



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 February 10th, 2025 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

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

Public: Richard Boisseau, Jim Brown, KATV, Dana Gray, Gillian Sewake, Ben Deede, Erin McMullen, Francine Morgan, Chris Louras (via zoom), Megan Novak (via zoom)

Agenda Amendments:

- Steve Isham mentioned the need to add the Downtown Reinvestment Statics following the Bylaw Modernization Presentation.

Public Comment:

- Richard Boisseau spoke about Route 5 between the daycare and Roberts Brook and how narrow it was. He asked if it was possible for the State to wing back the snow banks. He also expressed concerns regarding the Cheap Tote and Post Office and how it is impossible to pull over there. He asked if it was possible to have some snow removed to make it safer. Chad mentioned that he would relay the message along to DPW who works closely with the State and will let them know.
- Erin McMullen inquired about the Boyton Ave. sidewalk. She stated that it needs to be replaced as it is currently a fall risk for those walking on it. Dennis mentioned that there have been conversations with Steve about it and it is on the scheduled to be repaired. He explained that unfortunately DPW could not get to it last year due to the flooding but it is on the list for this spring.
- Erin asked if Dennis knew which portion was on the list. Dennis mentioned that he was not entirely sure but knew that the top portion needed to be replaced. Chad mentioned that he would get an update from DPW and get back to her.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to approve the Select Board minutes from the Select Board meeting on January 27th, 2025 with the noted corrections. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Warrants:

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

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:

- Steve Isham presented the following Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:
 - Center Tower LLC.- tobacco license
 - Center Tower LLC.- second class
 - Center Tower LLC.- tobacco substitute
 - Global Montello Group- second class
 - Global Montello Group- tobacco license
 - Global Montello Group- tobacco substitute
 - American Dream Restaurants LLC- first class
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the liquor and tobacco licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Public Safety Enhancement Taskforce:

- Steve Isham introduced the Public Safety Enhancement Team, led by Chris Louras and Megan Novak.
- Chris Louras introduced the PSET program, how it came to be and who the team has worked with. Chris explained that the Public Safety Enhancement Team was formed in response to Governor Phil Scott's 10-point public safety and violence reduction plan announced in August 2022. The team, including Chris, Megan, and Gwen Zakoff, and works collaboratively with local communities to provide resources and improve public safety. They have been working with St. Johnsbury and have been in contact with the Town's Public Safety Task Force. Chris also shared his past experience, including his role as the mayor of Rutland and his involvement in Project Vision.
- Chris and Megan from the Public Safety Enhancement team discussed their ongoing collaboration with the St. Johnsbury community to address public safety issues. They highlighted the importance of community involvement and the need for a sustainable plan to tackle these issues. The team, which includes representatives from various agencies and organizations, has already made significant progress in this area. A public forum is scheduled for February 20th at the St. Johnsbury School, where the community will have the opportunity to provide input and discuss the data collected by the Crime Research Group. Chris went on to say that St. Johnsbury was chosen not just based on the data but because the Town is in a better position to start to effect change. The leadership here wants to see change.
- Chad provided an overview of those on the Town's Public Safety Committee including Chief Reed, Chief Pierce, Code Compliance Officer, Northeast Kingdom Human Services, NEKA, Umbrella, Dept. of Corrections, Dispatch Director, DCF, and States Attorney to just name a few. He explained that good things are coming out of this.
- Steve Isham highlighted that Megan has helped to develop the survey that is out and will be analyzing the data.
- Frank asked what time the meeting on Feb. 20th was at. Steve said 6 pm.
- Richard Boisseau expressed that it seemed like the Task Force is more focused within the downtown but mentioned that the committee also includes townwide agencies. Chad explained that the Task Force is specific to St. Johnsbury but does bleed out beyond the downtown area.

Bylaw Modernization Presentation:

- Jim Brown mentioned that on January 21st the Planning Commission held a Public Hearing for the bylaws. Following that the Planning Commission voted to approve the bylaws as presented a motion was made to move the bylaws to the Select Board. He explained that this was the second time he was at the Select Board meeting to discuss the bylaw modernization.
- Tracy inquired if the Planning Commission was going to do a presentation or walk through of the changes or just provide the board with the summary document.
- Jim Brown discussed the modernization of the Town's bylaws, which were not compliant with State Acts. He explained that the changes were driven by a grant from NVDA and a comprehensive analysis of the existing bylaws was completed. The changes included a shift from "family units to "dwelling units" and the reorganization of zones based on a study of the Town's layout.
- Dennis asked if the changes proposed were entirely State mandated. Matt Walsh, Zoning Administrator explained that the changes were largely state-mandated, with only a small portion being the result of the Town's interpretation. He noted that the majority of changes were related to housing and updating dwelling units per acre in different districts.
- Steve Isham asked if the new zone boundaries were set by choice or by the State. Matt explained that the Town had some input on the boundaries but ultimately had to adhere to the state-defined criteria. Ben Deede, Planning Commission member mentioned that current parcels were taken into consideration when determining boundaries in St. Johnsbury. He explained that in the past some parcels had multiple zones which caused confusion. Matt concluded by explaining that a density study had been done to see what zones would fit the Town best.
- Dennis inquired about the changes to off lot sewer and water. He asked if the changes were more restrictive or more allowing. Matt Walsh explained that
- Steve Isham inquired about agriculture being allowed in all zones. He asked what the definition covered/permitted. Matt Walsh explained agriculture is permitted in all zones except conservation. He mentioned that the state statute is very broad and there isn't much that Towns can do. He explained that the Town cannot technically regulate agriculture but can regulate the impact of it.
- Steve Isham asked about overnight and transitional shelters. Matt explained that S100 allows shelters in any district.
- Steve Isham inquired about the changes and possibility of having more than four B&Bs in a rural area. Matt explained that more than 4 would be considered a major change and would need to go through the DRB process. The DRB would have the ability to still regulate them. Jim Brown mentioned that minor changes would be able to be go through the Zoning Administrator while major changes would still be required to go through the DRB.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Dennis to move the Bylaw Modernization to a Public Hearing to be held on March 10th. All in favor.
- Steve Isham thanked the Planning Commission for all of their hard work and effort on the bylaw modernization.

Downtown Reinvestment Statistics:

- Gillian Sewake, Discover St. Johnsbury Director presented the Select Board with the Downtown Reinvestment Statistics that included 2024, highlighting the significant investments in properties and businesses within the designated downtown area. She provided a 2024 recap including that investment in downtown continues along with big ticket projects such as Fairbanks Museum, the Armory and Rural Edge. She explained that year over year the downtown has seen net positives with regards to new businesses and full time jobs. Since 2020 128 new people have been employed.

- Steve Isham inquired about the large decline in housing units and asked if she worked with Joe on the housing piece. Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager mentioned that he reviewed the information in detail and that there has been a fair amount coming off the housing units list for various reasons including database clean0up and catching up on grand list changes.
- Gillian highlighted that the next big Discover St. Johnsbury event is the Kingdom Maple Festival scheduled for April 19th. Lots of great programs are coming this spring and summer.

Vermont Brownfield Revitalization Grant Resolution- Armory Remediation:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager provided a recap on the VT Brownfield Revitalization Grant that was awarded to the Town of St. Johnsbury back in 2022 in the amount of \$1,200,000. He explained that while he was collecting invoices it came to his attention that the resolution was never formally accepted by the Select Board. He asked the board to consider accepting the State of Vermont Grant Agreement number 07120-BRF-SP-19 for the Brownfield Revitalization Grant in the amount of \$1,200,000, and designate Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager and authorize Chad Whitehead, Town Manager to execute the grant on behalf of the Town.
- On a motion by Tracy an second by Frank to accept the Brownfield Revitalization Grant in the amount of \$1,200,000 with the noted correction and designate Joe Kasprzak and authorize Chad Whitehead to execute the grant on behalf of the Town. All in favor.

January Financials:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager, presented the January Financial Memo highlighting the following.
- At the end of January, the General Fund had a deficit of \$323,591. The deficit is due to a revitalization expense of \$183,000, an annual payment for the pension, and a storm damage expense of \$48,000.
- The Town still has a \$1 million advance out on the line of credit which was taken out to help with cash flow until reimbursement from the summer flooding events is received.
- Delinquent property tax balance is \$90,000 and cash balance is \$1.5 million including the advance at month end.
- At the end of January, the Special Services Fund has a surplus of \$39,778. Regular and overtime wages at 54% of the budget which has positively impacted the bottom line in this fund.
- The Highway Fund had a temporary deficit of \$3,004,198. The deficit is due to the \$2,812,359 in expense associated with July flooding events. Three loan payments have been made as well.
- At the end of January the Water Fund had a temporary deficit of \$318,245. This is due to billing in arrears, property tax expense for the new water filter plant and annual debt payments.
- The Sewer Fund at the end of January had a temporary deficit of \$503,935 due to billing in arrears and annual debt payments. Solid handlings are at 76% of the budgeted line item.
- The Parking Meter Fund at the end of January had a surplus of \$32,285.
- Dennis inquired about the line of credit. Chad explained that Lesley, Stacy and himself are watching cash flow closely and expects if more is needed Lesley and Stacy will make a recommendation.
- Dennis asked if the majority of bills for the July flooding have been processed. Chad explained that most have been and that the first round of storm response has been sent to FEMA.
- Tracy asked about the impacts to FEMA and the potential reimbursement to the Town. Chad explained that FEMA remains positive with the reimbursements where he sees concern is with stuff that is not yet in construction.

VT Bond Bank-Fire Apparatus Loan Documents:

- Chad mentioned that the loan for the fire apparatus was approved in the amount of \$1,640,000 on a 25 year term. The closing date was estimated for March 6th. He asked the board to consider authorizing him to execute the commitment memo.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to authorize Chad Whitehead, Town Manager to execute the loan documents for the fire apparatus. All in favor.
- Steve Isham asked if there were any delivery dates yet. Chief Reed explained that the delivery dates keep getting pushed back and now they are expected to both arrive in August of 2025.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following report.
- New Police Recruit started the full time Police Academy last Monday. Expect him to return in early June but will then need to complete 400 hours of training.
- Officer Wilson's last day with the department was last Monday Feb. 3rd.
- Recruitment in the Police Department continues with a few potential candidates in the pipe line.
- FF Martin is leaving his employment with the Town in March. Recruitment was conducted, interviews were held and Shane Thresher has accepted the position and will be starting in March.
- DPW has been working to on removing snow in the downtown area.
- Continue to work on FEMA buyout program.
- Richard Boisseau offered his assistance with meetings regarding the buyout program. Chad explained that he has obtained a list of steps from another Town to start the process.

Other Business:

- Jim Brown discussed the Planning Commissions progress with regards to the Town Plan and the fast approaching time line.

Executive Session:

- None

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

February 10th Select Board Meeting Video:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/287kgt2Gn5N5ASUj9U5ovloWyCsGOYUxmj87rFFCZHgtNBtbed2ThprSM4KQOStq.JLZfHs6lcXR00R-4>

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