



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board November 25th, 2024 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Joe Kasprzak, Rachel Waterhouse, Matthew Walsh

Public: KATV, Richard Boisseau, Jim Brown, Dana Gray, Ben Deede, Ben Copans, Don Smith (via zoom), Gillian Sewake (via zoom)

Agenda Amendments:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager requested that Bylaw Modernization Update be added to the agenda.
- Steve Isham agreed to add the Bylaw Modernization Update before the Town Manager's Report.

Public Comment:

- None

Minutes:

- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to approve the minutes from Nov. 12th meeting. All in favor. Brendan and Dennis abstained.

Warrants:

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

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:

- None

Grand List Adjustments:

- Steven Isham presented several Grand List adjustments.
 - 2024 #14 involved an increase in the amount of \$32.10.
 - 2024 #13 was a reduction in the amount of \$10.58.
 - 2024 #12 was an increase in the amount of \$178.93.

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the grand list adjustments 2024 #12-#14 as presented. All in favor.

October Financials:

- Chad Whithead, Town Manager mentioned that Lesley Russ is the acting Finance Officer as Zan Zettler is currently out. He read the financial memo highlighting the following.
- At the end of October the General Fund had a surplus of \$95,484. The annual pension payments in dispatch and fire totaled \$119K and the majority of the special appropriations have been paid.
- The Armory remediation expenses have been moved to the grant fund this fiscal year. Since we are in the remediation phase, the majority of the expense will be reimbursed by grants.
- The new Maintenance department created last year during the budget has been added to the general fund. Wages and benefits were incorrectly booked to DPW which will be corrected in November.
- The Special Services Fund had a surplus of \$93,810. Regular and overtime wages are 29% of budget which has positively impacted the bottom line in this fund.
- At the end of October the Highway Fund had a temporary deficit of \$1,895,619. This deficit is due to \$2,155,811 in expenses associated with the July flooding events.
- The Water fund had a temporary deficit of \$176,374. This is due to audit reversals and billing in arrears. Additionally the property tax expense is significantly over budget due to the appraisal of the new water filter plant.
- At the end of October the Sewer Fund had a temporary deficit of \$236,381. This was due to audit reversals and billing in arrears. Additionally solid handlings are at 62% of the budgeted line item. Solid handling has been completed for this season.
- The Parking Meter Fund at the end of October had a deficit of \$5,887. This is cyclical as the majority of permit revenue is received during December and January.
- Steve Isham asked if the Town has had to use the line of credit yet. Chad said that the Town has not tapped into it and after speaking with Lesley he doesn't anticipate needing it in the short term.
- Steve Isham asked how this would affect the budget for next year. Chad explained that FEMA has bumped the reimbursement rate to 90% so the Town will be reimbursed but just don't know when. Chad mentioned if the Town comes out ahead with the FEMA reimbursement they will need to decide what to do with it.
- Jim Brown asked How FEMA funds are flowing into the Town. Chad explained that the funds will be coming in the future but there is not a definite timeframe at this point.

Bay Street Sewer Main:

- Chad explained that there is a main sewer line on Bay Street that runs under the St. Johnsbury Paper Company. The line has recently had issues including backing up into the building. The Town has rerouted some of the line and cleaned the pipes down stream but the issue still persists. He explained that the whole line will need to be rerouted. He estimated the cost to be around \$140,000 and mentioned that they have \$391,000 in reserve funds that can be used for this project. Chad continues to work on pinning down plans and will come back to the Select Board with a recommendation in the future.
- Steve Isham asked if that would be in the spring. Chad said it is all weather dependent. If it is a warmer winter it maybe sooner.
- Frank asked if it was something that could wait. Chad said the business owner wants to move a tenant into the building but cannot do so with the current situation.

Armory Remediation Update:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager presented the Select Board with an Armory Remediation update. He highlighted that the ongoing Armory Redevelopment project, which faced initial cost overruns of over 14 million dollars. The project was redesigned to focus on the main building and tear down the back structure for parking and police facilities. Remediation was bid out in July and was awarded to Costello Dismantling at just under 1.7 million dollars. Remediation began in September 4th and soon will be put to bed for the winter. The project is complex and has been classified as the most complicated remediation project in New England. Ongoing efforts to secure funding continue, including a placeholder in Senator Welch's Congressional direct spending and an application for an EPA-funded grant. The Town should know more about that come February. He highlighted the project timeline continues with remediation into April 2025 with construction hopefully starting in July of 2025. The project is expected to be completed in 12 months after construction begins.
- Jim Brown asked if there was anything that can be done to salvage the basketball court floor. Joe said unfortunately not as it is not worth the risks.
- Dana Gray asked when the walls were going to come down. Joe said the timeline is between Dec. 4th thru Dec. 20th.
- Steven Isham asked about the 40% reduction in cost. Joe explained that he is hoping that it will bring the cost down but the building requires significant bracing for remediation. The internal team continues trying to find alternatives to that much bracing. Hoping in the area of \$600,000.

Bylaw Modernization Update:

- Jim Brown, Chair of the Planning Commission discussed the changes made to the Planning Commission's bylaws, which were found to be non-compliant. These changes were based on the Homestead Act and the need for greater density of dwelling units. He mentioned that the changes in zoning and building permits, which were discussed in detail. He highlighted the flexibility in the proposed changes, particularly in the rural land area, which was a point of concern for many residents. He suggested the possibility of another public hearing to discuss these changes further.
- Chad clarified that the hearing could not be scheduled until after the Planning Commission approves the changes, which would then require another 15 days' notice. Chad emphasized the need for patience in the process, as changes could still be made before the public hearing.
- Brandy Saxton from Place Sense presented an overview of the St. Johnsbury bylaw modernization project. The project involved an audit of the town's current zoning and subdivision ordinances for compliance with new State laws, such as Act 47 and Act 181. The audit also considered the town plan's, policy, directions and the eligibility for an extension of the neighborhood development area. Brady noted that the State has altered these programs, potentially affecting St. Johnsbury's progress. The project also involved reshaping the zoning map to follow the lines of where the Town has water and sewer services. She highlighted the significant changes in State policy, such as the requirement to allow for 3 and 4 unit dwellings as a permitted use in serviced areas and a base density of 5 dwellings unit per acre.
- Brady discussed the changes in the law that have been implemented to facilitate affordable housing and emergency shelters. She highlighted the reduction in restrictions on these types of housing and changes in appeal rights. She mentioned the introduction of new language around parking and accessory on-farm businesses. She then shifted the discussion to the bylaw amendment process, focusing on the audit and the editing of Article 3, the zoning districts. The purpose statements of the zoning districts were updated to encourage housing in serviced areas, and multi-unit housing was added to more residential areas. The non-residential uses were largely unchanged, but the

Planning Commission made a few changes. Lastly she mentioned the revision of the zoning map, which had not been updated in years. Brandy concluded by mentioning that project aimed to simplify and modernize the current system.

- Steve Isham confirmed that the proposed bylaws has some flexibility. Jim Brown said yes some.
- Jim Brown mentioned that the Public Hearing is a time to talk with people to address these concerns.
- Matt Walsh confirmed the need for another public hearing since changes have been made.
- Jim Brown said that hearing would happen on Dec. 17th.
- Steve Isham mentioned that after the public hearing then approved again to send to the Select Board.
- Jim Brown asked why since the Planning Commission was here presenting tonight.
- Steve Isham mentioned that changes need to be approved by the Planning Commission before it comes to the Select Board for a hearing.
- Tracy asked for a copy of the red line/ blue line drafts. She mentioned that the presentation from Place Sense was super helpful in understanding the proposed changes.
- Steve Isham thanked the Planning Commission and Place Sense.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following report.
- The Town has worked with NVDA to submit an ECJC application which includes components of the Armory and significant funding for infrastructure projects around the Somerville neighborhood. Working with NVDA to get them to come to a Select Board meeting to provide an update. This will give them an opportunity to discuss brownfields as well.
- Continue to work to finalize the draft of the budget. Will be scheduling meetings with the Select Board shortly and then public presentations. The final deadline for budget approval is January 20th.
- DPW is working to prepare for snow events.
- Progress in the Police Department continues, Kevin Wilson was sworn in this week and Shawn Pereira is scheduled to attend the police academy in February.
- The Fire Department remains busy with calls.
- Steve Isham asked about the number of Police Officers. Chad explained that it is finally trending the other way and applications are coming in.
- Steve Isham mentioned that since Chief Joel Pierce has come on the Town has seen more positive changes. Chad agreed and mentioned that several officers have been hired under Joel's tenure.
- Steve Isham thanked Chad and Rachel for their assistance with the hiring of these officers.

Other Business:

- Jim Brown discussed the progress of the 2025 Town Plan, with a final draft expected by the end of February. The Planning Commission is increasing their capacity to make this deadline.

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and seconded by Brendan that there was a need for an Executive Session to discuss a contractual matter where premature disclosure could place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. All in favor.

- On a motion by Dennis and seconded by Brendan to enter Executive Session and invite the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager. All in favor.

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

November 25th Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/mNjKJlwPIGmFmD7W5gllsbssm9UbKL11qDJKWMRmKB_K9K5vEMM-rR4iqY7RuOip.w2-mywCUY2pOvcql

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