



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board Feb. 13th, 2023 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

Select Board: Dennis Smith, Tracy Zschau, Steve Isham, Brendan Hughes (via zoom), Frank Empsall

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

Press: KATV, Todd Wellington (via zoom)

Public: Gillian Sewake, Don Smith (via zoom), Alice Kitchell, Irene Nagle (via zoom), Jim Brown,

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- None

Warrants:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to table to warrants until after public comment. All in favor.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to accept the Select Board meeting minutes from Jan. 23rd, 2023 with the noted corrections. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to accept the Select Board meeting minutes from Jan. 30th, 2023 as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Liquor/Tobacco License:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy approve the following 2nd class liquor license for M&S Grainer, Price Chopper, Global Montello Group and KPH drugs. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

January Financials:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following January financials.

- The property taxes are prorated in the governmental funds as well as interdepartmental and reserve funds.
- General fund at the end of January had a surplus of \$1,179,317. Departments within the general fund are on target. The surplus does include ARPA funds in the amount of \$1,069,707. Overtime continues to exceed the budget in the dispatch and fire department. The vacancy in dispatch was filled in December and anticipate this employee will have completed training and be available to fill shifts beginning in May. We have filled one of the Fire Department vacancies and continue to work to fill the final position.
- The Special Services fund at the end of January had a surplus of \$3,099. Regular salaries and overtime combined are at 65% of the budget. Staffing continues to be an issue in the police department. We recently had one employee out on short term disability and we anticipate their return to unrestricted duties in the next few weeks. The recent Academy graduate resigned leaving the department with 3 ½ vacancies at this time. Recruitment continues for the Police Department and plan to discuss with the Chief in the next week.
- The Highway fund at the end of January had a surplus of \$145,061. Departments within the highway fund are on budget at this time.
- At the end of January, the water fund had a deficit of \$316,114. Expenses in the water fund are on budget except for chemical supplies. Revenue is under budget due to year-end audit adjustments.
- The Sewer fund at the end of January had a surplus of \$1,613,423. The Sewer Fund has received \$2,268,603 in grant funds for the Pleasant and Gilman project. The sewer plant is over budget due to solids handling and the purchase of RBC frames.
- At the end of January the parking meter fund had a surplus of \$19,593. Revenues are ahead of projections at this time.

Public Review of the Armory Development Correction Action Plan (CAP):

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager provided a review of the Armory Development Correction Action Plan. He explained this is part of the process for the environmental component. The 30 day public input period ends Feb. 22nd and a public meeting was required as part of the process.
- Frank asked what the next steps were. Joe explained that the public comment period will remain open until Feb 22nd. After that would move forward with additional sampling, working through the spring to develop a remediation plan with the hopes to put a bid document out in the late fall/ winter. Hopeful to start remediation by July/Aug. with a Oct. completion date.
- Frank asked if this was just part of the hoops that needed to be jumped through. Joe said yes. This will help the Town tap into some significant funding sources.

Discover St. Johnsbury, Downtown Update:

- Gillian Sewake, Director of Discover St. Johnsbury provided an update on the name change and rebranding of Discover St. Johnsbury. She reinforced that the mission still remains to stimulate and promote the vitality of St. Johnsbury's cultural, commerce, and community resources.
- 29 new businesses opened in Downtown St. Johnsbury in 2022. This makes 47 new business since 2020. St. Johnsbury continues to grow and thrive despite the COVID-19 pandemic. These new businesses netted 67 new employees within the Town.
- Gillian provided news about the exciting year ahead including the return of St. J Final Fridays and Food Truck Pop-Ups. Discover St. Johnsbury will also be managing the Maple Fest for 2023.
- She explained that all of these items are not possible without the Town of St. Johnsbury including the Town Manager's Office and the Department of Public Works.

- Steve Isham asked if Gillian was able to quantify the revenue that the events brought to St. Johnsbury between events. Gillian said while she was not sure she felt strongly that changing habits and behaviors has kept St. Johnsbury on their minds as a place to come.
- Brendan thanked Gillian for the amazing job she has done. A lot goes into all these events behind the scenes and thank you.
- Tracy inquired about what the Town could do to support the continued thriving of St. Johnsbury. Gillian said to continue to provide the support they currently do along with building redevelopment, work force housing and the unglamorous things such as beautification, sidewalk repair and security cameras.
- Jim Brown provided his experience with others visiting St. Johnsbury. He said he has seen people from Littleton who have come to St. Johnsbury because they enjoy shopping in downtown.
- Jim Brown mentioned that the Drug Store in downtown St. Johnsbury is closing and stated what a big loss that is to the downtown. He asked if Gillian had any information to share about what may occupy that prime location. Gillian said she does not have any information at this time however not public conversations have been taking place.
- Frank commented that he liked the rebranded name and thanked Gillian for all she does.

ARPA Funding Request:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided a PowerPoint presentation. The presentation highlighted that \$536,000 has already been obligated leaving a remainder of \$1,603,413.67 in funds. The ARPA Committee has determined the buckets to be housing, recreation, small business and creative economy, infrastructure, and mental health and social services. He outlined that the committee is requesting that the Select Board allocate \$704,000 of unobligated general fund reserves created as the result of ARPA funds to be used in the following ways.
 - \$104,000 for a federal procurement specialist and in house grant management for assistance in administration of the ARPA funds, Infrastructure Investments, Jobs Act and the Interest Reduction Act.
 - \$200,000 for the Rental Housing Improvement Grant Program utilizing the existing RHIGP process.
 - \$400,000 in funds to create the St. Johnsbury Revitalization Fund Grant Program for Implementation and Feasibility Assistance.
 - With \$100,000 of the funding to be used for micro-grants in the amount of \$1,000-\$5,000 with a 10% match requirement. These would be expedite applications with 50% awarded up front and 50% at the completion of the project.
 - The \$300,000 would be used for reimbursement grants in the range of \$10,000-\$50,000. With a minimum of 20% match and would be consider last gap funding.
- Chad explained that this funding could be used on an array of things including business planning, creative economy, environmental assessment and arts and culture.
- Steve Isham inquired about how far the \$50,000 in funds allocated to the record digitalization in the Town Clerk's Office went and if another \$50,000 would be needed. Stacy mentioned that in order to go back to book 1 she believes more than \$50,000 would be needed. However she has not requested more funds do to the fact that she is still waiting for them the get the files uploaded and indexed.
- Brendan asked how much of the funds were used for the consultant fee. Tracy said \$24,150 for HCH.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager explained that typically the RHIGP advertises and begins accepting applications in April, comes to the Select Board in June with recommendations for a July

1 award date. If possible would ideally like to keep this timeline. The thought is the RHIGP would deploy 50% of the funds in this next round and the remaining funds in the 2024 program.

- Steve Isham asked where the amount of \$200,000 came from. Joe explained that in the last round the Town deployed \$36,000. The RHIGP is trying to understand their capacity and giving \$100,000 this round the remaining in 2024 would give the community time to develop ways to use the funds.
- Steve Isham asked if the RHIGP has come up with a total grant award amount. Alice Kitchell explained the committee is look at a maximum of \$6,000 per grant with a 1:1 match. She mentioned that the committee realizes the importance of increasing the award amount and this would help them to do that.
- Gillian Sewake advocated for the \$200,000 for the RHIGP. She explained that housing is one of the highest needs in the community. Something she hears about every day.
- Tracy commented that sparking innovation is a great way to move St. Johnsbury forward. Tracy suggested using the funds for the things such as sidewalks as Gillian had previously mentioned to encourage people to want to move to St. Johnsbury.
- Brendan felt that the renaming of the funds was a good idea but express that he was uncomfortable with the funding requests at this time. He explained he would rather take time and make informed decision regarding the funds.
- Dennis expressed his concerns with the fund being called the St. Johnsbury Revitalization fund. He said he understands the concept but doesn't believe it is the right name.
- Tracy inquired if all the funds would be allocated to the St. Johnsbury Revitalization fund. Chad said yes as ARPA has been closed out this is just a name for the remaining funds.
- Joe Kasprzak explained that the ARPA Committee talked at length about the name and decided that revitalization aligns with the federal procurements.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Steve Isham to allocate \$1,603,413.67 to the St. Johnsbury Revitalization Fund reserve. All in favor. Dennis abstained.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to allocate \$200,000 from the St. Johnsbury Revitalization Fund Grant to the St. Johnsbury Rental Housing Improvement Grant Program. All in favor.
- Dennis and Brendan expressed that they were not ready to move forward with the other requests.
- Gillian Sewake mentioned how important the administration aspect is.
- Tracy asked if \$104,000 was for a one year position. Chad explained that the \$104,000 would cover the cost of a federal procurement specialist for 5-10 hours a week for one year and assist in covering the gap of \$50,000 for the in house administration. Chad explained that the administration piece is pretty tedious and applicants will need help. The position would also review reimbursements and close out requirements.
- Tracy asked when the position would happen. Chad said as early as April.
- Dennis expressed concern that the duties from upstairs would become dependent on this position. Chad explained that it would be looked at as the Town begins to build the FY24-25 and the position would be contingent upon the budget. He explained part of the position is there now just not full time.
- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk explained her concern with waiting until the Select Board on Feb. 27th. She explained that the current part time employee will be done in March leaving part of the position vacant. She asked if the job description for the in house position would be ready to go by then. Chad explained that the job description and ad will be completed and that the RFP is already ready to go.

- Stacy mentioned that it needs to be made clear that it is a one year position at this time. Chad explained that St. Johnsbury is growing and so is the need for more capacity. He explained that the position would be evaluated at the end of year when the next budget planning begins.
- Frank expressed that at some point if it gets stagnant and if the Town doesn't look forward enough then the Town stays stagnant.
- Chad expressed the importance of investing in the Town employees and that the workload is there. At this time it is a one year position.
- Dennis asked if the administration could be done through the consultant. Chad explained that it would be very costly to have the consultant do the administration piece.
- Gillian expressed her concern about how much administration will be needed to successfully distribute the funds. She explained that it will be a lot of work to take on including reviewing applications, processing payments and grant closeouts. She added that she really hopes the Select Board would not ask the current administration to take on all this extra work and that the Select Board would support the Town staff to deploy these funds.
- Chad explained that the part time work already exists and the workload is there. Without the funds to increase the position to full time he is not sure how much more work could be added.
- Dennis suggested the board does their homework and consider the proposals.
- Tracy confirmed that the ARPA Committee would be coming to next Select Board meeting. Chad said yes.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- Getting ready to advertise the Water Treatment Facility soon. Pre-bid meeting Thursday.
- Submitted the application for the Downtown Transportation fund grant to address concerns with the sidewalk and intersection at the Portland Street Bridge. The Grant includes replacing sidewalks in the area and increasing lighting and security in downtown parking lots. Feel we have a strong application and should hear in May if the Town is awarded the \$200,000.
- Solids Handling remains on the priority list. Working to prepare an application for USDA, as St Johnsbury is eligible for a 75% grant. Working to determine if this or the Revolving Clean Water Fund are the best funding possibilities for the Town.
- LVRT focus is on the grand opening of the trail and making sure traffic knows how to come into downtown St. Johnsbury. Working with Discover St. Johnsbury and Flek to get a mockup of signage for the trail. Reviewed designs and hoping to move forward soon with purchasing 3 signs for the LVRT.
- Railroad Street improvements will be back out to bid shortly once updated permits are received from VTrans. Struggling to attract contractors for this project.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager commented that he received the draft of the master planning for Bay Street and will be reviewing that. Continues to work with Snow Engineering on the impact analysis and expects to have something to report in the next 4 to 6 weeks.
- Jim Brown asked what has happened with the homeless shelter and the Fairbanks Inn. Chad mentioned that he could not comment on the Fairbanks Inn as it is in the legal process. He explained that NVRH is working through the planning and permitting process with regards to the homeless shelter.

Other Business:

- None

Warrants:

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

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.