



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 June 24th, 2024 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak, Kresten Sterling, Police Chief Joel Pierce, Stacy (iphone), Lester (iphone)

Public: Gillian Sewake (via zoom), KATV, Jim Brown, Don Smith (via zoom), Kerry (via zoom), Anita Pierce-Roth, David Roth, Shelia Weston, Tarrah Taylor, Cory Bunnell, Scott Beck, Dana Gray, Sherriff James Hemond, State Police Lt. Charlie Winn, Lepine (zoom), Bobbie Lepine, iphone (zoom)

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- David Roth approached the Select Board regarding a micro and meta issue in Town. He mentioned the micro issue of being the Town Parking lot behind Cary and Main. He explained that despite investment from landlords in the area the activity and trash in the Town parking lot is not getting better. Drug paraphilia can be found in the lot along with drug deals. He mentioned that the meta issue is the violence in Town. He explained that he has never lived in a place where 5 murders have occurred within a mile radius in 12 months and finds it very concerning. He expressed that he doesn't know what to do but offered to help in any way he could.
- Anita Pierce-Roth expressed her concern as well with these issues. She expressed that her tenants that live in the area are frightened. They call the Police and notify her as the landlord when they are scared. She explained that the parking lot feels like a coordinated distribution site. She also offered to help. She mentioned that she is aware that Becca Ballard's Office knows of the issues throughout VT and the concern on the impact of tourism to the state. It is of high level concern with the government.
- Steve Isham thanked David and Anita for this information and mentioned that they do have a lot to contribute and he appreciates that.
- Frank asked about dispatch hanging up. Anita mentioned that it was an upsetting situation.
- Tarrah explained that VT cares will help clean up syringes. She explained that lots of people in these situations are those in poverty.
- Shelia mentioned that lots of needles have been found out front the stores on Railroad Street.
- Tarrah suggested that everyone carry narcan as these drugs can be fatal. She explained that people in this situation know that it is an issue too.
- Shelia explained that the Town parking lot is drug central and filled with garbage and needles.

- Tarrah explained that a lot of out of state dealers are coming up now which increases the crime. There are lots of moving parts to the situation.
- Chad explained that this does weigh heavily on managements mind. Policing is in a challenging position with such low staff levels. He explained that a Public Safety Task Force has been created to address these issues. The Town is making this a priority and will continue to do so. Recovery coaching training is being looked into for the Police so Officers are ready to respond when those users are ready for help. The Town works to create a positive experience for all that work, live and visit St. Johnsbury.
- Anita asked about support from bigger agencies with this issue.
- _____ explained that this feels different. The parking lot doesn't feel safe and the cast of characters seem now to have less to lose. It is the same people coming and going and this seems like a violent new crowd.
- Frank asked if this happens during the day time. Shelia said yes both during the day and night. She explained that they patrol the lot looking to break into cars.
- Jim Brown asked if the Task Force has discussed vigilantes.
- Chief Pierce explained that this escalation is a new thing to the Police Department too and they are working on figuring out a new strategy to handle this. He mentioned that it would be great to brainstorm all together. He said the issue is if you remove one crowd another crowd will come in and support from the community is always welcomed.
- _____ asked what support from the community looks like.
- Chief Pierce mentioned that he wasn't sure and would have to string that together. He explained that every agency is struggling. He went on to say that vigilantes protests are not illegal and qusted how does one determine where to draw the line and tell them what they can and cannot protest.
- Brendan suggested that those that are motivated take classes to become certified level 2or 3 Officers.
- Jim Brown voiced that these people are willing to threaten people with violence. Chief Pierce said a majority of it is incorrect information out there on Facebook.
- Steve Isham mentioned that the Public Safety Task Force continues to meet and plans to host public meetings to interact and brainstorm with the public sooner rather than later.
- Tracy confirmed that Chief Pierce was hosting quarterly public meetings at the Athenaeum. Chief Piece said yes and encouraged the community to attend.

Warrants:

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

Minutes:

- On a motion by Frank and second by Brendan to approve the minutes from the June 24th Select Board meeting as presented. All in favor.

Liquor/Tobacco License:

- Steven Isham presented the following liquor and tobacco licenses and renewals:
 - St. Johnsbury House of Pizza- 1st class
- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to approve the other liquor licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

DPW CBA:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager reviewed the proposed copy of the Department of Public Works CBA. He highlighted the changes including removing longevity pay for a pay scale with step increases. He mentioned that this will make things more streamlined. He explained that the increase seen in this contract was about 5% over last year and moving forward for the next two years will be CPI plus 1% for a max of 5%. The contract also adds Juneteenth as a holiday in DPW which the Town has been observing for two years and provides an incentive when called upon during the snow season, which equates to an additional \$750 annually.
- He explained that Frank, Dennis and Chad were in agreement with the proposed contract and the Union has voted to ratify it.
- Steve Isham asked if it was a 3 year contract. Chad said yes.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Tracy to approve the DPW CBA as presented. All in favor.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- He thanked everyone for attending tonight and coming to talk about the safety of St. Johnsbury.
- The retaining wall on Central Street has been completed.
- The Water Treatment Plant construction continues to move forward.
- JA McDonald is working on Pleasant and Gilman drainage and wrapping up the project.
- The Pearl Street North project is in design which would include increased lighting and security cameras in the area. He mentioned that he has asked for permission to purchase the cameras and get them installed sooner rather than later.
- The grant has been submitted for redesign on Eastern Ave and to rebuild the sidewalk from Pearl Street to Cherry Street. He explained that currently Eastern Ave can be tight to navigate.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager had nothing to report.

Other Business:

- None

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Tracy and second by Brendan that there is a need for an executive session to discuss a contractual matter where premature disclosure would place the Town at substantial risk. All in favor.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Frank to enter executive session and invite the Town Manager and Police Chief. All in favor.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Brendan to exit executive session. All in favor.
- The Chair had nothing to report.

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