, then 40 is probably needed. Mike said he thinks it should be 32. Mark said he thinks it should be 40. Duncan said when we went to 40 due to the flooding, dealing with FEMA, etc., the idea was that we would go back to 32. Eben said he wants to do some research and then come back with an opinion. Duncan said he has had a couple of people approach him and ask why it is at 40 hours when it was originally supposed to be 32. The board agreed to leave it at 40 hours for now. Tom said the job is different from what it was 8 years ago. The responsibilities are different now.

Tom said after we are done with the budget he plans to reach out to VLCT to talk about how we can reduce insurance costs. He thinks if we make changes they can be prorated for the rest of the year.

Eben asked if Tom can check whether the amount budgeted for a specific employee's insurance is correct based on the insurance they are taking.

There was discussion about not mailing the town report to all voters. Eben suggested talking about it in a slow month like June or July. Rosemary said we already have a signed contract for printing 900 town reports for this year.

The board agreed to budget \$18K for legal expense and to budget \$6K rather than \$12K for outside consultants.

The board discussed what should be budgeted for lister expenses and made some adjustments. For now the budget includes the higher rate of pay requested by the lister assistant.

Eben said he would rather see planning commission contracted services at \$500 than zeroed out. Duncan said he thought we were going to ask them to work on the capital plan. Eben said we were talking about going for a municipal planning grant that could be used for that. Tom said his understanding was that we would need to wait a year before being eligible.

Eben said he thinks we should unplug the EV charging station. Is it serving its intended purpose of attracting people to spend time in town? He suggested that we at least start charging for use. Rosemary and Tom brought up the monthly fee for credit card payments. Tom said the part that reads the usage doesn't work. It will charge a car but he doesn't know that it is tracking use. Mike agreed with Eben. When we got it the idea was that people would come through town and shop while their car was charging. He argued at the time that there isn't enough for people to do for 3

hours in Johnson. It was agreed to take out the \$500 budgeted for the credit card processing telephone line.

Eben asked what data backs up the amount budgeted for the ten cents on the grand list payment to the village. Duncan said we need to look at the village 2024 grand list and use 10% of that. So the number may change. Rosemary said she doubts it will go up.

Eben said he thinks the interest on loan payments amount needs verification. He is not sure if he agrees with what is in there. What is the basis for the amount of interest on the 2025 truck? Tom explained that it was based on a basic amortization schedule and 6% interest. Eben asked if that is what we think the interest payment will be. It is money in and money out and doesn't matter to the tax rate but we owe the voters an accurate budget. Tom said 6% is the commercial lending rate. We got an offer that was 5.99%. Eben suggested including an amortization schedule in case there is a question at town meeting.

Eben had recommended some changes to amounts budgeted for committees. Tom said it feels immoral to ask committees to drop their budgets at this point. Eben said this is the selectboard's budget and asking committee to work on certain lines is not immoral to him. Duncan said he tried to get the board to pick a target so we could tell committees not to bring a budget that was more than X percent higher. He has the same concern as Tom about cherry picking some committee items now. Mike agreed. The board agreed not to change any of the committee numbers, except for recreation, as previously discussed.

It was agreed to budget \$110K for the contribution to paving.

The board decided to stop discussing the budget and return to it at the next meeting.

**5. *Articles for Town Meeting Warning***

Eben suggested letting legislators speak at town meeting but asking them to show up at noon. Mark said he will ask them.

The board reviewed the draft warning. Eben asked if, because we have so many articles, there is a way to handle the article on dividing town and village property outside of town meeting. Mike said he thinks it is an exercise in futility. He thinks it will be difficult to negotiate any deal with the trustees that is advantageous to us. The board discussed possible wording changes and the possibility of handling this under Other Business instead of as a warned article, but decided to leave the article with the current wording. Duncan said he thinks the number of acres shown may be incorrect.

Mike said a committee member said to him that it would be nice if there were some point during town meeting where committees could stand up and give a plug for their committee. It was agreed that this could be included under hearing and accepting the reports of the town officers.

**6. *Lunch for Election Workers at Town Meeting***

Tom said Susan asked him about this. Typically during lunch is when the most people come to vote so election workers often don't eat. Is there going to be pizza? Mark said he will make sure there is. Last year he made sure pizzas got delivered to the election workers. Tom said Susan requested two specific types of pizza for the election workers.

Tom said daycare is another question. Rosemary said Kyle Nuse has arranged it in the past. Eben asked Tom to reach out to her and see if she is going to do it. He suggested committees could set up booths and ask for donations at town meeting.

**7. Future Special Budget Meeting**

It was agreed to schedule a special meeting for Monday, January 13 at 6:00.

**8. Executive Session for Employment Evaluation**

**Mike moved to enter executive session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) for employment evaluation, Mark seconded and the motion was passed at 8:08.** The board consented out of executive session at 8:36.

**9. Executive Session for Pending or Probably Civil Litigation or Prosecution**

**Peter moved to enter executive session to discuss pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party, under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(E), Duncan seconded and the motion was passed at 8:36.** The board consented out of executive session at 9:05.

**10. Executive Session for the Negotiating or Securing of Real Estate Purchase or Lease Options**

**Peter moved to enter executive session for the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(2), Mark seconded and the motion was passed at 9:06.** The board consented out of executive session at 9:25.

**11. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*