



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board June 14, 2021 at 6:00 PM Select Board Meeting

Present-

Select Board: Kevin Oddy, Dennis Smith, Daniel Kimbell, Frank Empsall, Brendan Hughes

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Stacy Jewell, Lesley Russ (via zoom), Joe Kasprzak (via zoom)

Press: KATV, Todd Wellington (via zoom)

Public: Jim Brown, Scott Campbell, Beth Fauver, Ed Behr, Ray Cummings, Diane Cummings, Susan Cherry, Tara Holt, Victor Caamano, David Brown, Linda Caamano, Spencer Hudson, Bryon Quatrini, Janet Quatrini, Melissa Maney, Jeff Maney, Jerry Webber, Kathy Sillowcy, Tracy Zscher, Joe Fox, Steft (via zoom), Alice Kitchell (via zoom), Patricia Janssen (via zoom), Nick Anzalone (via zoom), John's Iphone (via zoom), Mary's Iphone (via zoom), Travis Samuels (via zoom), John Raser (via zoom), Betty (via zoom),

Agenda Amendments:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to add approval of the long term revolving fund RF1251 to the agenda following the Manager's Report. All in favor.

Public Comment:

- Jerry Webber approached the board regarding his concerns with the placement of 4 offenders into the community. Jerry voiced his concerns with the Restorative Justice Center helping violent offenders find housing within St. Johnsbury when their mission is in helping victims. 272 sex offenders reside in the Northeast Kingdom. Suggests that Restorative Justice Center returns to its core mission to assist victims.
- Tara Holt expressed her concern with raising young children in the Town. Shared an experience one of her children had in front of their school.
- The Select Board was asked if offenders were indeed being released back into their pre-prison residences. Dennis stated that he has no information to tell him otherwise. Kevin commented that is what they have been told by the department of corrections.
- Susan Cherry from the Restorative Justice Center spoke on behalf of the issue and mission of the Center. Encouraged residences to talk with her regarding their concerns.
- Beth Fauver expressed her concerns and fears with raising young children amongst these offenders.
- Melissa Maney expressed that mental health services in the area are lacking and the Town is not capable of this.

Warrants:

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

Minutes:

- On a motion by Daniel and second by Dennis to approve the minutes of 05/24/2021 as presented. All in favor.

Liquor Licenses:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank approve the following liquor licenses. All in favor. Brendan abstained.
 - Whiskey Den, LLC - 1st Class Renewal
 - Whiskey Den, LLC - 3rd Class Renewal
- Spencer Hudson approached the board regarding his request for a new 1st and 3rd class liquor license under The DiSpencery, LLC. Explained the liquor license is for the event area which will be open when the store is open and possibly a few evenings. Daniel asked about the space. Spencer commented that it will be a low-key environment with seating for 50 (1500 square feet). Daniel asked if the food portion was currently up and running. Spencer said it is not currently up and running. Waiting on the town liquor license approval and the state.
- Catamount Film and Arts requested a new 1st class liquor license under ArtPort. The liquor license is only for when events are held at the new Mall location. Health inspection has been completed.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the following liquor license. All in favor. Brendan abstained.
 - The DiSpencery, LLC- 1st Class
 - ArtPort- 1st Class
 - The DiSpencery, LLC- 3rd Class

Grand List Adjustment:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan the board approved the grand list adjustment 2020 #11 in the amount of \$454.49. All in favor.

Additional Authorized Check Signer Appointment:

- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve Denise Bigelow as an additional authorized check signer for the Town of St. Johnsbury. All in favor.

May Finance Report:

- Lesley Russ, Finance Officer provided the Select Board with a May financial update.
- Perusing possible use of ARPA funds for Parking Fund deficit.
- Expect surplus in all funds expect Parking and Highway at the end of the year.

Rental Housing Grant Program:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager provided an overview of the Rental Housing Grant Program including review of the purpose of the program and the 2021 program details.
- 11 property owners with 20+ housing units inquired in early 2021 about the program. 10 applications were received. COVID still impacts the program.
- Patricia Janssen presented the following applications and recommendations from the Rental Housing Grant Program Board.
 - Application #1 1064 US Route 2E in the amount of \$3,000 for heat pumps. The Rental Housing Grant Program Board isn't recommending this project as it doesn't address universal design.
 - On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to deny the request for \$3,000 for application #1 1064 US Route 2E. All in favor.
 - Application #2 146 Costa Ave. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$11,310.85. The Rental Housing Grant Program Board recommends a grant in the amount of \$3,000 for various improvements with regards to the porch, bathroom and stove.
 - Daniel questioned the application not being within compliance, the landlord not being a local owner. Asked what the criteria was to push through. Joe explained that it was a mistake by the owner and confirmed that landlord is in good standing and not in arrears.
 - Daniel commented that the programs max award amount is \$3,000. How long does it take to raise the funds in place vs what is paid out per year? Joe explained that \$40,000 in registration fees has been raised for two years and an additional \$10,000 came from the Economic Reserves to fund the Rental Housing Grant Program.
 - Daniel asked if the Select Board has the authority to award less. Joe explained that the Select Board has the sole authority on how to deploy the grant funds the Rental Housing Program just makes recommendations.
 - Brendan asked if the grant funds were paid after the \$11,310 amount of work was complete. Joe explained that yes the projects needed to be complete and a site inspection would take place before the grant funds were paid out. Joe explained that the program requires at least a 1:1 match. Kevin reiterated that complete was at \$6,000 worth of work.
 - Kevin mentioned his concern over the same applicant having multiple locations and requesting a total of \$9,000. Concerned with who may have been left out. Joe mentioned that the program has a max of 3 units per property owner. A direct mailing was conducted to property owners of apartments within St. Johnsbury, the program was advertised. Believe information got out to a large number of landlords.
 - Kevin expressed his concern with giving 1/3 of the funds available to one person. What about the response later in the summer when the pandemic begins to roll back, things open up and more people become aware. Joe explained that some funding will still be available for a second round however the program is underfunded and the committee is working hard to secure other funding sources. Joe explained that the spring outreach was comprehensive and many inquire but were just not ready to pull the trigger. Optimistic on future funding for the program.
 - Kevin expressed that is just a concern of his that the program is awarding the same individual multiple grants. Patricia explained that no one was turned away because the program ran out of funds.
 - Kevin applauded the group on their work.
 - Brendan asked if a next around was proposed. Patricia said yes.

- Dennis asked about the time line regarding completion of the projects. Joe explained the projects must be completed at the end of the calendar year.
 - On a motion by Daniel and second by Frank to approve the grant request in the amount of \$3,000 for application # 2 146 Costa Ave. All in favor.
- Application #3 441 Main Street Unit # 1. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$ 14,318.85. The board is recommending a grant in the amount of \$3,000 for various improvements including flooring, oven, bathroom remodel and fridge.
 - On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the grant request in the amount of \$3,000 for application #3 441 Main Street Unit #1. All in favor.
- Application #4 441 Main Street Unit #2. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$14,085.85. The board is recommending a grant in the amount of \$3,000 for various improvements including flooring, stairs, bathroom remodel and fridge.
 - On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to approve the grant request in the amount of \$3,000 for application #4 441 Main Street Unit # 2. All in favor.
- Application #5 462 Railroad Street. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$6,000 for alarms, extinguishers and paint. The board is not recommending this project due to incomplete application.
 - On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to deny applications #5, #6 and #7 due to the applications being incomplete. All in favor.
- Application #8 626 Summer Street Unit #1. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$7,159.74. The board is recommending a grant in the amount of \$3,000 for various improvements including locks, dryer, windows, hand rails and laundry room door.
 - Daniel asked if this request was specific to this unit. Patricia commented that the request was specific to the unit.
 - On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the grant request in the amount of \$3,000 for application #8 626 Summer Street Unit #1. All in favor.
- Application #9 626 Summer Street Unit #2. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$595.93. The board is recommending a grant in the amount of \$297.96 for various improvements including locks, levers and a kitchen sink facet.
 - On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the grant request in the amount of \$297.96 for application #9 626 Summer Street Unit #2. All in favor.
- Application #10 626 Summer Street Unit #3. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$3,653.10. The board is recommending a grant in the amount of \$1,826.55 for various improvements including locks, levers and replacement of 3 windows.
 - On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the grant request in the amount of \$1,826.55 for application #10 626 Summer Street Unit #3. All in favor.
- Patricia thanked the board. Kevin thanked the Rental Housing Grant Program for all of their hard work.

Enhanced Energy Plan Request for Hearing:

- Scheduled Enhanced Energy Plan Hearing for July 12th at 5:30 pm and July 26th at 5:30 pm.

Vermont Land Trust- The Knob Property:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided an over view of the Knob property and the asset it is for the Town of St. Johnsbury.
- Tracey Zschau from the VT land trust explained that the property went on the market in late March of 2021. The goal of the VT land trust is to help the community protect land such as the

Knob. The end result would be that the Town of St. Johnsbury purchases the property as a town forest.

- As of 5:45 pm on 6/14/21 the Knob property was under contract for \$200,000 until November 20th, 2021. The hope is a bulk of the cost will come from conservation funding. However with conservation funding a conservation easement will be required.
- Daniel asked for clarification on the conservation easement. Tracey explained the conservation easement would allow for a parking lot and structure that supports the conservation.
- Dennis asked if the potential cost to the Town would be \$20,000 plus legal fees. Tracey said yes.
- David Brown approached the board about his interest in the Knob as an adjacent property owner. He explained he has allowed community members and visitors over his land for over 13 years on their visits to the Knob. He said he has 11 log books that people have signed when visiting the Knob over the years. The view is incredible. He explained that people love it. It's a fantastic opportunity for the town.
- Linda Camano explained that she doesn't want anything to happen to this piece of land. She said she has been many places in her life and knows many people who have visited the Knob. It is a precious place to the area that is used by the public. This is a great opportunity for the Town.
- Joe Fox voiced that the Knob is currently used by many different sports teams. Incredible property and would be a travesty if it was shut down.
- Ed Behr explained that the Knob is an asset to the community. It is a wonderful thing.
- Kevin asked what the next steps would be. Tracey explained that the next steps would be coming back to the Select Board with a timeline including the appraisal is scheduled for July 16th, grant application is due July 23rd, offering site walks, and working on securing funding sources.
- Kevin stated the biggest question will be the cost to the Town. Frank agreed. Frank asked if any fundraising has started with the public. Tracey explained that it had not yet as they were holding off until it was under contract.
- Brendan asked if Tracey would be willing to work with Chad on this. Tracey said yes.
- Jim Brown asked if a letter showing support from the Select Board would be helpful moving forward. Tracey said yes. Dennis asked if getting a letter of support from the board by June 28th would be soon enough. Tracey said yes.
- Tracey will bring more updates to the Select Board and Chad as they develop.

State Hotel Shelter Program:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the select board an update regarding the State Hotel Shelter Program ending on July 1, 2021. This will leave 31-37 people who are no longer eligible to receive a voucher to stay at the hotel here in St. Johnsbury.
- During COVID this has put a taxing role on the St. Johnsbury Police Department and Calnex EMS. The impact has proved to be stressful. The Chief of Police requested security protocols and received no assistance from the State at the hotel.
- NEKCA staff will be available to address issues as they arise.
- Scott Campbell mentioned that Jeffery the special advisor for child and families is aware of the issues. Adjustments are being made to make the program more accessible but at a point it has to end. It cannot go on forever and this is where we are at now. Hopefully most will go back to doing what they did before living in cars or doubling up. Doesn't mean they will necessarily be on the streets. There is no easy answer. We will have to see how it pans out.
- Kevin expressed his concerns with the increase in police calls as the St. Johnsbury residences pay that cost.

- Daniel expressed that he feels St. Johnsbury becomes penalized because they have the hotel and resources to house them. Kevin agreed.
- Brenden commented that even though St. Johnsbury may have the services but it overwhelms the resources of the Town and doesn't provide any funds for an increase in these services.
- Scott Campbell suggested tracking expense related to this if it becomes a burden.
- Susan Cherry stated she appreciated Chad coming to the continuum of care meetings on behalf of the Town. Continue to work on the problem but not one agency along is going to solve it. We are keeping a close eye on the situation and will continue to talk together.

ARPA Authorized Official:

- On a motion by Daniel and second by Frank to appoint Chad Whitehead, Town Manager as the ARPA authorized official. All in favor.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- Nick Anzalone provided an update to the select board regarding NEK broad band district. Scott Campbell has volunteered to be an alternate. On a motion by Daniel and second by Dennis to appoint Scott Campbell as the alternate for the NEK Broad Band District. All in favor.
- June 24th is the final deadline for the re-bid for the Gilman and Pleasant Street project.
- Fire Chief has given his notice. Working on replacement moving forward.
- 1st #Getdowntown even for 2021 was successful. Town was busy.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager mentioned that the application for the CDBG grant in the amount of \$500,000 for the Amory project has been submitted. Hoping to hear by 7/2 or so regarding the award.
- Kevin asked if construction for the Gilman and Pleasant Street project would still begin this year. Chad said yes.
- Dennis asked if the bid closes on June 24th when would the project start. Chad said before September.
- Dennis voiced his concern that the Town has already received one written complaint. Is it possible to provide any temporary relief for summer? Chad explained that he would follow up with Steve Beaugard, Director of DPW to see what they could possibly do.

Long Term Revolving Loan Grant:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager presented the details for the long term revolving loan RF1-251 long term control plan loan grant in the amount of \$236,230.00.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the RF1-251 long term revolving loan in the amount of \$236,230.00

Other Business:

- Susan Cherry commented how wonderful the event in St. Johnsbury on Saturdays was. Thank you to the board and town for helping put this on.

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