



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

51 Depot Square, Suite 1

St Johnsbury, VT 05819

802-748-4331

www.stjvt.com

Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board April 25, 2022 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Kresten Sterling, Bradley Reed, Paul Berlejung

Press: Todd Wellington, KATV

Public: Jim Brown, Don Smith (via zoom), Mary Berlejung, Jenna O'Farrell, Becky Masure (via zoom), Robert Little (via zoom), Patrick Shattuck (via zoom), Robin Cornwell, Vanessa Symoni (via zoom), Rebecca (via zoom)

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Mary Berlejung expressed that she is glad to see the work starting on the Eastern Ave sidewalk. She stated she is concerned with the cost of the project.
- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained the Town has identified funds for the sidewalk repairs and will be asking the Select Board this evening for \$90,000 from construction reserve funds for sidewalk repairs.
- Mary Berlejung expressed that things are happening in Town and people are coming here. Frank mentioned it would be nice to have it done before the Farmers Market starts.

Warrants:

- None

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the select board meeting minutes from 03/28/22 as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.
On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to approve the select board meeting minutes from 04/11/22 with the correction of bullet 1 on page 1 to say by not be and the correction of bullet 2 on page 5 to remove "the". All in favor.

Liquor License:

- None
- A gentleman approached the Select Board regarding his application for a liquor license for 25 Depot Square. He explained when he submitted the liquor license application a week ago he was told to attend the select board meeting on April 25th to answer any questions. He stated they are not slated to open the establishment until June.
- Frank stated he would follow up and get back to him as to when his liquor license would be on the agenda.

Planning Commission Public Hearing Request:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that he had provided the select board with the recent Planning Commission report. Updates to the storage unit bylaws have been made and the Planning Commission is requesting a Public Hearing for these changes.
- Scheduled the Public Hearing for 5:30 pm on May 23rd, 2022 prior to the Select Board meeting.
- Jim Brown mentioned that a number of public hearings will be required for planning commission changes in the future and hopes to expedite them as quickly as possible. Items include but are not limited to the warming shelter, lighting, cannabis retail and flood plains. He expects these hearings to take place over the next 5 months.
- Frank explained that the sooner he gets the information to the board the sooner they are able to expedite them.

Water/Sewer Budget:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided an overview of the proposed Water and Sewer Budget for 2022-2023.
- Chad explained that he has not received any comments from the public and the proposed budget and 10 year projections are available on the Town's website.
- The proposed budget includes a 1.5% increase in water rates and a 3% increase in sewer rates. Both water and sewer funds have good reserves but there are some expected upcoming expenses.
- In the proposed budget the Town would use \$200,000 from sewer reserve funds to help offset the increased expenses in the sewer fund. Since the Town can no longer land apply and will be sending solids to the landfill the cost is increasing. The Town working with the sewer treatment facility on obtaining the necessary solid handling equipment.
- Dennis asked if solids need be hauled away and if there would be any issues with finding a landfill to take them. Chad explained that most likely Casella will take the solids. However it could be an issue down the road.
- Frank asked who hauls away the solids. Chad explained that whoever the Town contracts with would haul it away.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to approve the 2022-2023 water and sewer budget as presented. All in favor.

Fire Department Repair Request:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that the plan was to come to the Select Board tonight to ask for approval to use funds to repair Car 1. However over the weekend Car 1 suffered fire

damage. The Town is currently working with the insurance company to determine if the vehicle is salvageable and will be putting together a plan to move forward.

ARPA Application and Process:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that the federal reporting have been done and the funds are able to be used for any governmental expenses. ARPA Committee met last week and discussed having short term vs long term projects. Some ARPA funding requests need funding sooner rather than later. The recommendation is to make \$500,000 available for those requiring a quicker turn around due to time restrictions.
- Reviewed the ARPA Application and request process. Application is a working document and will continue to develop and change as a facilitator comes on and collects community input.
- ARPA Committee is moving forward with hiring a facilitator for the committee. Reviewed duties of the facilitator to include collecting public input on how the funding should be spent. This will help the committee make recommendations on the best way for the Town to spend the funds. The concept is to take the 2 million in ARPA funds and leverage it with other funding sources in the best interest for the Town of St. Johnsbury.
- Steve Isham asked if the \$500,000 set aside for short term items was a hard and fast number. Chad said no it was just a starting point.
- Brendan asked if there would be a hard deadline or rolling deadlines. Chad said the committee would look to the facilitator for advice on this. However a hard deadline would most likely be needed for long term applications as the funding has a deadline that it needs to be spent by. The concept is to listen to the public.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the application and process for the ARPA funds. All in favor.
- Brendan questioned approving the application and then hearing some applications in the same meeting. Chad explained that the ARPA Committee through consensus, voted to move forward these applications ahead of the process and bring the applications presented tonight to the Select Board. The applications presented have tight deadlines and would request short term funding due to those deadlines.
- Tracy asked how the short term requests were advertised. Chad explained that the short term requests that will be presented at this meeting came directly to the committee and align with the Town Plan.

ARPA Funds Request:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided an overview of the ARPA requests. Rural Edge is seeking funding for two projects. The first is for 2 vacant and blighted buildings located at 138 Cherry Street and 759 Railroad Street. The second application is for a senior housing project located at the fire site on Main Street. The other application is from NEKA regarding a warming shelter for St. Johnsbury.
- Patrick Shattuck from Rural Edge presented the application for 138 Cherry Street and 759 Railroad Street. Rural Edge is asking for ARPA funding in the amount of \$150,000 for the construction of 5 permanent rental housing units with onsite services. This project will provide investment in St. Johnsbury, create housing, and remediate blight. Additional funding for this project will come from the State of Vermont ARPA funding in the amount of 1.4 million. With the approval of the \$150,000 in funding construction could start in June.

- Dennis asked if the housing was affordable housing or housing for the homeless. Patrick explained that it would be permanent housing. Applicants would have to qualify and would have a lease. Per ARPA funds from the State the first people to inhabit the housing need to be homeless after that it can be a mixture of incomes.
- Dennis commented that it seems like they are creating spot zoning with this project. Patrick explained that even though they are homeless they enter into a one year lease.
- Frank asked if it was like a step program. Patrick and Jenna explained that it is a coordinated entry. They must apply and are screened like everyone else.
- Frank asked if this was part of the ARPA regulation for housing. Patrick said yes, it is part of the VHCB requirements.
- Tracy asked if they did not have enough homeless applicants if they could open it up to others. Patrick said there is currently a lengthy list of those who are homeless looking for apartments. Jenna explained that currently about 100 adults and 39 children in Caledonian Country that are homeless. NEKCA will continue to work with the homeless and make recommendations to Rural Edge regarding the rentals. NEKCA will also provide full time staff at the Cherry Street location to make sure these people have what they need to succeed.
- Brendan asked if the housing was more long term or transitional. Jenna and Patrick explained that it will be long term housing.
- Jim Brown asked if other funds were in place for a June start date and were they looking at the beginning, middle or end of June. Patrick said the goal is to start in June. Patrick explained that there are conditions that have to be met prior to disbursement of funds.
- Dennis asked if people from the hotel have been sited to other towns. Patrick explained that they have placed 70 people over the Northeast Kingdom. Dennis commented that St. Johnsbury should not shoulder the entire motel population.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Brendan to approve the ARPA request for Rural Edge in the amount of \$150,000 for the Cherry Street and Railroad Street project. All in favor. Dennis abstained.
- Brendan asked if the request was time sensitive. Patrick said yes, Rural Edge cannot close without the funding in place.
- Patrick Shattuck presented the Select Board with the second Rural Edge application for the fire site located on Main Street. The request is for \$50,000 of ARPA funding for the construction of a 30 unit senior housing development with services. This project is estimated at 12 million and will include 5 stories with an elevator and public park.
- Dennis asked if this would be senior housing. Patrick said yes it would fall under HUD 202 permanent senior housing.
- Frank asked when Rural Edge anticipated breaking ground. Patrick said the middle of 2023. Currently replying for federal HUD funding for the project.
- Brendan asked when Rural Edge anticipated the federal funding award. Patrick said he is anticipating the funding award in late fall early winter.
- Frank asked when the application needed to be submitted by. Patrick said June.
- Steve Isham commented that he loves the idea of the public park. Public parks build relationships within the community. As likes that the project is looking at not using fossil fuels. Looking into the future with concerns to energy. Impressed with how Rural Edge is looking to utilize \$50,000 in local ARPA funding to leverage 12 million. Incredible opportunity that serves a great need.
- Brendan asked if the \$50,000 request would come out of the \$500,000 short term request funds. Chad said yes
- Frank asked if Rural Edge is not awarded the funds from HUD what happens. Patrick said the \$50,000 is returned to the ARPA funds.

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to approve the ARPA request for Rural Edge in the amount of \$50,000 for the fire site on Main Street project. All in favor.
- Chad explained the third ARPA request is for funding is to secure a consultant to help determine location and plans for a warming shelter in St Johnsbury. Explained that there is a need for a warming shelter in St. Johnsbury. Homelessness has been seen all winter around downtown.
- Jenna O'Farrell from NEKCA explained the previous warming shelter in St. Johnsbury. The unit only had 10 beds which were always full. Looking at a seasonal shelter with 24 hour accessibility. A shelter is going to be needed when the hotel program closes.
- Frank asked what the study length is. Jenna said she was unsure but with the funds a consultant could be brought on to help us figure out how to do it right.
- Frank expressed concern that October/November will be here in 6 months. Asked if that was enough time to build a shelter. Jenna said no. Currently they could maintain a temporary shelter in the hospital zone but would not be able to pull that off long term. Jenna explained there have been 4 community meetings regarding a warming shelter and agencies are actively involved. Pre-COVID St. Johnsbury had 5 churches serving 5 lunches.
- Tracy asked if the \$50,000 was based on what other communities had spent on consultants and studies. Patrick Shattuck explained that this would help look beyond the interim solution.
- Brendan asked how they plan to fund the next 10-20 years based on what the study shows. Patrick said it is easy to build something but how do we operate it, who holds ownership to it and how do we sustain it for years to come is what we are looking for.
- Frank asked if multiple organizations were involved. Jenna and Patrick said yes including the Town of St. Johnsbury municipality.
- Brendan commented that if there is no funding it seems immoral to fund a study. Believes it needs to be done right for down the line so the program has sustainability.
- Steve Isham stated that based on the 2015 VCRD study a homeless shelter is top priority. However is \$50,000 enough for a feasibility study? Can you say in confidences that there would be conclusion from this study on how to move forward and make it sustainable for St. Johnsbury.
- Chad suggested that an action plan is put into place including an RFP for consultants. Let the consultants tell us the cost. Seems like there is support from the Select Board along with the Planning Commission as they have already been working on zoning bylaws with regards to the warming shelter.
- Jim Brown mentioned that the Planning Commission is ready for the zoning changes including the definitions for a shelter.
- Chad suggested fine tuning the dollar amount before awarding any funds. He is seeing support from the Select Board just need to firm it up a little. Jenna said she would get some proposals and bring it back to the Select Board.
- Steve Isham and Tracy commented that they feel this scope of work is important.
- Frank explained that the Select Board is looking for more of a line by line outline. Consultant amount, what they plan to get out of the study. Suggested that more homework be done and come back to the Select Board to firm up the request.

Sidewalk Improvements Reserve Request:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that the following areas have been identified as the areas of priority.
 - Eastern Ave and Pearl Street
 - Railroad Street by Whirligigs and Pedestrian bypass

- Main Street by the Fire Department
- Chad mentioned that after speaking with Finance the Town is not ready to use the surplus of winter maintenance funds for sidewalk repair. Would like to wait until it is closer to the end of the year before doing so. The Town is requesting utilizing \$90,000 from the construction reserves to complete the areas of priority. If approved by the Select Board these projects could begin immediately with work completed before the summer.
- Dennis asked if the Town looked beyond these areas at the neighborhoods. And temporary repair in those areas? Steve explained that he was under the impression that the areas in the downtown were the priority. He explained that in order to address all the sidewalk issues a budget of about \$75,000 to \$100,000 would have to be allocated to sidewalks each year.
- Chad explained that if the Town continues to follow the replacement schedule the sidewalks would be replaced on a 50 year cycle. Chad explained that the sidewalks need to be addressed in the neighborhoods and it needs to be built into the budget yearly.
- Mary Berlejung asked what the sidewalk material that is used recently is as it is lighter in color and does not seem to blend in with the surrounding sidewalks. Steve Beauregard explained that the sidewalks are a 4,000 lb. mix, which is the standard sidewalk mix. Contractors do things a little differently and overtime sunlight can change the color of the concrete.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to approve the use of \$90,000 from the construction reserves for sidewalk improvements on Eastern Ave, Pearl Street, Main Street in the area of the Fire Department, Railroad Street by Whirligigs and the pedestrian bypass. All in favor. Tracy abstained.

Zoning Report:

- Paul Berlejung, Zoning Administrator provided the following Zoning Report.
- Reviewed his job duties as the Zoning Administrator.
- A total of 400 rental housing units were registered in FY 2021.
- Only 5 tickets were issued for failure to register rental housing units in FY 2021.
- Vacant buildings are slowly declining.
- 26 event permits were issued during calendar year 2021.
- 49 land use applications were sent to the DRB in 2021.
- Handled 21 E-911 related tasks during FY 2021.
- Reviewed the complaint process. Encouraged anyone with issues to contact the Town Manager, Fire Chief, Code Compliance Officer or Zoning Administrator.
- Paul expressed what a great Town team and encouraged the community to be aware of that. The staff have a great relationship throughout the community. Great to see the Town moving forward.
- Issue down the road including cannabis zoning, FEMA, and Department of Environmental Conservation.
- Jim Brown explained that the Planning Commission is back into reviewing and updating the flood plain by laws to meet FEMA requirements. Ben Copans has been an asset on this project. The Planning Commission is also working on developing bylaws with regards to cannabis retail.
- Steve Isham asked if someone was having a yard sale if they had to obtain a permit. Paul explained that only if they plan to have 3 or more yard sales in a year.
- Dennis asked if there was any movement with hemp. Paul explained that will be on the DRB agenda for Thursday night.

Town Managers' Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- JA McDonald is continuing to work on the Pleasant and Gilman Project. Concord Ave will remain closed throughout the week while they lay water and sewer lines.
- Eastern and Pearl Sidewalk repair is underway. Granite curbing will be installed tomorrow starting at the corner of Railroad and Eastern. People are asked to avoid the area if possible.
- Bids closed April 22nd for the Railroad Street Construction Project. Those bids are currently being reviewed by the consultant.
- Tax Sale is schedule for June 16th.
- St Johnsbury Academy Alumni weekend is June 4th and 5th.
- ACCD Downtown Conference is scheduled for June in St. Johnsbury.
- Working with Rachel on putting together a community clean up event. Plan to bring beautifications into the discussion to assist with this.
- The Town continues to work with the Chamber to coordinate the 2022 #GetDowntown events scheduled for the final Fridays of June, July and August.
- Frank asked what was going on at the Armory the other day. Chad explained that they were finalizing some pieces for testing including water quality.

Other Business:

- None

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