



# TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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## **Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board June 27, 2022 @ 6:00 pm**

### **Present-**

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

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

Press: KATV, Todd Wellington

Public: Mary Berlejung (via zoom), Kevin Fontesha, Jim Brown, Alice Kitchel, Patricia Janssen, Susan Dugan, Patrick Shattuck (via zoom), Fred DeMarzo (via zoom)

### Agenda Amendments:

- None

### Public Comment:

- None

### Warrants:

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

### Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the Select Board minutes from June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022 as presented. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the Select Board minutes from May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022 with the correction of bore in the Town Manager's Report. All in favor.

### Liquor License:

- None

### RHIGP Award Recommendations:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager and Patricia Janssen provided a review of the Rental Housing Improvement Grant Program. Committee members include Patricia Janssen, Alice Kitchel, Patrick Shattuck, Irene Nagle and Fred DeMarzo.

- Highlighted the critical status of rental housing in St. Johnsbury. This is the third year of the grant program. Applications were accepted from mid-March until April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022. The committee received a total of 21 applications, which is a huge increase compared to the previous years. 8 applications were not accepted for various reasons.
- Reviewed the recommended grant awards totaling \$36,519 in funding with projects costing over \$160,902.
- The Town has a 97.7% success rate for rental housing registration. Thank you to Doug Reid for working so hard on this.
- Would like to thank Ron Stein for his assistance on the committee the last two years.
- Steve Isham asked if the committee believes landlords decide to do improvements to their rentals because of this program. Joe said absolutely. Also seeing these landlords purchasing other units within St. Johnsbury. Very refreshing.
- Steven Isham asked if landlords who are in arrears with their taxes would be considered once their taxes were paid. Patricia Janssen explained that those landlords could reapply.
- Steve Isham asked if the next round would be in 2023. Joe explained in the past it has been possible to have a second round but not sure if that will be the case for 2022. Patricia Janssen explained that Alice Kitchel put it the purpose is to get the funding out to the landlords for improvements and the committee continues to stay true to that motto. Patricia mentioned it is a very transparent and consistent process.
- Joe explained that letters go out to all applicants to notify them why or why not they were chosen.
- Patricia Janssen explained that it is a grant reimbursement program so the work must be completed and the improvements inspected by the Town before the reimbursement is processed.
- Frank commented the committee on their due diligence and stated he appreciates the hours they have put in. Feels comfortable voting on the applications as a whole.
- Jim Brown asked who inspects the work when it is completed. Joe explained that the work is inspected by the Code Compliance Officer.
- Jim Brown asked if the Code Compliance Officer knows the codes. Joe stated yes and this gets him into the apartments. It is a strong effort by both departments.
- Steve Isham asked if the grant program was only for existing units. Joe explained that the program is for existing apartments or projects that result in new units. Steve explained he finds that very important.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the recommended slate of RHIGP awards as presented. All in favor.
- The Select Board commended the RHIGP Committee on their hard work. Expressed that the grant program is working.

#### Tax Stabilization Contracts:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager explained that after the last Select Board meeting on June 13<sup>th</sup> he added the agreed upon terms to the standard tax stabilization contract per the discussions. Here to present the tax stabilization contract for 98 Mill Street tonight. Reviewed the contract that included a 7 year graduated tax stabilization which will include the conditions of 5 FTEs in year one and 10 FTEs in year two. Contract includes annual reporting requirements.
- Kevin Fontesha expressed his appreciation of the committee and the Select Board for offering a tax stabilization and helping grow businesses within the community.
- Kevin Fontesha and the Select Board signed the tax stabilization contract for 98 Mill Street.
- Joe explained that he is still working with 202 Bay Street and Zion Growers. At this time they are not ready to execute their contract.

- Tracy asked if there might be changes to Zion Grower's contract. Joe said yes it is still in draft form.

#### Bylaw Amendments:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided an overview of the two Public Hearings held on May 23<sup>rd</sup> and June 13<sup>th</sup> for the proposed bylaw amendments. Recapped the proposed definitions and permitted zoning of Self-Storage, Freight Storage, Pet Services and Vet Services.
- Jim Brown explained the bylaw amendments will give the DRB definitions and clarity to continue to help move the town forward. The process was bylaw amendments are for the overall population. If someone doesn't agree there are appeal procedures in place to handle those cases.
- On a motion Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the bylaw amendments as presented by the Planning Commission. All in favor.
- Jim Brown inquired if there was an appeal process of 30 days. Chad said yes.

#### WWTF Sludge Loan:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager recapped the issues with the waste water treatment facility and land applying solids. The Town worked with the State to pull the plug on the land applying in St. Johnsbury. Moving forward solids will have to be disposed of at a landfill.
- Currently the solids come in at 95% liquid since disposal costs are charged based on the weight of the load the solids need to be moved through a dewatering system. The dewatering equipment was initially bid at \$640,000. However the vendor has proposed a few small changes to reduce the cost. With the changes it reduces the cost by \$195,000 bringing the project cost to \$447,000 from \$640,000.
- Hoping to have the unit by the end of summer.
- Larger project down the road will be to building a building to house the equipment.
- The cost will be covered under the existing planning grant/loans with the terms that there will be no payments until five years after the project is complete.
- Dennis asked if more than one bid was obtained. Chad said yes.
- Frank commented that it seems like a necessary evil. Chad said yes.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to authorize the Town Manager to sign the equipment agreement with PDB Industries and execute the contract of \$447,000. All in favor.

#### Town Managers' Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- The Gilman and Pleasant Street Project estimated to cost 6.3 million. The bid from JA McDonald came in at 5.8 million. Received about 89.5% of project cost in grants and loan forgiveness leaving the estimated cost of \$560,000 on the tax payers.
- JA McDonald continues work on the Gilman and Pleasant Project. Currently working on the sewer in the area of Elm St. and St. John's Street.
- Hoping to have the water main under the river off bypass and completed within the next two weeks.
- Lost another Police Officer to a career change leaving three vacancies in the Police Department.
- Chief Page is working on assessing the schedule given the three vacancies and the potential for a pilot program with on call from 2 am until 7 am.

- Met with Chief Page and Rachel to discuss a recruitment and retention program. Costs about \$80,000 to train a Police Officer. Expensive to continue to lose them.
- The first final Friday was very successful. Thank you to the Chamber, Catamount Arts and the volunteers for all of their efforts.
- Jim Brown mentioned that there was difficulty with food vendors not having enough food due to the large crowds. Jim asked if it was possible to somehow encourage them to bring more food for the next event as the food trucks bring a lot of flavor to the event. He mentioned that he believed the best food truck was the hot dog stand run by Rocky and his wife. Chad explained he would bring that concern up at the planning meeting for the next event and believe the food trucks will adjust to the market for the next event.
- Steve Isham mentioned that the business owners seemed happy with the event and turn out.
- Dennis asked about the status of 955 Portland Street. Chad said it has been completely cleaned out and is ready to either go on the market or for a housing project. Jim Brown commented that the cleanout on the outside was really well done.

#### Other Business:

- Susan Dugan approached the Board regarding issues she has had with her property located at 47 Wright Ave. Sewer work was completed last fall but continues to be an issue. She believes the cleanouts need to be removed as it seems they have disrupted the storm drain when they were put in. She expressed that DPW has been over twice for this issue. She would like to have it dealt with so she can have her garage repaired. Explained that she understands it's a little job but it's big to her.
- Chad explained that Steve Beauregard, Director of DPW told him the work would be completed this week. Chad said he would follow up with Steve.

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