



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 August 14th, 2023 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Joe Kasprzak, Stacy Jewel; Rachel Waterhouse, Kresten Sterling (via zoom)

Public: Jim Brown, Lorraine, Daniel Sweet

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Lorraine approached the board regarding her concerns with the homelessness in St. Johnsbury. She explained that there have been lots of problems and was concerned the Town had not made provisions for a place for these people to go. She explained she felt that somehow the Town needed to help them get their lives together. She expressed she would like to see some sort of shelter for these individuals and offered to be a part of a committee to help.
- Frank said the Select Board would take her concerns into consideration and that the Town has to figure it out. However mentioned he was not sure what it would look like at this point.
- Chad explained that other opportunities for these individuals is being worked on through different organizations in Town.

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 from Brendan to table to minutes from the July 24th, 2023 meeting. All in favor.

Liquor/Tobacco License:

- None

Design Advisory Committee Appointments:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that Lorna Higgs has expressed interest in returning to the DAC.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Dennis to reappoint Lorna Higgs to the Design Advisory Committee. All in favor.

St. Johnsbury Pension Update:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that the financial advisors are recommending making some changes to the Town's pension plan to address funding shortfalls. Chad reviewed the recommended changes to the pension plan including increasing the equity allocation by 5%.
- Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk mentioned that the Actuary also reviewed the proposed changes and did not have any questions or concerns. She explained that no changes have been made to the pension investment policy in a long time. The last changes made were a name change.
- Tracy asked who was on the pension committee. Stacy explained that the following individuals were on the pension committee- Chad Whitehead, Stacy Jewell, Adam Colburn, Diane Perkins, Clifford Whiting, Stacy Smith and the Fire Department rotates members.
- Steve Isham asked what the allocation percentage was at currently. Chad said it is currently between 35% and 65% equity. The proposed would raise it to 40%-70% equity.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to approve the investment policy statement updates as recommended by the Pension Committee and Investors. All in favor.

Set Tax Rate:

- Chad reviewed the 2023 grand list and recommended setting the tax rate based on the general fund grand list of \$5,123,554.00 and the special services district grand list of \$2,176,531.00.
- Chad explained that the Town Manager's Office is not recommending a budget adjustment and that the tax rate is set based on the budget presented during Town Meeting.
- Stacy explained that her office is hoping to print tax bills by Aug. 28th and mail them by Sept. 1st.
- Chad mentioned that the tax rate inside the special services district would be \$1.7293 and outside the special services district would be \$1.0660.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Dennis to set the tax rate as presented. All in favor.

Police Department Union Contract:

- Chad explained that the Negotiations Committee consisting of himself (Chad Whitehead), Frank Empsall, Dennis Smith and Jamie Murphy have been working over the last 9 months to come to an agreement on the Police Department Union Contract with the NEPBA Union. He explained that the Police and Dispatch has ratified the presented contract.
- Chad highlighted the changes of the contract including the following.
 - Change in how scheduling is done within the PD and Dispatch
 - Change in how callbacks work including changing the callback time paid from 3 hours to 4 hours per callback.
 - 13% increase in salaries in year 1 and 3%-5% in years 2, 3 and 4.
- Frank mentioned that the committee has been working on negotiations since January and he would like to move things forward.

- Dennis commented that 13% is a considerable raise and the committee understands that. He explained that the major raise was needed as the department was very close to being short staffed.
- Frank mentioned that the Police Department cannot afford to lose more staff.
- Steve Isham asked if the Union has approved the proposed contract. Chad said yes last week.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to approve the Police and Dispatch contract as presented. All in favor.
- Jim Brown asked why the Town was in a position paying so much less. Chad explained that it was not intentionally and in the last few years the Town has been locked into a contract. He mentioned it is very much a balancing act.
- Jim asked if the increases only pertained to those within the special services district. Chad said yes for the police.
- Dennis mentioned that people do not seem favorable with the idea of Town wide policing.
- Jim explained that he felt it was not fair or equitable for the distribution of services.
- Dennis mentioned that the St. Johnsbury Police Department wages were becoming less and less competitive.

STJREGP Implementation and Planning Grant Recommendations:

- Chad explained that the Select Board allocated \$100,000 in implementation and planning grant funds back in March of 2023. Applications were accepted until May 30th, 2023. 14 Implementation and Planning Grant applications were received totaling over \$521,369 in requests. The program outlined that Planning and Implementation Reimbursement Grants would be awarded in the range of \$5,000 to \$40,000 to support a wide array of project implementation and feasibility. A 20% match is required for these grants. He explained that the applications must demonstrate that the project meets a community need in the areas of business support, growth of the creative economy, housing, access to outdoor recreation and access to mental health and social services. These grant funds should be used as last gap funding. Operational expense are not eligible.
- Chad reviewed the scoring criteria for the applications. He mentioned that the review committee consisted of Jamie Murphy, Heather Alger and Doug Reid.
- Chad presented the committee's recommendations as follows:
 - St. Johnsbury Kiwanis Pool in the amount of \$22,500 for fencing repairs. Kiwanis indicated they would find the 20% match in their budget for this project.
 - InnovateNEK in the amount of \$20,000 for NVDA and Do North Co-working to launch co-working space on the 2nd floor of the Welcome Center. This project will leverage 1.5 million in other funds.
 - New Depot Square LLC in the amount of \$20,000 to help maintain sustainable rental rates and maintain the renovated appearance of the building.
 - The Lofts at Ralston Mills in the amount of \$15,000 to aid in the design and development of 12 Artist Lofts with both residential and commercial space including a Artist Gallery.
 - Friends of Dog Mountain in the amount of \$15,000 to enhance and sustain 3 miles of trails at Dog Mountain and to create Paws Places.
 - Dan's Barbershop and Shave Parlor in the amount of \$7,500 to assist in the relocation to 36 Eastern Ave which will increase the blueprint of the Barber Shop by approximately 600 sq. ft. allowing for two more barbers and to assist in creating a barber school in St. Johnsbury. Currently the closest barber school is over 70 miles away and it takes 800 hours to complete schooling.

- Steve Isham asked about the scoring leverage for these projects. Chad explained that Tracy had the same question and the Town will be working with the St. J Rec with regards to their planning application.
- Steve Isham asked if it was feasible to move Dan's Barber Shop down to the micro grants as there was remaining funding to allow for more funding to be available for the planning and implementation grants. Chad explained that it didn't make sense at this time.
- Brendan asked if all applications totaled \$100,000. Chad said yes.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to approve the recommended STJRFGP Planning and Implementation Grants as presented. All in favor.

Pomerleau Building Doors:

- Frank explained that there was a need to replace the outside doors at the Pomerleau Building that were not done previously.
- Stacy explained that it was in the Town's best interest to replace the doors and make the first floor of 51 Depot Square more energy efficient. She mentioned that the first floor was not renovated like the other floors have been.
- Chad mentioned that the Town has \$68,302 in the Pomerleau Building Reserve Fund. Chad mentioned that the Town is working on redoing the locks to the building but that is included in the current budget.
- Frank mentioned that the quote to replace the three doors was \$26,111.11.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the quote to replace the three doors in the amount of \$26,111.11 from the Pomerleau Building Reserve Fund. All in favor.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whithead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- The flooding event resulted in limited damages in St. Johnsbury.
- DPW is still awaiting permission from the River Management Commission to complete the repair to Goss Hollow.
- The new sludge press and conveyor system have been delivered. A bid opening for the electrical work will take place on Tuesday Aug. 16th at 2 pm in the Welcome Center.
- The preliminary engineering report for the LVRT project has been submitted along with the application for funding. The project is moving into the permitting stage.
- Frank asked about the clearing at the water plant. Chad explained that clearing was underway as there was a limited window for that.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager mentioned that consultants will be at the Armory all week collecting samples.
- The ad for Police Chief in St. Johnsbury remains open and interviews will begin this week.
- The ad for a full time Municipal Zoning and Planning Administrator has been posted. Paul will continue to help in the interim.

Other Business:

- Jim mentioned that the Planning Commission currently only has three members. He explained that with two more members they would have a full Planning Commission.
- Chad explained that he has received one person who is interested.
- Jim asked what the process was for those interested in joining the Planning Commission. Chad explained that those interested should send letters of interest to Rachel.

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy that there was a need for executive session to discuss a contractual matter that premature public knowledge would place 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 and Assistant Town Manager. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to exit executive session. All in favor.
- The chair had nothing to report.

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