



# TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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## **Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board Nov. 22, 2021 @ 6:00 pm Select Board Meeting**

Present-

Select Board: Kevin Oddy, Dennis Smith, Daniel Kimbell, Frank Empsall, Brendan Hughes (via zoom)

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak, Kresten Sterling

Press: Todd Wellington (via zoom), KATV

Public: Jim Brown (via zoom), Patricia Janssen (via zoom), Alice Kitchel (via zoom)

### Agenda Amendments:

- None

### Public Comment:

- Dennis Smith discussed the proposed government mask mandate. He explained that before the Town acts on it- if we choose to would – I would like to solicit feedback from the public. Dennis said he would like to know how the people in the town feel about a town-wide mask mandate. He urged the public to contact the Select Board.
- Daniel Kimbell mentioned that he believes in the science and is fully vaccinated. He doesn't believe he should be required to wear a mask because others will not get vaccinated.
- Frank Empsall commented that he doesn't believe there is enough manpower within the Police Department to enforce such a mandate. It should be left up to individuals to do it.
- Kevin Oddy mentioned if it gets signed and the governor gives the authority to the Towns to mandate masks then the Select Board. Then we will need to hear from the public before the Town takes any actions as there are strong feelings on both sides.

### Minutes:

- On a motion by Daniel and second by Dennis to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes from 11/08/21 as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

### Warrants:

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

### Liquor Licenses:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Daniel to approve the following liquor license. All in favor. Brendan abstained.
  - Kingdom Tap Room- 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Renewal

#### Grand List Adjustments:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank the board approved the grand list adjustment 2021 #12 in the amount of \$41.11. All in favor.

#### October Financials:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following October financials.
- General fund at the end of October had a surplus of \$172,058. Most departments within the General Fund are on target.
- Heating system replacement at the Public Safety Building was close to \$17,000.
- Areas of concern within the general fund is the Fire Department overtime, contracted services and supplies and repairs.
- Delinquent tax receivable is at \$148,653 versus \$270,667 at this time last year.
- Special Services fund at the end of October had a surplus of \$8,636. Regular salaries and overtime combined are at 29% of those budgeted line items.
- Highway fund at the end of October had a surplus of \$158,865. Paving budget in the summer maintenance has been fully expensed for fiscal year. Mechanic has been hired for the DPW garage.
- Water fund at the end of October had a deficit of \$216,004. Revenue is under budget due to booking revenue to the prior year during our audit. Expense are on target.
- Sewer fund at the end of October had a deficit of \$460,005. Revenue is under budget due to booking revenue to the prior year during our audit. Town has spent \$170,969 for solid handling.
- Parking Meter Fund at the end of October had a deficit of \$15,651. Expense are on target at this time.
- Dennis asked why contracted services within the Fire Department was over budget. Chad explained that is where the Interim Fire Chief salary is being booked to.
- Kevin asked where the Town is at with the Solid Handling. Chad explained that the tank was virtually emptied. E Town continues to work on obtaining the permanent solution hoping to have the pieces before the tank needs to be emptied again. Kevin recommended that the Town stay on top of it.

#### Rental Housing Improvement Grant Review Committee Application Recommendations:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager provided an overview of the Rental Housing Improvement Grant and the purpose of encourage
- Program details for the 2021 RHIGP-2 were outlined as follows:
  - Sept. 2021-Oct. 2021 outreach and application window
  - Nov. 2021 application review and recommendations to the Select Board
  - Dec. 1, 2021 grant awards announced
  - April 30, 2022 projects must be completed
  - May-June 2022 grant close-out procedures
- Program outreach consisted of direct mailings to all rental housing owners, ads in the Caledonian Record, announcement at the Landlord Information Exchanges, Town Website and NVDA Newsletter.

- Review committee consists of Patricia Janssen, Chair, Ron Steen, Alice Kitchel, Patrick Shattuck and Irene Nagle all which are on one year terms which are due to expire in March 2022.
- The 2021 Rental Housing Improvement Grant Program funding sources are as follows.
  - \$20,000 from rental housing registrations fees
  - \$14,364 from economic development reserves
  - Giving the program a total funding of .34,364 for 2021
- Round 2 of the rental housing improvement grant program received a total of six applications. Three applications were withdrawn.
- Grant funding totals for round 2 total \$5,324.00.
- COVID-19 continues to hold the program back. Still seeing increasing costs of construction and the availability of contractors is a real problem.
- Not one of applicants this round are St. Johnsbury residents. Also all three applicants are new owners of the property in St. Johnsbury.
- The Housing Review Committee is working with Town Officials on the details of the 2022 RHIGP. Plan to come back to the Select Board this winter to discuss the 2022 program.
- Patricia Janssen provided the following committee recommendations regarding the grant awards for round 2 of the 2021 RHIGP. Also reminded the Select board that is a reimbursement grant program which means that the Town does not provide the grant funds until the project is complete and inspected. With the awards tonight the Committee will have awarded a total of \$35,084 on projects totaling \$102,600.
- Application #1 for 13 Central Street to install modern double-hung vinyl windows. Total project cost of \$5,949.84 with a grant request in the amount of \$2,974.92. The Committee recommends this grant.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the grant award for 139 Central Street in the amount of \$2,974.92. All in favor.
- Application #2 for 161 River Road Unit #1 to install modern single-hung vinyl windows. Total project cost of \$1,568.10 with a grant request in the amount of \$784.05. The Committee recommends this grant.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the grant award for 161 River Road Unit #1 in the amount of \$784.05. All in favor.
- Application #3 for 161 River Road Unit #2 to install modern single-hung vinyl windows. Total project cost is \$3,130.65 with a grant request in the amount of \$1,565.02. The Committee recommends this grant.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the grant award for 161 River Road Unit #2 in the amount of \$1,565.02. All in favor.
- Kevin expressed the same concerns he continues to have regarding the same owners getting 2 bites of the apple versus another owner getting a bite too. Patricia explained that his concern is certainly noted and if and when more applications are received things will be looked at differently.
- Kevin asked if the committee had any idea why locals are not participating in this program. Joe explained that every single rental on the rental registry got a letter about the grant program. He said the committee could do some survey work to see if they can determine why residents aren't taking advantage of the program. Kevin explained he would like to see some sort of outreach as to why residences are not participating.
- Kevin posed a question about the scoring of the applications. Suggested maybe putting the average on the score form presented to the Select Board or something to explain how the applications were scored. Joe said he would work with the committee on the survey and the scoring.
- Kevin asked if the committee tracked applicants that have applied, the properties and awards. Joe said yes he would be happy to share it with the Select Board.

- Daniel asked if within the application for the grant it asks if the property is for subsidized housing or market rate housing. Joe commented that currently it does not but the committee will be reviewing the application and process and plans to present to the Select Board in late January or early February.
- Brendan asked if the board could get an accurate breakdown of rentals owned by St. Johnsbury residents versus not. Joe commented that he would double check the numbers and let the Select Board know. Brendan mention that he is interested in figuring out why St. Johnsbury residences have not applied to the program.
- Kevin thanked Joe and the committee for all their hard work. Took an idea and brought it to fruition making great strides.

#### Property Transfer- Knob Property:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager discussed the Knob property transfer. The Vermont Housing Conservation Board awarded Vermont Land Trust with a grant in the amount of \$200,000 which will cover the total purchase price. The property has been given a clean bill of health and has no environmental concerns. The purchase and sales agreement has been extended to December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The Vermont Land Trust fund raising raised \$40,000 for future maintenance of the property.
- Chad presented the Select Board with the resolutions for the conservation easement for the property. He explained that the property will remain for recreational purposes however the easement allows for a parking lot, restrooms and parcel for the cemetery if the Town so chooses down the road.
- Dennis asked about the mention of the cemetery. Chad explained that the easement is written to allow the Town to subdivide a portion of the property for the cemetery if the Town chooses. It would less than a 5 acre parcel hay field located at the bottom of the trail.
- Daniel asked if the Vermont Land Trust was to dissolve who would then retain the rights. Chad explained that if the land trust was to dissolve there would be no asset there just the restrictions listed in the deed.
- Kevin asked if the Town would hold the ownership of the property. Chad said yes.
- Daniel asked if the Select Board had to approve the resolutions tonight. Chad explained that ideally yes as the resolutions would need to be completed prior to the closing on December 14<sup>th</sup>.
- Daniel asked who had reviewed the resolution documents. Chad said Ed Zuccaro had reviewed them.
- Kevin asked when the last date to authorize the documents would be. Chad explained the closing is 12/14/21 and he would like the documents authorized before then.
- Kevin asked if the Select Board wanted more time to review and if so would a meeting on 12/6/21 at 5 pm work. All agreed to more time and Special Select Board meeting on 12/6/21 at 5 pm.
- Kevin requested that Select Board members get all questions regarding the documents to Chad by 12/01/21 so he will have time to obtain the answers before the meeting on 12/06/21.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Daniel to table the Property Transfer- Knob property until Special Select Board meeting on 12/06/21 at 5 pm. All in favor.

#### Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- Fatal structure fire occurred on 11/9/21 on Summer Street in St. Johnsbury. Town's condolences goes out to the family of Connie March. Thanked the St. Johnsbury Fire Department and all responding agencies.

- Initial ARPA Committee meeting was held last week. Initial discussion included looking at requesting funds to hire a facilitator and public engagement.
- Charter Review Committee plans to bring draft to the next Select Board meeting.
- Gilman and Pleasant Street Project is shutting down for the winter. The town will be responsible for winter maintenance.
- Borac Grant is due 11/29/21. Working on finalizing with the St. Johnsbury Chamber. This grant will include marketing and outreach for the Riverfront project.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager provided the following update.
- Rental units in St. Johnsbury owned by Vermonters is 86.5%. Of that 55% are owned by St. Johnsbury residences.
- Property owners from round 1 of the RHIGP are struggling to get the work completed by the end of 2021. Discussed with administration about extending the deadline to 04/30/22. All agreed that makes sense.
- Daniel mentioned how nice it was to see the letter of appreciation sent from residences in the area of Brunelle Street for the work DPW did on the water main leak in the area. Thanked DPW staff.
- Kevin asked how the Fire Chief search was going. Chad explained that MRI has narrowed the applicant pool to 7-8 applicants. MRI will be hosting virtual interviews on 11/29/21.

#### Other Business:

- None

#### Executive Session:

- On a motion by Daniel and second by Frank the board voted that there was a need for an executive session to discuss a contractual matter that premature general public knowledge would place the Town at substantial risk. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to enter into executive session and invite the Town Manager to join them. All in favor.
- On a motion by Daniel and second by Frank the board voted to exit executive session. All in favor.
- The Select Board Chair had nothing to report.

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