



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board May 22nd, 2023 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Joe Kasprzak, Rachel Waterhouse, Paul Berlejung, Stacy Jewell, Kresten Sterling (via zoom)

Press: KATV

Public: Jim Brown, Gillian Sewake, Kate Fish, Scott Campbell, Evan Olsen, Lorraine, Madeline, Bob Joly,

Agenda Amendments:

- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to add time sensitive ARPA fund dispersements discussion following the dog warrant agenda item. All in favor.

Public Comment:

- None

Warrants:

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

Minutes:

- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to table the minutes from the May 8th, 2023 Select Board meeting. All in favor.

Liquor/Tobacco License:

- Frank reviewed the liquor and tobacco license requests
 - The Tack Room- 3rd class
- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk explained that the state has not figured out the process yet therefore it is going through the Town again this year.
- Frank asked if they were required to be licensed in each Town. Stacy said no they are required to obtain event permits for each town.
- A gentleman asked if they were allowed to drink on the sidewalk at the Tap Room. Frank clarified that the liquor license they are discussing is for the Tack Room a mobile catering service.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the liquor and tobacco licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Dog Warrants for Unlicensed Dogs:

- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk provided the Select Board with a list of dogs who have not yet been registered this year. She explained that late notices have been sent to all those on the list.
- Dennis clarified that the Town had not perused this in the past. Stacy confirmed that stating lack of manpower is a big piece.
- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that the board just needed to receive the list they did not need to take any action.

Time Sensitive ARPA Requests:

- Brendan started the discussion regarding
- Chad explained that the Select Board has flexibility with that and can set a requirement for the application and updates to the board. He suggested 6 months.
- Steve Isham asked how this would affect previous obligations. Dennis mentioned that it wouldn't take the funding away but just ask that they give the Select Board an update.
- Steve Isham asked what the consequences would be if someone did not comply and funds were already obligated. Brendan suggested that funds would not be obligated past a certain point.
- Tracy asked which projects had not provided an application yet. Chad said the Town had not received an application from the St. Johnsbury Development Fund but he would be working with Daniel Kimbell on that. He explained there also has been no application from NEKA for the homeless shelter feasibility study.
- Steve Isham inquired if the Select Board could legally add a deadline to already obligated funds. Chad explained that there was no written contract in place.
- A community member asked what the money the Select Board was talking about. Dennis explained that it was funds given to the town to recover from the pandemic.
- A community member as if the Select Board can agree to approve or not approve the funds and how the funds were overseen. Dennis explained that the Select Board can make sure the funds are used otherwise the requestor would need to come back to the Select Board at the 6 month mark as there are a lot of other groups that could use the funds.
- A community member asked if these were the funds that Rural Edge used for the Cherry Street project. Dennis said yes.
- A community member asked if he funds were to improve the Town. Frank said yes and explained the STJRFGP. He explained that the Packard Court Project was obligated \$50,000 of this funding to leverage 12 million for the project as just one example.
- Steve Isham mentioned that the funds stem from COVID and economic loss recovery.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager mentioned that he thinks there needs to be an application timeline but 6 months is to long for the Town to receive an application for funds already obligated. He suggested if the funds were not used within a certain amount of time that an update is provided to the Town.
- Frank suggested that funds be used within 6 months or an update be provided.
- Brendan voiced concern over sitting on funds and that a year from now those funds still may not be used and other projects are waiting.
- Tracy mentioned that 6 months may not be feasible for a construction project but maybe just an update on the timeline to the Select Board could happen.

- Brendan explained that he was worried about allocating funds without applications in hand.
- Frank suggested that applications be submitted within 45 days of being obligated the funds.
- Scott Campbell asked if the funds were still ARPA funds or if it was Town funds. Frank explained that it was Town funds.
- Tracy suggested that the application be collected at the time of request or within 45 days.
- Frank suggested that if the funds were not used by 6 months that an update would be provided to the Select Board.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to update the requirement of the STJRFGP to include an application within 45 days of obligation of funds and that if the project is not complete within 6 months of obligation that an update including a timeline be provided to the Town.

Sidewalk Reserve Request:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that a section of sidewalk in front of Caplan's and along Portland Street Bridge needs attention.
- Steve Beauregard, Director of DPW explained that 5 sidewalk panels in front of the Caplan's building lean in towards the building causing drainage problems into the basement of Caplan's. He explained that the sidewalk panels need to be fixed which would include addressing the crosswalk section as well. He also explained that on the far end of Portland Street Bridge the sidewalk water popped up the sidewalk and concrete is now chipping away. He mentioned that it is about a 10-12 foot section. The total estimated cost for the sidewalk repairs is \$62,300.
- A gentleman asked if the repairs included the area where Fred Lewis used to be. He said it was really, really bad and almost hit his car there in the past. Steve Beauregard said yes it included that area.
- Chad explained that the sidewalk reserve currently has \$150,000 however \$50,000 has been obligated as matching funds for downtown improvements including pedestrian safety and lighting.
- Dennis confirmed the ask amount of \$62,300. Steve Beauregard said yes. He went on to explain that he contacted the State regarding the condition of the bridge and was told the only poor condition is the sidewalk otherwise the State considers the bridge to be in good condition.
- Brendan asked how much should be set aside a year for sidewalks. Chad explained around \$75,000 however the downtown area might need a quicker cycle.
- Chad mentioned that Portland and Elm have poor sidewalks along with the sidewalk that will not be replaced as part of the construction on Mt. Pleasant Street. He explained the sidewalk would not be eligible but the Town could borrow funds through bon council to complete the work. He expressed that increasing speed in the area was a fear and highlighted the importance of walkability through downtown.
- Dennis confirmed that \$62,300 was available. Chad said yes.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to allocate \$62,300 from sidewalk reserves for sidewalk repair in front of Caplan's and on the Portland Street Bridge. All in favor.

Pavement Reserve Request:

- Steve Beauregard, DPW Director mentioned that he would like to bundle this years paving budget and next years in order to obtain the best possible pricing for paving. In order to do this the Select Board would need to authorize the use of construction reserve funds to be used in June 2023 which will be repaid by the FY23-24 budget. He explained that the paving is scheduled to start June 5th.

- Tracy confirmed that the FY23-24 paving funds were needed to complete the paving that is scheduled for June. Chad said yes the paving scheduled for June will overrun this year's paving budget. He explained that if the Select Board choose to do this paving would not take place next year and the budget would repay back the reserves. He mentioned that the Town was able to obtain a better price and get move paving done by doing this.
- Dennis asked how much was needed from construction reserves. Steve said \$150,000 was needed from reserves.
- Steve Isham asked if the list would have to be limited due to the funds available. Steve Beauregard said no the contractor said they would be able to do all.
- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk asked that the list of roads to be paved be read aloud. Frank stated the roads to be paved were Undercliff Rd., Knollwood Terrance, Elm Street, Hillside Ave, Spring Creek Road, Rocky Ridge Road, High Street, Concord Ave at the Railroad Street intersection, Concord Ave at the Almshouse Road intersection and Breezy Hill Road.
- Scott Campbell asked if this meant that no paving would take place from July 1 until June 30th, 2024. Steve said technically yes but the Town did recently receive a class 2 grant to pave Old Center Road.
- Frank confirmed that no paving had taken place last summer. Steve Beauregard said that was correct.
- Tracy commented that the goal was to strike with the iron was hot. Chad said yes.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to authorize the use of \$150,000 in construction reserves to complete the paving listed above with the understanding that the \$150,000 will be repaid to the construction reserves by next year's paving budget. All in favor.

560 Railroad Street Redevelopment Project Update (Northern Forest Center):

- Evan Olsen from Northern Forest Center approached the board regarding their redevelopment project at 560 Railroad Street. He provided the board with an overview and the goals for the project. He explained the plan to convert some of the space into market rate housing with two commercial businesses located on the street front. He explained that this project would create middle income housing, contribute to downtown revitalization, enhance the arts community and hopefully inspire and serve as a model for additional development. Evan mentioned that included in the project would be a studio space and apartment which would allow for an artist in residency program through Catamount Arts.
- Evan explained that the timeline includes starting construction in the fall of 2023 with completion by fall/winter of 2024. He highlighted that the town could help through tax stabilization, the rental housing improvement grant program and the St. Johnsbury Revitalization Fund Grant Program.
- Northern Forest Center will be holding an open house at 560 Railroad Street on June 7th from 11:30 am until 1 pm and invite anyone interested to attend.
- Steve Isham expressed what a great project this was and fits the needs of the Town. He asked if they have considered EV charging stations as part of their parking lots. Evan mentioned that they have not but was absolutely something that they would look into.
- Frank commented that the project looks great.
- Scott Campbell asked about the rental rates. Evan explained that is will be 100% median AMI with 30% or below of income.
- Frank asked if all units would be 2 bedroom units. Evan explained that currently in the design there is 1 one bedroom, 1 three bedroom and the rest are two bedroom apartments.

- Jim Brown voiced concern over housing residents above commercial space given the recent water damage to a local business. Evan explained that all new plumbing will be installed and they hope not to run into that situation.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager commented that he was excited to have Northern Forest Center in St. Johnsbury and interested to see how this housing model works. He mentioned he is looking forward to the project.
- Brendan mentioned he was happy to have Northern Forest Center in St. Johnsbury and was excited for this project.
- Jody Fried explained that he is really excited for this opportunity. He explained it will hopefully serve as a model for housing moving forward.
- Frank commented that it seemed like a win/ win project.
- Madeline asked how the apartments would be heated. Evan explained that at this point they would be heated through electric heat.
- Madeline asked if the apartments would have outside porches. Evan explained that the rear deck system would be rebuilt and some apartments would have outside porches. However there is not a ton of space for other common areas.
- Tracy expressed that she was really impressed with the project and that Northern Boards really gets the community impact part.

Catamount Arts Creative Campus Project Request:

- Jody Fried from Catamount Arts approached the Select Board to request \$200,000 from the St. Johnsbury Revitalization Fund Grant Program to assist in Catamount Arts Creative Campus Project. He explained that the timeline has sped up and he recognizes the application process however there is currently not an application for transformational projects.
- Jody highlighted that the project will be divided into three phases acquisition, immediate needs and long term goals. He explained that they are hoping to close on the property by June 30th pending the completion of the environmental assessments.
- Jody explained that the project has been selected as 1 of 20 projects Senator Welch has moved to Washington as a priority project.
- Frank asked if the property would remain on the grand list. Jody said yes that was the intent.
- Dennis asked if Jody anticipated any environmental assessment problems. Jody explained that the testing was taking place today and he was unsure of the findings.
- Tracy asked what the \$200,000 would help leverage. Jody explained the \$200,000 would assist with the match for CCRP funds for the acquisition phase. Jody said he expects the project to be in the 3 million dollar range.
- Steve Isham asked if Jody had an idea of what Catamount Arts has brought in for economic value to St. Johnsbury. Jody expressed he did not have an exact number but estimated about 5.5 million annually in 2019 and growing.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Tracy to obligate \$200,000 to Catamount Arts Creative Campus Project pending the receipt of an application within 45 days. All in favor.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.

- Traveled to Montpelier today with Gillian Sewake, Chamber Director to present the downtown designation application. The application was very well received in Montpelier. He expressed how wonderful it was to hear other Town's complement what St. Johnsbury is doing.
- Chad mentioned that the Town's neighborhood designated area application had been approved which will allow those in that area to be eligible for the tax credit pilot program through the State.
- Gillian Sewake, Discover St. Johnsbury Director explained that when the downtown designation was applied for 8 years ago St. Johnsbury was a different place in 2015 filled with blighted buildings and in need of infrastructure repairs. She mentioned that the Town has been successful at improving and is excited to see St. Johnsbury moving forward. She mentioned that St. Johnsbury isn't revitalization anymore St. Johnsbury has been revitalized. She thanked Chad and Joe for their amazing support, leadership and dedication to the Town.

Other Business:

- A gentleman asked for an update on the Hastings Hill Property. Chad explained that the property is a private sale and the Town does not know where it stands.
- Frank mentioned that the sale is in motion. A gentleman asked what in motion meant. Frank explained that the sale is between the Academy and the interested party.
- A gentleman asked if Rural Edge was the interested party or where that ended. Frank explained that that deal had expired.
- Chad mentioned that the Town has no business in the sale at this time.
- Dennis asked for a Charter update. Chad explained that the Town's Charter had not been acted upon and will not be moving forward during this session.
- Scott Campbell explained that it would be looked at next year. Chad explained that the Town had thought that it was only minimal changes but when he went to speak on behalf of the Charter changes he was notified it was being treated like a whole new Charter and that they are going through it line by line to make sure everything is in compliance. He mentioned that he expects to receive comments regarding the changes and will review those comments with the Charter Committee and Select Board.
- Scott Campbell explained that there are various things to look at and they are looking at it with a fine tooth comb and will tell us what needs to be looked at or changed.
- Chad provided an explain that the municipality had used the word "use" in the section referring to the governance of fire arms and the state preferred the word "discharge".
- Tracy asked if the Charter would likely come back for the Town to act on before it is voted on in Montpelier. Chad explained that they have the authority in Montpelier to change it but at this time he isn't sure what will happen.
- Jim Brown mentioned that Mrs. Warden was collecting signatures for a petition for next year's Town Meeting at the Farmer's Market over the weekend. He questioned if the Town Band really needed to wait that long or if they could bring the request forward now to the Select Board. He explained that the needed amount on the petition was \$7,500. He asked what was currently appropriated. Frank said \$770.
- Steve Isham suggested that they apply for the St. Johnsbury Revitalization Fund Grant Program.
- Jim Brown asked who he should direct them to. Chad said him.
- Lorraine stated they were unsure if the Select Board authorized funds to tear down the building on Hastings Hill when it could be fixed. Frank expressed that the intention was to put housing in there.
- Brendan explained that the funds were obligated to acquire the property.
- Dennis expressed that he would rather see something done with it than it to sit vacant.

- Scott Campbell asked if the Select Board was aware of the plans from the developers. Frank explained that the first step was to acquire the property and expect that it would be 18 months before anything happened.
- Tracy explained that once the Town receives the application for the obligated funds it would give more insight into the project.

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

DRAFT