



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board March 28, 2022 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

Select Board: Dennis Smith, Frank Empsall, Tracy Zschau, Steven Isham

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak, Stacy Jewell (via zoom), Lesley Russ (via zoom), Kresten Sterling (via zoom), Chief Tim Page, Anthony Skelton, Chief Brad Reed

Press: Todd Wellington (via zoom), KATV

Public: Paul Berlejung, Mary Berlejung, Joanne Brown, Jim Brown (via zoom), Roland Bigelow, David Roy (via zoom), Don Smith (via zoom), Alek Wolf (via zoom), Peter Van Straten (via zoom), Joe Weith (via zoom)

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager received a request to have the newly elected Select Board members introduce themselves. Tracy Zschau and Steve Isham introduced themselves.
- Frank welcomed Tracy and Steve Isham to the Select Board.
- Joanne Brown asked who was elected as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Select Board. Frank explained that he was elected as the Chair and Dennis Smith was elected as the Vice -Chair. Joanne congratulated those who were elected and reelected to the Select Board. She expressed how pleased she was to see a woman had been elected to the Select Board and believes she will be a positive contribution.
- Joanne Brown expressed her concern over the instability and irresponsibility of federal spending following COVID.

Warrants:

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

Liquor License:

- Steve Isham clarified that Kevin Fontesha (a local business owner) is his nephew. He identified this conflict and stated for the record that he will not vote on items that pertain directly to Kevin and

his businesses in St. Johnsbury. Steve Isham did express that he believes he can be fair with other establishments in town.

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the following liquor license renewals. All in favor.
 - Center Tower, LLC- 1st class renewal
 - VFW- 1st class and 3rd class renewal
 - Pica-Pica Filipino Restaurant.- 1st class renewal
 - Salmon & Barns Partnership- 1st class renewal
 - Riley's Fish Shack, LLC- 1st class and outside consumption renewal
 - Moose Lodge # 1779- 1st class, 3rd class and outside consumption renewal
- Roland Bigelow presented the Select Board with an overview of the request to expand their outside liquor consumption space. Advised the board that the VFW has spoken with a neighbor regarding this expansion.
- Frank asked when the VFW plans to use the sectioned off areas. Roland said the plan is to mainly use the area in the summer for activities such as corn hole. However, it was recommended by the Liquor Inspector to request the permit with the expansion for a year.
- Frank asked what times typically this would take place. Roland explained that the VFW is open 7 days a week until 7 pm except on nights they host corn hole then they are open until 10 pm. Roland explained that they typically try to hold the corn hole events 1 day a week and typically on Saturday nights.
- Dennis asked if the area would be marked off. Roland presented the board with a diagram and explanation of how the area would be marked off for outside consumption.
- Tracy asked if the expansion would have an impact on parking. Roland said no there is plenty of parking.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the following new liquor licenses. All in favor.
 - VFW- outside consumption renewal with an expansion.
- Chief Tim Page let the Select Board know that he did not have an issue with the expansion. The VFW polices themselves well.
- Joanne Brown asked what corn hole was. Roland explained that corn hole where a bean bag is thrown into holes in boards.
- Chief Brad Reed asked about fire access. Roland shared the plan with the Chief and stated that it would be fully accessible.
- Frank asked Chief Reed if he was ok with the access. Chief Reed said yes.
- Roland Bigelow thanked the Select Board for their support.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the Select Board Meeting minutes from 03/14/2022 with the clarification of Steve Isham and Steve Beauregard. All in favor.
- Joanne Brown asked if the organizational meeting took place on 3/14/22 and if so who was elected as the Chair and Vice-Chair. Frank explained that the organization meeting did take place on 03/14/22 and Frank Empsall was appointed as the Chair and Dennis Smith was appointed as the Vice-Chair.

February Financials:

- Lesley Russ, Finance Officer presented the February Financials to the board.
- Currently 8 months into the current fiscal year. The property taxes are prorated in the governmental funds as well as interdepartmental and reserve transfers in all the funds.
- The General Fund at the end of February had a surplus of \$172,429. The Fire Department and Dispatch overtime line items continue to remain an area of concern. Overall the general fund departments are on target.
- Delinquent tax receivables are \$136,881 vs. \$82,310 at this time last year.
- The second installment of property tax payments was due in March and during the first week, almost 2 million was received.
- The Special Services fund at the end of February had a surplus of \$24,306. Regular salaries and overtime combined are at 65% of those budget line items and are on target at this time.
- A new Police Officer was hired during February however she will be attending the Police Academy for 16 weeks beginning in late March.
- The Highway fund at the end of February had a surplus of \$258,609. The highway fund is on target. The first loan payment for the two news trucks will be due in June 2022.
- At the end of February, the Water Fund had a deficit of \$208,222. Revenue is under budget due to booking the revenue to the prior year during our audit. Expenses are on target.
- At the end of February, the Sewer fund had a deficit of \$543,307. Revenue is under budget due to booking revenue to the prior year during our audit.
- **At the end of February the parking meter fund had a deficit of \$10,516. Expenses are on target at this time.**
- No questions from the board.
- Joanne Brown asked if the new police officer would be paid while she attends the Police Academy for 16 weeks and if so how much. Lesley said yes she would be paid a probationary rate while she attends the Police Academy.
- Joanne Brown asked what the incoming salary for a Police Officer is. Lesley stated she was unsure of the exact amount.
- Joanne Brown stated that the budget indicates a 5% increase for one recruit. Dennis explained that the current new hire was from a vacancy the PD has been trying to fill. Dennis also explained that the increasing rates help the Town retain employees instead of losing them to other departments.
- Frank explained that we don't want to train people for other departments. The goal is to get competitive with rates to help offset turnover.
- Dennis explained that in order to get qualified candidates we need to pay them.
- Steve Isham explained that it is a safety issue as well. The longer officers stay the more they know the trouble spots and can better protect the community.
- Chad expressed to Joanne that if she had any more questions she could put a request into the Town Manager's Office for more information.
- Frank thanked Lesley.

Armory Project Update:

- David Roy provided an overview of the site plans for the Armory. Reviewed the exterior and interior proposed plans. Including the following:
 - Basement Zone with Evidence Processing Area, Men and Woman Locker Rooms and; Showers and a Fitness Room.

- The Main Floor would include the Dispatch Zone, Squad Room, Processing Zone, Holding cells, Sally Port Entrance and; Secure Room for Suspect Interviews.
 - 3rd Floor would include the Police Department Offices and Training Room
- Joanne Brown asked about the clean-up of the hazardous materials in the basement. Frank explained that remediated would need to take place before the construction begins. David Roy explained that a study has been completed, there is a plan in place and the hazardous materials would be removed prior to construction.
- Dennis mentioned that it looked like a boiler was noted in the mechanical room. He asked if a determination of what type has been determined and if the Town Energy Committee had been involved. David Roy explained that they are still looking at possibilities including air sources, heat pumps and geothermal wells. The idea is to utilize the least amount of fossil fuels if possible. Joe Kasprzak explained that he has a meeting with the Town Energy Committee to solicit feedback.
- Joanne Brown asked what the plan is for the old Police Station. Frank mentioned that it will still continue to function as a Fire Station. Joe Kasprzak explained that the plan is planning and construction of the Armory as a Police Station, development at the fire site, and work with the Fire Department for a new Fire Station and potentially list 1187 for sale. There has been a lot of interest in 1187 Main Street in the private sector.
- Joanne Brown asked if the Fire Department may end up by the hospital. Joe explained that feasibility studies would be completed to determine a location when the time comes.
- Joanne Brown asked if the Fire Department might be used as a satellite location. Chad explained that we are discussing the Armory at this time and not the Fire Department.
- Joe Kasprzak provided the select board and the community a powerpoint presentation with included an overview of the project budget, project timeline, procurement deadlines and funding requests.
- A revised project budget was received in Feb. is estimated at 6.2 million. An increase of about \$300,000 from the initial projected budget.
- The current timeline looks as follows:
 - Environmental Review Complete May/June 2022
 - Bid Remediation May/June 2022
 - Architectural & Construction Documents Complete July 2022
 - Construction Bidding July/August 2022
 - Environmental Remediation July-Sept. 2022
 - Construction Starts Oct. 2022
 - Building Occupancy Summer 2023
- Procurement was presented as follows:
 - Brownfields Revitalization Fund (BRF) June 2022
 - VCDP CDGB (if necessary) June 2022
 - BGS Building Communities Sept. 2022
 - Vermont Historic Preservation (VHP) Oct. 2022
 - USDA RD Dec. 2022
- Joe explained that the BRF is in the queue for June 2022. The draft of the corrective action plan is due in late April.
- Joe explained that the VCDP CDBG is not the best source of funding but remains an option. This will be the third time the Town has applied for this grant for the Armory project. Still working to determine the effects of this grant on the timeline. Will be holding a public hearing for this application on April 11th at 5:45 pm.

- Joe asked the Select Board to consider utilizing \$100,000 from the unassigned fund balance in the general fund to be used for the Armory Redevelopment Project. Joe expressed that the Town continues to work to procure other funding sources to help augment EPA clean up funds.
- Joe explained that currently the Town Economic Development Reserve Fund has a balance of approximately \$88,000. The Town Manager's Office is suggesting that this fund remain intact in order to cover existing contractual obligations and invoicing and to maintain a minimum account balance.
- Joe clarified that the funds expensed from the Town reserves to date are expected to be replenished by either the 5.4 million dollar bond or the EPA Clean up Grant.
- Joe explained that the Town Manager's Office has determined this is the best strategy for funding right now and will help get the project to the next set of funding sources.
- Frank confirmed that the funds would be replenished when the bond is accessed. Joe said yes.
- Steve Isham asked if ARPA funds have been considered for this project. Joe explained that at this point the Town and the ARPA Committee are still in the process of determining how to request the ARPA funding. However, believes that ARPA is a reasonable source and will at some point come to the Select Board to access it.
- Dennis asked if the ARPA funding could be repaid by the bond. Joe explained that would depend on how the accounting trail goes.
- Joanne Brown asked when the bond vote would take place. Joe and Chad explained the bond vote took place on 09/14/22.
- Frank stated he believes this request is straightforward and needs to continue to move forward.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve \$100,000 from the unassigned fund balance in the general fund to be used for the Armory redevelopment project. All in favor.
- Joanne Brown asked if Joe believes \$100,000 is enough for the project. Joe said he has the ability to come back to the Select Board and ask for more money if he needs to down the road.
- Frank and Chad thanked Joe Weith, David Roy and Joe Kasprzak.

Municipal Parking Ordinance Amendment:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the Select Board with the following Proposed Municipal Ordinance Amendments specific to handicap parking and towing fines. The proposed amendments would give the Town flexibility in setting the fines.
 - Division 2. Handicapped Parking, Section 12-121: Remove fined amount of fifty dollars (\$50) and replace with the fine will be set by the Town Manager, approved by the Select Board and filed with the Town Clerk's Office.
 - Division 3. Parking Lots, Section 12-137: Remove that the fees shall be clearly stated upon signs at the entrance to the parking lots and replace with only the time so established shall be clearly stated upon the signs at the entrance to the parking lots.
 - Division 3. Parking Lots, Section 12-139: Remove the fine for violating this division shall be not less than one dollar (\$1.00) nor more than fifty dollars (\$50.00). Replace with the fine for violating this division shall be set by the Town Manager, approved by the Select Board and filed with the Town Clerk's Office.
 - Division 5. Authorizing Removal of Motor Vehicles, Section 12-158: Remove the fines associated with towing and storage and replace with required to pay the reasonable towing and storage charges.
- Chad explained the process for implementing the Proposed Municipal Ordinance Amendments. Including posting the proposed amendments, petition to appeal time frame of 44 days and if no appeal after 60 days the amendments would go into effect.

- On a motion by Tracy and second by Dennis to approve the Proposed Municipal Ordinance Amendments as presented. All in favor.

Fire Department Engine 1 Repairs:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that currently Engine 1 is out of service
- The estimate was received from Westward Repair and confirmed by the Town Mechanic. Repairs needed include but are not limited to turbo work, exhaust work, springs, and repair to the cracked frame.
- Engine 1 is slated for replacement but Chief Reed explained that a new rig could take up to two years to get.
- The estimated cost for repairs is \$22,325.07 and Chief Reed has found the funds within his current budget for the repairs.
- No questions from the board.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve and authorize the repairs of Engine 1. All in favor.
- Joanne Brown asked where the \$22,000 will come from. Frank explained that it is already in the budget.
- Joanne Brown asked if the work would be done locally. Chad said yes the work will be done locally and will follow the Town of St. Johnsbury purchasing policy.

Land Record Scanning Project:

- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk approached the Select Board about funding to complete the land record scanning project. Stacy explained the goal is to scan all land records back to book one. It is a very slow process that needs to take place between customers. Currently, it has taken the Town Clerk's Office 2 years to scan land records back to 1996, a total of 10 books. The contract for scanner they are currently using is up in August of 2022.
- Stacy explained that a company could come on-site and back scan all the land records back to book 1 in about a week. All the Town Clerk's Office would have to do is just index them and make them available online for people to view. The estimated cost for this service is a little over \$100,000.
- Stacy explained that title searches go back 40 years and land surveyors go back at least 50 years. Ideally, we would back scan at least 50 years if not all the way back to book 1. Part of the ARPA funding could be used to help offset the cost to the Town as digitalization of land records is part of ARPA allowed projects.
- Tracy inquired about what the cost would be if the Town chose to only back scan 50 years. Stacy commented that it would probably be around \$50,000.
- Tracy asked if the Town Clerk's Office is currently doing the back scanning. Stacy said yes.
- Tracy confirmed the new scanner for August. Stacy said yes.
- Steve Isham asked if once the records are digitalized if they would be available online and how long it would take to have them online. Stacy said yes once the records are indexed they would be available online within 24 to 48 hours.
- Paul Berlejung, Zoning Administrator commented in favor of the scanning on land records.
- Tracy asked what the process was on deciding how to spend ARPA funds. Chad explained that the Town and Committee are working on developing a process for requesting ARPA funds.

- Stacy mentioned she is meeting with the vendor on Wednesday to determine a more accurate cost for the project. The company will microfilm the records at the same time.
- Frank expressed that this is very much needed.
- Dennis asked if \$100,000 was an adequate amount for the project. Stacy said she was hoping \$100,000 would be enough. However there are also reserve funds for restoration that would be used.
- Tracy asked if Stacy was looking for action tonight or if it was just informational. Chad explained the Town Manager's Office will work with the Town Clerk to get to work on requesting ARPA funds to get this taken care of.
- Joanne Brown asked if it is possible for the Town Clerk's staff to complete the project. Stacy explained they continue to work on the project as time allows but at some point they will need a different scanner to complete the project.

Town Managers' Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- Chad presented the Select Board with information regarding the Vermont Plants Sunflowers for the Ukraine Project. Chad explained that the organization is asking Towns to plan sunflowers in public places so that people visiting can see that Vermont stands in solidarity with the people of the Ukraine. The Town Beautification Committee has all agreed that this is a good effort and will help plan where the Town can incorporate sunflowers into St. Johnsbury beautification plans.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy for the Town of St. Johnsbury to take action and support the Vermont Plants Sunflowers for the Ukraine program. All in favor.
- CDBG Public Hearing April 11th at 5:45 pm at the Welcome Center.
- Working with department heads and finance to finalize the draft of the water and sewer budget. Planning on presenting the water and sewer budget at the Select Board Meeting on 4/11/22.
- Currently working with the Wastewater Treatment Facility on reviewing bids received for solid handling equipment.
- RFP for Railroad Street Project is out for bid. Bids are due back by April 22nd.
- Portland Street Sidewalk Scope Project is currently under review by the Town Manager and VTrans. Hoping to address the board about the project in April or May.
- Household Hazardous Waste Day will take place in St. Johnsbury on April 16th from 9 am until 1 pm in the parking lot located behind the Fire Department.
- Green Up Day is May 7th. The Town is working with the Energy Committee to coordinate a demonstration and potential of selling backyard composters.
- Governor was in Danville today to announce the VORAC Grant. The Town of St. Johnsbury will be receiving \$128,000 for the LVRT. This funding will help with signage for the trail along with implementing a bike lending library.
- No questions from the board. Frank thanked Chad.

Other Business:

- None

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