



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board October 28th, 2024 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

Select Board: Steve Isham, Frank Empsall, Dennis Smith, Tracy Zchau

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Brad Reed, Joe Kasprzak

Public: KATV, Paul Taylor, Michael Wright, Richard Boisseau, Gillian Sewake (via zoom), Deb Dolgin, Don Smith, Ashley Luche

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Ashley Luche discussed potential assistance for public water systems in St. Johnsbury. She explained that the assistance can include help with infrastructure upgrades, planning and rate analysis. Ashley explained that she is looking to spread awareness of this free technical assistance that is paid for by the State of VT.
- Chad explained that there are three redundancy systems in St. Johnsbury including the Trailer Park, St. Johnsbury Center Fire District and Passumpsic Water District. Ashley mentioned that some of the systems have been unresponsive to her outreach but she said she would send the information along to Chad to distribute to those who maybe interested.
- Jim Brown mentioned that he had heard that the street sweeper was out on Summer Street. He asked if that was true. Frank mentioned that he had seen it out.
- Paul Taylor asked why ARPA dollars were not used to buy the needed fire trucks.
- Dennis explained that the ARPA funding was a one time thing and was looked at as an investment to the Town through those funds.
- Paul Taylor mentioned that he thought in house stuff should have been purchased first as there was a need for new apparatus. He expressed that those looking for funding through the Town could have gone to the bank and gotten loans. Paul asked if the Town was gaining any interest on the funds they gave out. Dennis said no.
- Paul Taylor explained that in the past businesses have come into Town taken Town dollars and then closed. Dennis explained that the funds were used to encourage economic and grand list growth and that mortgages have been place on all funds through the contracts. Frank explained that in 3-5 years the Town would see repayment through the grand list.
- Paul Taylor asked how much the Co-op building sold for. Frank said in the area of 2.2 million.
- Steve Isham explained that \$50,000 in ARPA will bring in around 12 million on the grand list.
- Paul Taylor asked who was administering the ARPA funds and the contracts. Steve Isham said the Town was.

- Chad offered to show Paul the report regarding the spending of the ARPA funds.
- Paul Taylor explained that the Fire Department wants a fire truck they should get it.
- Chad explained that the funds are really unrestricted and that flexibility helped to get the projects moving and the growing the grand list. Mortgages have been set on most projects and the Town has leverage to get the funds back if projects fall through.
- Paul Taylor asked if the current fire trucks would be auctioned or traded. Chief Reed explained that the fire trucks would be placed on an online bid system. No one wants to touch them as they have rotten frames.
- Steve Isham explained that the Town was complimented on how they handled the ARPA dollars.

Fire Truck Bond Article:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager and Fire Chief Brad Reed discussed the 2024 fire apparatus bond article. Chad explained that the article seeks voter approval to obtain bonds or notes not to exceed \$1,650,000 for acquiring two fire trucks, with an estimated cost of \$1,654,000. He discussed the bond language and highlighted that the bond is on the November 5th ballot. Chief Reed explained that currently Engine 1 is 23 years old, has had a broken frame repaired three times and is 3 years overdue for replacement. Rescue 2 is 19 years old, is out of service due to an unrepairable broken frame and is due for replacement in 2025. The new fire trucks will have a lifetime warranty on the frames. The bond amount includes additional equipment and the cost of delivery. Chief explained that ISO ratings are impacted by both of these trucks being old and out of service. According to NFPA 1911 standards after 15 years an engine should be placed on a reserve status. Chief Reed mentioned that the engine and rescue truck were placed out to bid and Ferrara came back with the lowest bid and the Town was able to lock into 2021/2022 pricing. If ordered today it would take 2.5 to 3 years to get the trucks. The Town was able to work with a local dealer and was given the option to customize.
- The Town plans to use capital reserve funds towards the down payment and borrow about 1.3 million for the purchase. The first payment would be around \$120,000 with subsequent payments decreasing annually over the next 20 years. The next large apparatus purchase is planned for 2038 and would include replacement of the Tower truck and Engine 3.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the minutes from Oct. 16th with the noted corrections. All in favor.

Warrants:

- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to approve the warrants as presented. All in favor.

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:

- None

Grand List Adjustments:

- Steven Isham presented several Grand List adjustments.
 - 2024 #9 involved a reduction in the amount of \$902.69

- 2024 #10 was a reduction in the amount of \$900.01.
- 2024 #11 was an increase in the amount of \$170.40.
- Dennis inquired why there have been so many grand list adjustments. He thought that part of going with New England Municipal Resources was that the number of grand list adjustments would be low. Chad explained that he can discuss with Matt but it might be something outside of their control such as late homestead exemptions.
- Steve Isham asked if it could be due to the recent flooding. Chad said no.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the grand list adjustments 2024 #9-#11 as presented. All in favor.

Sept. Financials:

- Chad asked the board to table the Sept. Financials as the current Financial Officer is out.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to table the Sept. Financials. All in favor.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following report.
- The Town recently on boarded a new Police Officer who will be attending the Police Academy in February. Until the academy starts he will be working on getting to know the community and public. The Town anticipates onboard a level 3 certified Police Officer in early Nov.
- DPW continues to work on closing the gap on back road repairs before winter.
- Dennis asked if the Town has utilized GE Tatro for some repairs. Chad said yes.
- Discussed the recent repair of the pipe in the river cross, which was damaged and required a significant drop in the water level in order to make the repair. He expressed satisfaction with the outcome and the restoration of redundancy in the water system. Chad mentioned the potential for a new bridge crossing in the future, as the current pipe is old and not ideal.
- Jim Brown asked if the damage to the crossing was not as bad as anticipated and that a new line was not needed. Chad explained that it was hard to tell until the water level was dropped. He explained that the pipe is a 1920 era and that a bridge crossing would be a better option if the Town got the option to do so.
- Jim Brown asked if Sargent Johnson was still on paid leave as he saw him working for the Sheriff's Department. Chad explained that he is still on paid leave and that the Town is unaware of him working for the Sheriff's Department.

Other Business:

- Steve Isham mentioned that the next Select Board meeting would be Nov. 11th which is a holiday. He asked the board's preference on another day. The Board decided to move the meeting to Tuesday Nov. 12th at 6 pm.
- Dennis asked about progress on the Armory. Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager mentioned that things are going well. He explained that the Town received a request for a change order with regards to the foundation and are working on winterizing the building. Hoping for demolition of the back walls in the Spring. Otherwise everything is going smoothly and is on schedule.

- Jim Brown discussed the approval of the final draft of the bylaw modernization and the upcoming Planning Commission Public Hearing scheduled for Nov. 19th. He directed those looking for a final draft of the bylaws to reach out to Matt Walsh the Zoning Administrator.
- Chad explained that the bylaw modernization stems from Act 148 changes.
- Jim Brown mentioned that the Planning Commission will be meeting twice a month on the first Monday and third Tuesday to work on the Town Plan as the February deadline is fast approaching.
- Don Smith asked about the progress with the Town alert system. Chad explained that the Town is exploring using VT Alerts.

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy that there was a need for executive session to discuss a contractual matter where premature disclosure would place the Town at substantial risk. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to enter executive session and invite the Town Manager, Fire Chief and Calex Chief. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to exit executive session. All in favor.
- The Chair had nothing to report.

On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis the board adjourned by unanimous decision.

October 28th Select Board Meeting Video: