



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board January 13, 2025 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Brad Reed, Joel Pierce (via zoom), Stacy Jewell (via zoom)

Public: Richard Boisseau, Jim Brown, Bob Joly, Issaih, Dana Gray, Tom Turek, Deb Dolgin, Peter Van Straten, Don Smith, Sten Lium

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Sten Lium requested that the Select Board consider a killer pothole warning system. He explained that about a week and a half ago he left Whites Market and hit a killer pothole by the Corner Street School. It destroyed his tire and headlight on his vehicle. He mentioned that the pot hole is about 1 foot by 1 foot by 4 inches deep. He commented that two other people have had similar issues with the same pot hole and asked if an earlier warning system was possible.
- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that Sten can complete a form to be submitted to VLCT as an insurance claim for the damage done to his vehicle. He also mentioned that the Town follows the VTrans process for repairing pot holes which states that they will be repaired within 48 hours after notification. He did remind folks that it is pot hole season and that he believed the pot hole in question had been repaired already but he would follow up with Steve Beauregard, Director of Public Works.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Tracy and second by Frank to approve the Select Board minutes from the Emergency Meeting on December 14th, 2025. All in favor.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to approve the Select Board minutes from December 23rd, 2024 with the noted corrections. All in favor.

Warrants:

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

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:

- Steve Isham presented the following liquor license:
 - Tirozzi VT LLC- first class
 - Northeast Kannabis LLC- tobacco
 - Northeast Kannabis LLC- tobacco substitute
 - Vermont Catering Company LLC- first class
 - Vermont Catering Company LLC- third class
 - Spoonthawee LLC- first class
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the liquor licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

St. Johnsbury Baseball:

- Chad explained that in order for St. Johnsbury Baseball to be tax exempt it must go on the ballot at Town Meeting every five years.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve adding the St. Johnsbury Baseball tax exemption to the ballot for Town Meeting. All in favor.

Fees and Fines:

- Chad explained that at the last Select Board meeting on December 23rd, 2024 the Town proposed making changes to the Zoning fees and fines. He highlighted that the Town has compared Zoning fees and fines to other Towns within the region and have determined that St. Johnsbury's fees and fines are very low. Currently the Town Zoning permit fee is \$55 for any project. The Zoning Administrator has recommended increasing the fee to \$100 plus 5 cents per square foot. Chad explained that he has reviewed the increase recommendation and is in agreement with it. Chad suggested an implantation date of July 1, 2025.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Brendan to approve the Fees and Fines as presented with an effective date of July 1, 2025. All in favor.

FY 26 Budget:

- Steve Isham, Select Board Chair explained that the proposed FY 26 budget has been presented a couple of times now.
- Chad explained that an update since the last meeting was made to the Police Department training budget. Keeping the training budget at \$8,000. He thanked Issaih and his colleague for noticing the change and bringing to the Town's attention. He mentioned that this change had no impact outside of the special services district and inside the special services district increased taxes 0.7067%.
- Dennis proposed that the Recreation budget be moved from the general fund to a separate item to be voted on at Town Meeting.
- Tracy expressed that she did not support this proposed change. She explained that for over the last 10 years the recreation budget has been included within the municipal budget. The only difference this year is that the budget has an increase otherwise there are no other changes. If the Town were to remove the recreation budget from the general fund budget it would be setting a dangerous president.

- Dennis explained that he felt it was a modest increase in the recreation budget and it was unknown what it would look like year over year. He also mentioned that the recreation department was not essential services and he believes should be looked at like a special appropriations.
- Tracy expressed that special appropriations are for outside agencies not a recreation department.
- Dennis mentioned that it has been in the general fund since it has been with the Academy.
- Brendan mentioned that the board had received quite a few emails from residents that were in support of the increase in the recreation department budget and believes it should stay within the Town budget as presented.
- Peter Van Stratten expressed that he did not thin
- Tom Turek asked if anyone had read the Impact Consulting Report. He mentioned that St. Johnsbury was only paying 1% of the Recreation Department costs compared to other towns in the area. He explained that clearly the Academy is not going to do it anyone and if the Town is not going to do it then there will be no Recreation Department. He mentioned that would mean that St. Johnsbury would possibly be the only town with no Recreation Department in Vermont. He mentioned that the program under the Town would all for the potential of more grant funding. He implored the Select Board to keep it within the budget as recreation is an essential service.
- Dennis mentioned that a special appropriation would still fund the Recreation Department should the voters chose to. He mentioned he is not against recreation but voiced that he felt the survey was not done well and did not include a large part of the community.
- Tracy explained that Dennis's statement regarding the survey was not an accurate statement.
- Jim Brown mentioned that he received the survey and agreed with Tracy on the matter.
- Richard Boisseau expressed his support for the Recreation Department. He mentioned that this is something the kids need. It would be hard to put the Recreation Department budget back into the Town budget in the following years. He expressed that he felt the Recreation Department has served well presently and can do better.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to remove the recreation budget from the Town budget and place it as a special appropriations on the ballot. Dennis voted in favor and Tracy, Frank and Brendan voted against it.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Brendan to approve the FY26 budget as presented. Dennis voted no and Tracy, Brendan and Frank voted for it. The motion passed.
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Bay Street Water Project Bond Article:

- Chad explained that the projects on Bay Street include the enhanced connection from the LVRT into Town by building a multipurpose path including enhanced street lighting. The water project is part of the Town's long term control plan and will provide redundancy within the water system. He explained that the funding will come from the Clean Waer and Drinking Water Funds. The project would create a permanent new water main under the Portland Street bridge and replace old cast iron lines. Requesting that the bond article be placed on the ballot for Town Meeting allowing the voters to vote on it. He mentioned that additional public meetings will be scheduled as the project develops. Chad read the Declaration of Intent and Warning and mentioned the ability if the project goes to construction to recap the funds incurred during the design and permit phase. He explained that in order to enter into the project the Town needs authority for the bond from the voters however only water system users will pay for the project.
- Brendan asked if the water line was connecting to the top or bottom of the Portland Street Bridge. Chad explained that it would be connected to the lower bridge.

- Brendan asked if the project at St. J Paper would be connected to this project. Chad said he suspected it would not be covered but it is something that can be looked into.
- Brendan asked if the pipe was being replaced at the current size or a bigger pipe. Chad said the inground size currently is correct.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the bond article as presented. All in favor.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to sign the declaration on intent. All in favor.
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Municipal Ethics Liaison Appointment:

- Chad explained that due to Act 171 municipalities are required to appoint an Ethics Liaison. He explained that the position needed to be filled within 30 days of January 1st, 2025. He suggested that the Select Board appoint him as the Municipal Ethics Liaison and he will delegate to Rachel if needed.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to appoint Chad Whitehead, Town Manager as the Municipal Ethics Liaison for the Town of St. Johnsbury. All in favor.
- Jim Brown asked if there would be any stipulations for committee members to attend trainings due to this act. Stacy mentioned that once the State creates the trainings elected officials will be required to attend.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following report.
- The Town Manager's Office has been working on the 2026 Budget and Bay Street projects.
- DPW is prepared for Winter.
- Working on the application for the bond bank for the fire trucks.
- Continue working on the FEMA buyouts. Plan is to develop a process for the potential buyouts in February. Have spoke with Barre City regarding their process.

Other Business:

- None

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank that there was a need for an executive session to discuss a contractual matter where
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to enter executive session and invite the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager. All in favor.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to exit executive session. All in favor.
- The chair had nothing to report.

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

January 23th Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/4pNA7sx6_F337NjjGTif4q9CoemONYdwXg-Mkt56aNyytyP7-4PWbtOl2rvLUr17.9meNheVaxmbSh0Q

Passcode: f0KTK9J!

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