



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board February 24th, 2025 @ 5:30 pm

Present-

Select Board: Steve Isham, Frank Empsall, Tracy Zschau, Dennis Smith, Brendan Hughes (via zoom)

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

Public: Richard Boisseau, Jim Brown (via zoom), KATV, Dana Gray, Kasey Guill, Bob Joly, Adam Kane, David Hare, Rick Desrochers, Kimberly White, Peter Schwergert, Jim Impey, Gavin Fisher, Maggie Gray, Scott Campbell, Scott Beck, Diane (via zoom), Ashley VZ (via zoom), Kelsey S. (via zoom), Don Smith (via zoom),

Agenda Amendments:

- Chad asked to add Fire Apparatus Bond before the Town Manager's Report.

Public Comment:

- None

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the Select Board minutes from the Select Board meeting on February 10th, 2025 with the noted corrections. All in favor.

Warrants:

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

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:

- Steve Isham presented the following Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:
 - R. L. Vallee, Inc. - tobacco
 - R. L. Vallee, Inc. - tobacco substitute
 - R. L. Vallee, Inc – second class
 - HH Haven Company- first class
 - HH Haven Company- second class
 - The Dispencery, LLC.- first class
 - The Dispencery, LLC. – outside consumption

- The Dispencery, LLC. – third class
- Catamount Film & Arts Company – first class
- Price Chopper operating Co. of Vermont, Inc.- second class
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the liquor and tobacco licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Special Appropriations Presentations:

- Good Living Senior Center in the amount of \$20,000. Bob Theriault explained that the \$20,000 allows for the Senior Center to provide programs and support to seniors within St. Johnsbury. He thanked the voters for their continued support.
- Fairbanks Museum and Planetarium in the amount of \$63,000. Adam Kane spoke on behalf of this special appropriations request. He explained that the requested amount is only 3.5% of the operating budget of 1.8 million. He mentioned that St. Johnsbury residents get free admission to the museum and highlighted some current and upcoming events and exhibits.
- NEK Learning Services in the amount of \$2,500. Rick and Michelle spoke on behalf of NEK Learning Services, highlighting that NEK Learning provides services to 48 towns. In 2024 they provided over 9100 instructional hours for 194 students. They highlighted an up and coming project called the Step up Program.
- St. Johnsbury Athenaeum in the amount of \$115,000. Kacey Guill mentioned that the Athenaeum is asking for the same amount as they have for in the past. She mentioned that last year the special appropriation made up 19% of the Athenaeum budget. These funds are used for community needs, including employment, technology and services. She explained how important these services are to the community. Kasey was welcomed to the community by Tracy.
- Rural Edge SASH Program in the amount of \$2,000. Gary Chester explained that in 2024 the SASH program had 525 full-time participants, serving 90 people in St. Johnsbury with supporting maintaining housing, medical needs, mental health and wellness.
- Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging in the amount of \$9,000. Megan provided an overview of the programs offered by the Council on Aging. She highlighted that in 2024 the program provided services to over 653 St. Johnsbury residents, through numerous programs.
- NEKCA in the amount of \$12,000. An overview was provided regarding the services NEKCA offers including community based activities and supports. She highlighted NEKCA locations including the shelter on Moose River Drive, HeadStart, the food shelf. In 2024 NEKCA served 3400 people through 60 programs.
- St. Johnsbury Town Band in the amount of \$7,500. David Hare explained that the Town Band was founded in 1898 and is an embodiment of the Town. The band is open to anyone who plays an instrument. The band holds 10 concerts in the summer concert series and presence at the Memorial Day parade.
- Umbrella in the amount of \$9,500. Jordan explained that the \$9,500 helps sustain programs including advocacy, social change and family based services. She highlighted that last year 312 households had services.
- Caledonia Home Health Care and Hospice in the amount of \$18,382. Rev. Ann Hockridge explained that the program was founded in 1968 and provides programs and services to the community from birth through death. She mentioned that 100% of the special appropriations goes to direct patient care. In 2024 home health care and hospice provided 11,765 visits and served 328 St. Johnsbury residents.
- St. Johnsbury Meals on Wheels in the amount of \$10,000. Diane spoke on behalf of this special appropriations request. She explained that Meals on Wheels serves the great St. Johnsbury Monday

thru Friday providing hot meals and wellness checks. She mentioned that in 2024 27,725 meals were provided to the community.

- Northeast Kingdom Youth Services in the amount of \$5,500. Constance explained that NEK Youth Services has been around since 1975. In 2024 services were provided to 181 youths from age 12-24. Numerous programs are available through this program.
- Catamount Arts in the amount of \$5,000 and First Night North in the amount of \$3,000. Ashley Van Zandt explained that in May Catamount Arts will have been around for 50 years. She explained that home base is in St. Johnsbury where many programs are provided including screen films weekly, opera, and gallery space. She highlighted the downtown concerts and the St. Johnsbury Levitt Amp Concert Series. She moved on to discuss First Night North which in 2024 included over 70 performances from 4 pm until midnight utilizing 12 facilities. The night concluded with a dance party on Main Street that was attended by around 400 people. In the coming year Catamount is expected to expand their creative campus area.
- Northeast Kingdom Human Services in the amount of \$7,983. Kasey Stavseth provided an overview of the services that NEK Human Services offers and highlighted that the funds from this appropriation help offset the cost for the St. Johnsbury community. He explained that in 2024 NEKHS employed 530 employees and served 3,000 individuals.
- Steve Isham mentioned that Town Meeting is scheduled for next Tuesday March 4th from 8 am until 7 pm. The informational meeting will take place Monday March 3rd at 7 pm.

502 Railroad Street Tax Stabilization:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager discussed the Town's tax stabilization program, which aims to provide predictability for new businesses by stabilizing property values. He presented a proposal for tax stabilization for the Caledonia Food Co-op Inc., which has been a priority project for the Town and is expected to be an economic flywheel.
- The proposal included a 10-year tax stabilization program, with the property value stabilized at \$676,200 for five years, and a gradual increase in property tax on the incremental value added to the property. The committee recommended that the store should be open by April 2028 and 50% of the projected FTEs be hired.
- Peter Schweiger, the president of the Co-op, explained the projects timeline and financial projections, including a targeted opening date of late spring/early summer of 2026. He mentioned that the co-op structure includes profits going back to members. First year projections for the Co-op is around 8 million in sales. He explained that the tax stabilization would provide security as they build their financial projections over the 10 year time frame.
- Discussed a community project involving the acquisition of a building from Walgreens for a retail space, with a focus on sustainability and minimal cost. The project, which includes a community room and plans to utilize the St. Johnsbury Academy CTE program, it is expected to have significant economic impact for downtown St. Johnsbury.
- Jim Impey, from the Tax Stabilization Committee highlighted that it was an unanimous decision to recommend the project to the Select board. He highlighted the specific criteria for maintaining the tax stabilization, outlining a three-phase plan with specific tax rates for different periods.
- Dana Gray asked about the scope of the renovations. Peter explained that the renovations are primarily interior including electrical and plumbing updates.
- Steve Isham asked about the planned capacity for the community room. Peter explained that the capacity would be around 10-12 people.
- Tracy asked if 8-10 years was the standard precedent for tax stabilization agreements. Joe explained that a 10 year stabilization has been done before but the standard is 7 years. He

mentioned that the Co-op would only be the second 10 year stabilization, highlighting that the other 10 year stabilization was the Singer Building on Concord Ave.

- Steve Isham asked about the specific criteria for the Tax Stabilization Agreement. Joe suggested the following criteria.
 - From April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2030 property value shall remain the same at \$676,200.
 - From April 1, 2030 to March 31, 2032 the valuation shall increase 25%.
 - From April 1, 2032 to March 31, 2034 the valuation shall increase 50%.
 - From April 1, 2034 to March 31, 2035 the valuation shall increase 75%.
 - For the period commencing April 1st, 2035 and thereafter, the valuation of the property shall be taxed at the full 100% fair market value.
- Steve Isham asked if the agreement contained anything regarding creation of jobs. Joe explained that the Co-op will need to create and maintain 50% of the minimum number of jobs projected by April 30, 2028. He explained that the Co-op projects to employ 30-40 FTEs. He also explained that in article 5 of the agreement the Co-op must open by April 30, 2028.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Tracy to approve the Tax Stabilization Agreement with 502 Railroad Street as presented. All in favor.

Bay Street Water Project Update:

- Chad presented a \$2,765,000 bond proposal for the Bay Street Water Project, which includes new water main infrastructure and redundancy for fire protection. The project cost includes replacement of 3,000 feet of existing water main, 400 feet of new water main, and four new hydrants. He shared a map of the proposed water path and the connections. The proposal also outlined additional Bay Street improvements, including 2,800 feet of new separate sewer and stormwater and 2,200 feet of a new multipurpose path along Bay Street. He discussed the funding of the water project, highlighting that funding will likely come from the Vermont Drinking Water Revolving Loan Fund or USDA Rural Development. He included that it was secure for now but could be cut if there was a funding breakdown. He mentioned that the water portion of the project would be paid for by the water users. This bond article will be included on the ballot for Town Meeting and voting will take place on Tuesday, March 4th from 8 am until 7 pm.
- Steve Isham asked if funding that has been secured has been cut off. Chad said not to date. Chad explained that should the voters approve this bond the Town would move forward with determining the best funding break down.
- Frank asked what the worst case scenario would be. Chad explained that the worst case scenario would be no loan forgiveness. However once funding is determined it will ultimately be up to the Select Board if the project moves forward.

DWSRF Authorized Representative:

- Chad sought authorization for Stacy Jewll to be added as a representative for the reimbursements of the DWSRF loans. He explained that this would allow Stacy to be able to put in the reimbursement requests.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Frank to add Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk/Treasurer as an authorized representative for the DWSRF loans. All in favor.

Fire Apparatus Bond:

- Chad mentioned that the loan for the fire apparatus was approved by the voters in Nov. 2024 in the amount of \$1,640,000. The first installment on the 25 year term would be Nov. 1st. He asked the board to consider authorizing him to execute the bond documents.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to authorize the Town Manager to execute the bond documents. All in favor.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following report.
- Town Meeting is Tuesday March 4th from 8 am until 7 pm
- Informational Meeting is Monday March 3rd at 7 pm
- Sullivan Powers will present an audit presentation on Monday March 24th at 5:30 pm
- Final permit has been received for the water treatment facility and contractors will be starting soon.

Other Business:

- Scott Beck provided information regarding Kiwanis and their request for \$29,000. These funds allow Kiwanis to provide free RED CROSS swimming lessons to 600 or more area children each summer. Along with coordinate the operations, maintenance, fundraising and staffing of the pool. He mentioned that this year to the pool will be under going the biggest renovation yet and is estimated to cost between \$300,000 and \$400,000.
- Gavin and Maggie, co-owners of the Buttery in downtown St. Johnsbury, presented a proposal for roadside dining outside their business. They discussed the benefits, including increased patron visibility, safety, foot traffic, and business prosperity. They addressed potential concerns such as parking, noise, and visibility for drivers. The proposal suggests using one parking space to create seating for 6 to 14 people from April through October.
- Steve Isham asked if something along these lines had been done at Central Café. Chad explained that yes Central Café had outdoor dining. Joe mentioned that parklets are not new to St. Johnsbury.
- Tracy confirmed that they were only looking for one parking spot. Maggie said yes.
- Steve Isham asked if increasing the seating would entail hiring more people. Maggie said not exactly.
- Dennis asked how many other business would likely be interested. He inquired about when deliveries were made on Railroad Street. Gavin explained that the Buttery receives around 3-4 deliveries a week and most are before 8 am.
- Dennis expressed his concern with maintaining traffic flow.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager mentioned that he loved the idea but mentioned the need for the Town to look at this as a global prospective.
- Tracy mentioned that she also loved the idea but wanted to make sure all things were looked at.
- Joe proposed that the Buttery be a pilot for this type of arrangement.
- Tracy asked if the barriers would be portable. Maggie said yes and they would only be out from April to October.
- Steve Isham asked for clarification on the permissions needed. Chad mentioned that he was interest in the idea but want to consider its impact on the entire street and other businesses before making a decision. He explained that research into how other cities have implemented similar protocols would need to be conducted.

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank that there was a need for executive session to discuss a personnel matter. All in favor.
- 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 Frank and second by Dennis the board adjourned by unanimous decision.

February 24th Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/3AFnzhNUQG_mE7OiuAfVwPip2qVYCYvSNFUfd133CDOQOIv8_MDtoMI3czbSlA.c85hz55GXHGn6RFG

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