



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board March 11th, 2024 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

Select Board: Steve Isham, Frank Empsall, Tracy Zschua, Dennis Smith, Brendan Hughes

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak (via zoom), Kresten Sterling (via zoom)

Public: KATV, Jim Brown, Gillian Sewake, Don Smith (via zoom), Lawrence Dolan

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- None

Warrants:

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

Minutes:

- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to approve the minutes from the Feb. 26th meeting with the noted corrections. All in favor.

Liquor/Tobacco License:

- Steven Isham presented the following liquor and tobacco renewals:
 - ABFB Corp. - 2nd class
 - ABRF Corp. -Tobacco
 - Family Dollar of VT LLC- Tobacco
 - Wesco- Tobacco
 - Wesco- Tobacco Substitute
 - Wesco- 2nd Class
 - Wesco- 2nd Class
- Dennis asked if anyone knew what WESCO was. Frank said he was not sure.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the liquor and tobacco licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Award Loan for DPW Equipment:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that all the equipment for DPW has been purchased. The loan amount was placed out to bid and the Finance Officer received the following bid amounts.
 - Passumpsic Bank 4.44%
 - Community Bank NA 5.24%
 - Community National 5.34%
 - Union Bank 5.40%
- The Town is recommending awarding the loan for the DPW equipment to Passumpsic Bank.
- Tracy Zschau recused herself as she sits on the loan board at Passumpsic.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to award the loan for the DPW equipment to Passumpsic Bank at 4.44% and authorize the Town Manager to execute the documents. All in favor. Tracy abstained.

202 Bay Street Update:

- Travis Samuels from Zion Growers provided the Select Board with an update regarding their property at 202 Bay Street in St. Johnsbury. He highlighted that the project is currently in the environmental review process and thanked the Town and NVDA for their letter of support for the project.
- He explained that they will be taking down the 2 out buildings including the office/pole barn, the Rail Spur and stone building all as part of the environmental clean-up. Hoping from there they will get the official ok from the state to move to the next phase. He mentioned that the project is moving slowly forward.
- Dennis inquired about a time frame for the state approval. Travis explained that the State will be reviewing it on Wednesday and they are hoping for a Spring/Summer start.
- Joe Kaszprak, Assistant Town Manager reiterate what a great project this is for St. Johnsbury and Bay Street. He expressed that Travis and Zion Growers has reaffirmed their commitment to this project in St. Johnsbury.
- He explained that a letter of support from the Town and NVDA was provided in hopes to help nudge Montpelier and help Zion Growers obtain some financial support for this project.
- Steve Isham asked if the tax stabilization contract was still in effect and if the agreement starts once the project starts. Joe said yes that once the project was off the ground the Tax Stabilization Committee would come back to the Select Board with an application. Currently Zion Growers is working to make payments to their back taxes and have been doing so in good faith.
- Travis mentioned he wanted to updated the Select Board as Zion Growers is also working on a project down in Proctor at the Old Proctor Marble Building however they continue to pursue the project in St. Johnsbury.
- Travis explained that Zion Growers is planning an event on May 4th at their Bay Street location with dancing and food. He mentioned he wanted to let the Town know ahead of time and that it will be nothing chaotic just something to help drum up more traction and energy for the project.
- Tracy asked if it was more of an informational or if it was a celebration. Travis said it would be more along the lines of a celebration.
- Jim Brown asked if food would be available at the event. Travis said yes.

Designated Downtown Report:

- Gillian Sewake, Discover St. Johnsbury Chamber Director provided the Select Board with an update on the Chamber from 2023 and talked about the year ahead. She discussed the ACCD

Annual Report including that business growth has been bonkers and increased in double digits in St. Johnsbury since COVID in 2021. She highlighted that since 2020 34 new businesses have come to St. Johnsbury and the number of facade renovations have been creeping up as well.

- Frank mentioned that he liked the report and it was pretty detailed. He thanked Gillian for compiling the data.
- Tracy mentioned that the number of new housing units was great to see.
- Gillian mentioned that Chad Whitehead and Joe Kasprzak have been instrumental in helping bring all this success to St. Johnsbury. She thanked Joe and Chad.
- Chad thanked Gillian.
- Frank asked if the number of volunteers have increased over the years. Gillian said yes they have increased.
- Steve Isham asked if the total vacancies was around 10-13. Gillian said yes but it depends what people are looking for in terms of space. Some of those units are actually not available.
- Jim Brown asked how the number of businesses/ job growth was calculated. Gillian explained that it is a tabulation set up on the back end of the spreadsheet. Gillian explained that it is her job to keep track and she was happy to share some of the specifics.
- Jim Brown asked how the number of hours for volunteers was calculated. Gillian explained that it was tabulated and was part of her job responsibilities. Gillian said it was related specifically to Discover St. Johnsbury.
- Jim commented that more hours and more people should be included in the volunteer information. He explained that he has been reporting his beautification hours to Chad.
- Joe Kasprzak said that this shows St. Johnsbury's remarkable story and kudos to Gillian and the Chamber team.
- Jim mentioned that a lot is going on.
- Brendan applauded Gillian and all her hard work. A lot goes on behind the scenes as well.
- Gillian mentioned the upcoming events in St. Johnsbury including the April 8th Eclipse, Kingdom Maple Fest on April 20th, the Food Truck Summer Events, Final Fridays, Fall for St. Johnsbury and St. Johnsbury Sparkles weekend.
- Brendan asked if the Eclipse glasses were in yet. Gillian mentioned some are available at the Fairbanks Museum now but St. Johnsbury specific brand ones should be arriving the last week of March.
- Tracy inquired if there was an estimated number of people that would be coming to St. Johnsbury for the Eclipse.
- Gillian explained that there are a lot of events planned and happening in St. Johnsbury. She is currently working on the logistics for parking and shuttling for the April 8th Eclipse. She mentioned that the Monday afternoon commute and transportation would be busy. She said to expect traffic jams and delays.
- Jim Brown inquired about the public safety and security for the April 8th Eclipse.
- Chad explained that the Police Department is aware of the event along with Emergency Services. A wrecker service will be on standby if needed. DPW will be working until 5 pm to help manage the traffic. He explained a lot of planning is going into it. The Fairbanks has 1,000 people confirmed already. The Police Department will be staffed and active.
- Jim Brown mentioned that he felt criminal elements would be elevated and a reality here for these big events. He explained that those see this as an opportunity in reserve of how we see it.
- Frank agreed.
- Steve thanked Gillian.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report
- The Town is working on the permit request from the Fairbanks Museum with regards to the solar eclipse event on April 8th. Lane shifts will take place starting at 10 am on Main Street with a road shut down around noon. Town school will dismiss at 12:40 on April 8th. Most of the traffic will be detoured through the 4 season's neighborhood with the exception of large trucks.
- Frank asked if temporary signage would be put up. Chad said yes.
- Steve Isham about road closures. Chad said roads will be closed on Main Street to Maple Street and the first block of Central Street.
- Construction at the Water Treatment Facility continues. Unknown when the turn on date will be but depending on the delivery of the new membranes it could be as early as Sept.
- Jim Brimblecombe at the WWTF continues to work with DuFraune Group to revise the plans for the building to house the press. Expecting construction to start this summer.
- Chad asked that community members be patient with gravel roads as we enter the 5th mud season of the year.
- DPW is looking into ordering a special plow blade for plowing snow on muddy soft gravel roads.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager had nothing to add.
- Brendan mentioned that there have been requests for improved lighting in the Somerville area. Chad said he would reach out to Green Mountain Power regarding the request.
- Brendan mentioned that a couple of sections in the area of 98 Mill Street could use some lighting improvements as well. Chad explained that the area of 98 Mill Street should be fairly easy.

Other Business:

- April 8th Select Board meeting will be moved to April 10th at 6 pm.
- Tracy Zschau mentioned that she would like to add the appointment of Tim Tierney to the Knob Property Committee. He has been serving on the committee and would like to continue.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to appoint Tim Tierney to a one year term on the Knob Property Committee. All in favor.
- Jim Brown provided an update on the bylaw modernization and what the Planning Commission continues to work on.

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