



# TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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## Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 @ 6:10 pm

Present-

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

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

Public: KATV, Jim Brown, Gillian Sewake (via zoom), Don Smith (via zoom), Damien Taylor, Evan Olsen (via zoom), Cal Rec (via zoom), Karen Geraghty (via zoom)

### Agenda Amendments:

- None

### Public Comment:

- Damien Taylor approached the Select Board regarding his concerns over the Gaza genocide and the dire situation with over 30,000 killed. He asked the Select Board to consider signing a cease fire. He explained that over 10 million from the State of VT is given to Israel every year. He proposed that the Town demand a cease fire stating that it is a local issue as tax dollars are being sent to Israel.
- Steve Isham thanked him and explained that the issue is outside of the Town's control. He explained that the Town does not send money to Israel. He suggested that Damien send a letter to the editor or get a petition signed for VT representatives.
- Damien explained that other Towns have called for a cease fire.
- Dennis mentioned that an effective resource would be the state reps.
- Tracy inquired if a petition was the next step. Chad explained that the Select Board is only allowed specific governing authority specific to the Town. Steve Isham mentioned that it is not a function of a Select Board.
- Chad explained that the Town has adopted an inclusion statement for St. Johnsbury.
- Damien mentioned that a demand to cease fire needs to be presented to Biden. He explained that he would leave a copy of the resolution for the board and was not giving up. He asked what the next steps were.
- Steve Isham explained that the next steps would be a letter to the editor or petition. He mentioned that the issue is a state and national issue not a Town issue.
- Chad explained that he would need 5% of the registered votes in St. Johnsbury in order for anything to be on the ballot.
- Carmen Darling approached the Select Board to voice her support for the Town to sign a cease fire for Israel. She inquired about what the number of people was needed in order for the board to be comfortable signing such a resolution. Dennis explained that there is no firm number but it

must be 5% of the registered votes to be on the ballot. Chad mentioned that it would need around 240 signatures to be on the ballot for Town Meeting.

- Dennis explained that the Select Board doesn't have the authority by legislation to handle international issues.
- Carmen mentioned that funds are being sent to Israel. Dennis explained that the Town doesn't send funds to Israel.
- Steve Isham explained that the contact information for St. Johnsbury's State Reps, Scott Campbell and Scott Beck can be found on the Vermont General Assembly website.

#### Warrants:

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

#### Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the minutes from the March 11<sup>th</sup> meeting with the noted corrections. All in favor.
- Tabled the meeting minutes from the March 11<sup>th</sup> organizational meeting.

#### Liquor/Tobacco License:

- Steven Isham presented the following liquor and tobacco renewals:
  - Family Dollar. - 2<sup>nd</sup> class
  - Firinn Golf Group of VT- 1<sup>st</sup> class
  - Firinn Golf Group of VT- 3<sup>rd</sup> Class
  - Firinn Golf Group of VT- Outside Consumption
  - HH Haven Company- 1<sup>st</sup> class
  - HH Haven Company- 2<sup>nd</sup> class
  - The dispensary LL- 3<sup>rd</sup> Class
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the liquor and tobacco licenses as presented. All in favor.

#### VCDP CDBG Implementation Grant on behalf of the Caledonia Food Cooperative:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager presented the Select Board with the resolution for the VCDP CDGB Implementation Grant on behalf of the Caledonia Food Cooperative.
- Dennis asked what the Town match would be for the grant. Joe explained that the Town would not have a match as the funds will just pass through the Town.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Frank to approve the resolution for the VCDP CDBG Implementation Grant on behalf of the Caledonia Food Cooperative. All in favor.

#### Bike Ped Committee Update:

- Dr. John Raser provided an update regarding the Bike Pedestrian Committee including statistics. He explained that St. Johnsbury sees a lot of walking and bike traffic and for some this is their primary mode of transportation. He reviewed the walking and biking scores. He highlighted

dangerous crossings including Portland and Maple Street. He thanked the Town for continuing to increase their investment in sidewalks.

- He explained that creating a bike and pedestrian community promotes quality of life and construction projects give the opportunity to rethink engineering and speed limits.
- Tracy inquired about local motion. John explained that the committee has ideas like closing Hasting Ext by Arnold Park allowing the town to make more of a human park.

#### Local Emergency Management Plan:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that most of the updates to the Local Emergency Management Plan was updated phone numbers but Chief Reed to speak on behalf of the plan.
- Chief Bradley Reed explained that the vulnerable population, phone numbers and Appendix A-heat emergencies have been updated. He mentioned that the plan itself has been in place for many years however in 2020 the Town switched from the short version to the long version.
- Dennis questioned the address of Streeter Hall- 17 Grandview address. Chief thanked him and said he would update it.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the Local Emergency Management Plan. All in favor.

#### 560 Railroad Street Tax Stabilization Agreement:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager explained that at the last Select Board meeting on March 11<sup>th</sup> the Select Board agreed to enter into a Tax Stabilization Agreement with 560 Railroad Street. He explained that the agreement contains a matrix around the creation of housing since there is a critical lack thereof in St. Johnsbury.
- He asked the Select Board to consider formally adding housing into the Tax Stabilization guidelines.
- Frank mentioned that he thought adding housing to the guidelines was smart.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the Tax Stabilization Agreement for 560 Railroad Street. All in favor.
- Joe mentioned that even if the board chooses to formally add housing into the Tax Stabilization guidelines the Select Board still have the full authority over the agreements.
- Frank mentioned that he thought it was helpful and liked to see housing moving forward and this is a good incentive.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to formally add housing into the Tax Stabilization guidelines. All in favor.

#### Downtown Transportation Fund Application Attendance:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that he recently came to the Select Board for approval to use funds from the sidewalk reserve as the Town's match for the Downtown Transportation Fund Application. He explained that application was originally submitted on Feb. 24<sup>th</sup> for design work with regards to sidewalk repairs on Eastern Ave. He explained that the Town was contact and encouraged to revise their application as the real intent is for construction.
- He explained that the Town has increased their application to \$200,000 which will be 80% funded requiring a Town match of 20% or \$50,000. He explained that currently there is plenty of funds in the sidewalk reserve with more funds being added both this fiscal year and next. He suggested using \$50,000 from the reserve as the Town match.

- Dennis mentioned that he thought there were worse sidewalks in Town than the ones included in the application. He explained that funds need to be sought for those other places as well.
- Chad explained that he has also asked the Bike Ped. Committee to take a look at where else may need sidewalk repairs as it is important for St. Johnsbury.
- Tracy mentioned that she sees it as doubling the benefit and allows the Town to use the reserve elsewhere. This allows the Town to take advantage of State funds to help with sidewalk repairs.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Frank to revise the application for the Downtown Transportation Fund as presented. All in favor.

#### Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report
- Daniel Ellingwood graduated the part time Police Academy and is back working on completing his field training hours.
- Jacob Young was sworn in today and is already part time certified. He is working on completing his field training hours as well.
- Chad explained that part time certified officers can work full time they just don't have the ability to do certain things.
- The vacant position in DPW is in the process of being filled. An offer has been made and we expect to onboard someone within the next two weeks.
- He explained that the Town Charter has been returned from the State with some suggested revisions for approval. There are 6 items that need to be looked at that reference existing legislation. He explained that he has reached out to the Town Attorney for review and to confirm that it doesn't change the essence of what was brought forward. He mentioned that he expects it to be on the next Select Board Agenda.
- Dennis mentioned that he would hate to see it kicked back and not wrapped up.
- Steve mentioned that he has heard that there is still time for the Town to review the Charter and get it back to legislation to get it done this session.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager had nothing to add.

#### Other Business:

- Jim Brown thanked the Select Board for being patient and kind with the folks during public comment that were discussing the genocide in Gaza. He expressed that he thought public comment was only for Town business and limited to 5 minutes. He asked the chair to be aware of that.
- Steve Isham explained that public comment can be limited if needed but is a requirement that the Town allow time for those to address concerns.
- Frank commented that he used to limit it to 5 minutes.
- Jim Brown provided an update on the bylaw modernization and what the Planning Commission continues. He invited the Select Board to the April 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.
- Steve Isham congratulated Matthew Lennox on becoming Firefighter of the year. He mentioned that he appreciated his dedication and commitment to St. Johnsbury.

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