

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, MARCH 3, 2025

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Eben Patch, Mark Woodward
Others: Tom Galinat, Rosemary Audibert, Lois Frey, Justin Mason (remote), Paul Warden, Jasmine Yuris, one other person
Absent: Duncan Hastings

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call Meeting to Order

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:31.

2. Consider Additions or Adjustments and Approving Agenda

Tom added items related to pay for the assessor's assistant and road posting.

3. Public Comment

Assessor Justin Mason said WVLB will be playing the press release through the month of March. He read the press release. It says the assessor will be performing property inspections on Tuesdays in March and April 2025. Inspections are performed on properties with reported or noticed changes to update the assessed value for the grand list. Appointments for inspections are not required but may be requested. Property and dog information forms were mailed to all Johnson property owners. Property owners will be notified by mail in spring of any value changes. The property and dog information forms are on the town website. We have received quite a few responses – a lot with no changes and some with changes. The property inspection days are March 25, April 1, April 8 and April 15.

Mark said April 1 is the day the grand list is set. He knows of some people doing buyouts that would like their property assessed before April 1. Justin said all assessments will be as of April 1.

Mark asked if properties that had tax abatements last year have to go through another abatement. Eben and Rosemary said yes, but the assessed value of the properties will probably drop this year. Justin said assessed values for some flooded properties have been updated.

4. Selectboard Issues and Concerns

Mark asked how town meeting will be recorded. Tom said GMATV will be there. Eben said it will be streamed live. Mark asked if it will also be available on YouTube. Tom said yes.

Eben said the emergency management team has been closely tracking snow depths and ice. The next two weeks look good.

5. Consent Agenda

The consent agenda consisted of the minutes of February 3 and February 18, 2025. **Mike moved to approve the consent agenda, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.**

6. Clerk & Treasurer's Report

Rosemary had nothing to report.

7. Road Foreman Report

Jason's report was included in the meeting packet.

8. Library Relocation

Tom said April 26 has been set as the date to relocate the library. Consolidated, Fidium, VTel and Comcast have all walked the route and will be sending in estimates. The village has agreed to sub out some work. Green Mountain Power says they can handle whatever the village can't do.

The property transfer is scheduled for March 10 at the school. A draft deed has been approved by both attorneys. A survey has been done.

Tom has two leads on donations for digging the foundation and providing concrete. On Saturday 18 people volunteered to do prep for the building movers. They will be there tomorrow cutting concrete and drilling holes.

Peter said the committee will be looking at the latest drawings from the architect on Thursday. Tom said we will also meet on site with the structural engineer Thursday morning to finalize the foundation structural work. When that is done we can go out to bid for a general contractor.

Tom said there was concern about the possibility of federal funding for the project being held up but the money paying for it is in the state's hands and unable to be clawed back, so the project is safe.

9. Industrial Park

Tom said there was a meeting today on the industrial park. A final set of utility plans is almost ready. Two of the lots are over 3 acres, but because of stormwater regulations anything over 3 acres is more expensive to build on, so he thinks we should talk about moving property lines so all lots are under 3 acres to make them more saleable.

10. Reimagine Johnson Grant

Tom said the grocery store and food awareness task force wants to use the town's tax ID number to apply for a grant. He believes we should support all the Reimagine Johnson task forces. Even though the group is not an official town committee, the task forces came out of a town-sanctioned activity.

Eben said he has a little concern about using the town's tax ID and making Rosemary responsible for the funds when it is not a town committee. In the past the selectboard has not been supportive of funneling federal grant funds through the town for other groups that were not appointed by the town. If we support this grant application it seems somewhat unfair. But Reimagine Johnson was a town recognized effort. Tom said the selectboard has been pushing the process. It is not a town committee, but it is part of the town's recovery plan development process. Rosemary will need receipts and the group will need to follow the procurement policy. Eben brought up the possibility that something could come out of the Reimagine Johnson efforts that did not align with where the selectboard wanted the town to go. He said he is just trying to be fair to everyone.

Mark moved to allow the grocery store and food awareness task force to use the town's tax ID number to apply for a grant to raise money for community meals. The motion was seconded.

Rosemary asked if the motion covers applying for any grant funds or if they need to come to the board for each grant they want to apply for. Tom said he thinks we support the idea of them applying for grants but they still need to bring the information about the grant to the selectboard.

The motion was passed.

11. Town Meeting Prep

Eben said he let Dave Williams know that the Boy Scouts are not doing the Pledge of Allegiance. He will look for someone there to lead it tomorrow. Mark and Duncan sent out a new list of topics and which board members should plan to address each of them.

Eben asked if Rosemary is comfortable with the treasurer and clerk articles. She said yes. He asked if paperwork is ready to appoint her to the positions. She said yes.

Eben asked who will put together the next town report if the position of auditor is eliminated. Rosemary said the auditors only approve it. Many people are involved in developing it.

Eben said Dave Williams feels the motions on Articles 3, 5, 7, 8 and 13 should be made and seconded by selectboard members.

Tom said he told Jason the highway crew would not be needed to move things to the school for town meeting. He will take care of it. Mark offered to help.

There was discussion about some budget items that may come up and about how to present the various articles.

Lois Frey said there has been very little discussion about Articles 7 and 8, about appointing a clerk and treasurer. She hopes the board is ready to explain them.

Mark said we should explain that if the articles pass we plan to appoint Rosemary for the next year and that will allow us to interview from a broader pool of applicants, not just Johnson residents and will give us overlap with Rosemary for training.

Lois said if the town clerk is appointed it seems like that person is under the selectboard's jurisdiction, as opposed to being independent and elected by the townspeople.

Mike said some towns have had town clerks who were getting paid but not coming to work and there was no vehicle to remove them until the next election. If they were appointed by the board and did not meet their responsibilities they could be terminated. Mark said in an election someone who was popular but had few skills could become town clerk. And we are finding that we need to pull from a larger area to fill positions. For instance, Tom is from Peacham. Tom said the town treasurer duties have changed over time and we need a professional skill set. A lot of towns, even Hyde Park, which is smaller than Johnson, have a finance person. The treasurer position is probably not a full-time job, but a clerk-treasurer position can be full time. In most towns the two people are the same.

Peter said he wonders if Lois is asking if there is a way for us to convey information about the articles ahead of the meeting so people can go into the meeting understanding the proposals. That is something to think about. Eben said towns that have gone to Australian ballot voting have informational meetings. Tom said Australian ballot voting brings more people in to vote but the quality of the voting goes down. Fewer people are involved at town meeting but the quality of the discussion is higher.

Jasmine Yuris arrived at 7:19. Board members told her the task force's request to apply for a grant had been approved. Jasmine asked if the Reimagine Johnson task forces are considered committees through the town. Eben said that is probably something for a future board to discuss. There has been no motion for the board to make them town committees, but he is not saying the board wouldn't support that. Jasmine left at 7:22.

Eben said Dave Williams thought brief reports from committees could be allowed under Article 3 but for next year he would prefer a separate article for committee reports.

The board discussed what information to have available for town meeting and what questions people may ask. Mark said people have asked him what the FEMA buyout properties are. Is that fully public information? How can they find that out? Tom said people can call or email him to find out.

Mike thanked Mark for his 3 years of service on the selectboard and many years of helping to feed people at town meeting. The rest of the board thanked him as well.

12. Assessor Assistant Pay

Mike said Mimi Burstein has been assisting our assessor. She does an excellent job. She drives all the way from Randolph. She is only contracted for 64 hours total in the year. **Mike moved and Peter seconded to pay Mimi Burstein \$27/hr as assistant to the assessor.** Tom said if we increase her pay to that amount we will still be under budget for lister contracted services. **The motion was passed.**

13. Road Posting

Eben said even if many people ignore the weight limit posting, log trucks do respect it and keeping them off the roads protects roads and taxpayers' money. Fuel delivery drivers sometimes respect the posting. We can only charge fines if DOT comes and DOT won't impose a fine unless we follow all the rules. One of the rules means that our town trucks would also be fined if they went on the posted roads. Another issue is that the college's food deliveries could not happen under the rules. Tom said Jason would like to work with fuel dealers and encourage them to get deliveries done now and then only go on the roads in emergencies. **Mike moved to authorize posting road weight limits when the road foreman decides it is necessary and to direct the road commissioner to report the posting to the state DMV, Mark seconded and the motion was passed.**

14. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:38.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths