



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board Jan. 9, 2023 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Rachel Waterhouse (via zoom), Chad Whitehead, Joe Kasprzak, Stacy Jewell, Paul Berlejung (via zoom), Anthony Skelton, Chief Bradley Reed, Chief Tim Page, Steve Beauregard (via zoom), Lesley Russ (via zoom)

Press: KATV, Todd Wellington (zoom),

Public: Gillian Sewake, Jim Brown, Mary Berlejung (via zoom), Lucas Weiss, Nick Bradley

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Lucas Weiss shared his concerns with the Select Board regarding increase in parking enforcement in St. Johnsbury over the last 9 months. He questioned the purpose of the parking policy and if it was to make revenue from the Town. He expressed the parking tickets are hitting the lowest earners and the hardest workers. He stated he would personally rather see higher property taxes.
- Frank explained that the Select Board would take his concerns into consideration.
- Kevin Oddy asked for an update on the parking study/parking plan for the Town. Chad explained that the Town is still operating under the policy which includes time limits on parking in Downtown. Chad explained that Pearl Street has been opened up as a free parking lot. Chad explained it is a challenge to gather a consensus from the Town on what people need and want.
- Nick Bradley shared that in the last 7 months of working in St. Johnsbury he has paid more than \$1,000 in parking fines. He proposed that lighting, cameras and security would be a good place to start as he has had items stolen from his truck in the parking lot.
- Gillian Sewake commented that this has been an ongoing conversation with other business owners as well and the consensus seems to be that it is an emergent problem. There are new businesses and new employees in the mix now.
- Brendan explained that it is a work in progress. The Town doesn't profit from the parking program and is lucky to break even. He explained that Pearl Street Parking lot is offered as free parking as well. Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager commented that the signage for free parking in the Pearl Street lot should be going up this week.
- Dennis said he understands the issues but is unsure how much more the tax payers can pay to support the downtown. He explained there has to be some sort of balance.
- Tracy asked part of the issue could be education to employees.
- Frank said the board will discuss and take into consideration.

Warrants:

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

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to accept the Special Select Board minutes from Dec. 28th, 2022 as presented. All in favor.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Tracy to accept the regular Select Board minutes from Dec. 28th, 2022 with the correction of the Knob Property Committee Members, a comment regarding NEKASAN and a correction regarding Ed Magnus's resignation. All in favor.

Liquor/Tobacco License:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy approve the 2nd class liquor license and tobacco for ABRB Corp. and Martell Enterprise. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Proposed Bylaw Changes:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided a recap of the proposed bylaw changes. The changes include adding permitted single family dwelling, 2 family dwellings and permitted upon issuance of a conditional use permit multi-family dwellings in Section 314.2 Health Services Uses and adding the definition of horticulture under Section 303.9.
- On a motion by Steve and second by Dennis to approve the bylaw changes as presented. All in favor.

Proposed Budget Presentation:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided an overview of the proposed Budget for 2023-2024 and the budget development process. Expenses have an increase of 10.8% which includes an increase in labor costs, pension contributions and increase in fuel material costs.
- Chad explained the only changes to the budget since the last meeting was the increase in the contribution to the 401A Pension Plan as recommended by the Town's 401A Accuracy and an increase in the expense of public utility services to the Community Justice Center from \$5,000 to \$7,500.
- The proposed budget impact on taxes inside the special services district is a 6.24% and outside the special services is 3.41%. The Town is recommending stabilizing the taxes by use of un-allocated reserve funds for 2023-2024. He explained there are no unusually large increase in any of the Town's department budgets. Based on feedback throughout the year the Town has included a planned increase in the paving and sidewalk budgets for 2023-2024. Chad explained that there is a need for repairs to sidewalks and streets and the Town anticipates seeking grant funds to help offset the costs. There is also a recommended increase to the planning and zoning budget due to the Town's growth including new businesses and projected Town Plan renewal in 2025. He explained the proposed budget can be found on the Town website as well.
- Chad encouraged anyone with questions to please reach out to him or the Select Board. Following the public input meetings the budget will go to the Select Board for approve and then be sent to the voters for Town Meeting. Tax rates would then be set in August of 2023.

- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk asked if the Planning and Zoning position would be one full time person or two part time people. Chad explained that it is budgeted as a full time position with benefits but Paul is still the Zoning Administrator at this time.
- Frank commented that felt it would be easier to find a full time employee.
- Steve Isham asked what the increase to taxes would be if reserve funds were not used. Chad explained it would be around 16%.
- Steve Isham inquired about the Town's ability to collect funds from other Town's for services provided. Chad explained that in the past it has been difficult, currently looking at mutual aid agreements and emergency services.
- Steve Isham asked if the merging the Town's 401A Pension with the State VMERS pension has been explored. Chad explained that he doesn't believe it has been explored and doesn't believe it is really an option. Efforts have been made in the past to move current employees from the 401A plan to VMERS.
- Frank asked how soon the Town thought they would advertise for the open positions. Chad explained that will probably take place closer to July.
- Kevin Oddy voiced that the increases in taxes is not sustainable. He explained that most St. Johnsbury residents are on a fixed income and continued increases are going to drive people out of St. Johnsbury. He explained he feels like Town wide Policing needs to happen. Frank expressed that this is a conversation that needs to happen.
- Stacy Jewell explained that the Town has lost so much property to non-profits. Kevin explained that the Academy is buying all the property in the special services district but they are tax exempt as a non-profit. He explained the increase in taxes then falls on those residents who live in the special services district and now those taxes payers have to pay more for the Recreation Program.

Articles for Town Meeting Ballot:

- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk explained that the Charter changes proposed would make the Town Moderator and First Constable appointed positions not elected by the voters.
- Steve Isham asked who appoints the positions. Stacy said the Select Board.
- Frank mentioned he felt it was a good idea.
- Steve Isham expressed his concern that the Select Board may not have the best intentions and it may be better if the voters could just elect someone.
- Stacy explained that no voting takes place from the floor. Kevin said the only job of the Town Moderator is to keep the meeting in order.
- Brendan expressed that with 5 members on the Select Board he things it will negate any ill intentions.
- Stacy explained that the First Constable only serves papers for tax sale.
- Steve Isham inquired about the special appropriations. Stacy explained that most has asked for the same amount. Kiwanis has asked for more funds but she is waiting for the signatures. She explained that each special appropriate are listed as a separate question on the ballot and are individual line item in the budget.

Lead Service Line Inventory:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that a Lead Service Line Inventory is required to verify that materials in the lines are not lead. St. Johnsbury currently has about 1700 lines to inventory. The project completion date is October 2024. The Line Inventory Project will be funded through

the revolving loan fund with a principle amount of \$235,000 which included \$100,000 in 100% loan forgiveness and \$135,000 in 50% loan forgiveness.

- Tracy asked about the cost. Chad explained that it would be part of the coming year water budget in April.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the loan application in the amount of \$235,000 and appoint the Town Manager to execute. All in favor.

Solids Handling Project, Wastewater Treatment Facility:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager presented the board with the Step 2 Loan for the Solids Handling Press.
- Chad explained that the Wastewater Treatment Facility upgrades are moving into the final planning phase. He explained that the board has two options with regards to the bond vote. They can choose to access the bonded 5.4 million or go back to the voters to repurpose the bond. Chad explained that the bond council has outlined a time frame that would allow the bond to go the voters at Town Meeting day should the board choose to move forward with that option.
- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk expressed that she did not feel there was time to have everything ready for a bond vote at Town Meeting.
- Frank asked what the deadline was if the Select Board choose to go that route. Stacy said information needs to be to the printers by Jan. 31st. That is the drop dead deadline.
- Tracy confirmed that the board had the option to either go back to the voters for a bond vote or repurpose the bond. Chad said yes. In the past the Select Board has sent the bond back to the voters for approval. This makes it clear what exactly the bond is for.
- Tracy asked if the challenge was getting the documents in order for a bond vote in time for Town Meeting. Stacy explained the challenge would be if there was enough time for the required posting for the bond.
- Stacy Jewell questioned if it really mattered since it was already approved by the votes vs. a public hearing notifying the voters of the change.
- Kevin Oddy expressed that not all voters are going to hear that it is coming from the same funds. It is really important to let voters know it is already part of the approved bond.
- Tracy suggested that the Town makes a case and educates the voters. Asked if the bond was tied to the March date or if it could be done later in the year. Stacy said it is not tied to Town Meeting but if a bond vote is required it would have to be looked at in more depth. Chad explained that he would have the bond counsel look at it.
- Kevin Oddy explained that the money has already been given to the Town.
- Dennis mentioned that the Town is only using the remaining funds of the bond. Dennis asked for an update on the dates. Chad said he would get an update for the board.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Dennis to approve the Step 2 loan in the amount of \$155,060 and authorize the Town Manager to execute. All in favor.

Certificate of Highway Mileage:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager approached the Select board about signing the annual certificate of highway mileage. He explained that there has been no change the certificate of highway mileage from last year.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to approve and sign the 2023 Certificate of Highway Mileage for the Town of St. Johnsbury as presented. All in favor.

Other Business:

- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk mentioned that she will be putting an ad in the paper outlining the open positions for Town Meeting.
- Kevin Oddy shared that he has heard of other Town's drying solid waste to the point that it can be used for compose. Questioned if this would be possible in St. Johnsbury. Chad explained that in order to use solid waste as compose the Town would have to apply for a Class A permit. Chad explained that the press the Town ordered has the capability of adding a dryer if the Town chose to. However a Class A requires testing for PFOAs.
- Kevin Oddy asked if the cost would help. Chad explained that it was brought up with the Engineer during the planning phases and was determined at the time that it would not be beneficial to the Town.

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan that an executive session was needed to address a contractual matter that premature general public knowledge would put the Town at substantial risk. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to enter executive session and invite the Town Manager. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to exit executive session.
- The Select Board Chair had nothing to report.

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