



# TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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## Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak, Stacy Jewell (via zoom), Chief Bradley Reed

Public: KATV, Richard Boisseau, Diane Boisseau, Issiah, J. McGregor, Jack Grant, Dana Gray, Evan Oleson, Gillian Sewake, Don Smith, Paul Luciano (via zoom)

### Agenda Amendments:

- None

### Public Comment:

- A resident approached the board regarding a petition signed by those that live on Farmer Drive to get the guardrails replaced. She explained that the guardrails washed out back in the July flooding leaving 20-30 feet drop offs.
- Frank explained that DPW is still catching up on flood damage.
- Steve Isham mentioned that the information would be relayed to DPW.

### Minutes:

- On a motion by Frank and second by Brendan to approve the Select Board minutes from March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025 as presented. All in favor.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to approve the Special Select Board minutes from March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 as presented. All in favor.

### Warrants:

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

### Liquor Licenses/ Tobacco Licenses:

- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to approve the liquor licenses and tobacco licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

### March Financials:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager, presented the March Financial Memo highlighting the following.
- At the end of March, the General Fund had a deficit of \$596,082. The deficit is due to a revitalization expense of \$215,000, storm damage expense of \$48,000, fire truck repairs, computer expenses and contracted services, legal services and employee turnover. Additionally, the general fund was budgeted with a deficit of \$200,000.
- The delinquent tax balance was \$639,000 at month end. The Town did pay off the \$1 million advance in March.
- At the end of March, the Special Services Fund has a surplus of \$72,696. Regular and overtime wages at 67% of the budget which has positively impacted the bottom line in this fund.
- The Highway Fund had a temporary deficit of \$3,169,742 at the end of March. The deficit is due to the \$2,885,372 in expense associated with July flooding events. Three annual loan payments have been made as well.
- Winter maintenance has exceeded the overtime budget by \$134,000 due to both regular and overtime wages.
- At the end of March the Water Fund had a temporary deficit of \$325,867. 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 March had a temporary deficit of \$502,176 due to billing in arrears and annual debt payments.
- The Parking Meter Fund at the end of March had a surplus of \$29,537.

#### 560 Railroad Street Update:

- Evan Olsen from Northern Forest Center gave an update on the 560 Railroad Street project. He highlighted that the project is substantially completed and people are starting to move in. He thanked the Town and Select Board for all their help through the process. He mentioned that the Town provided help with the funding of the project through the Revitalization Grant, Rental Housing Improvement Grant Program and Tax Stabilization. He highlighted that when he came to the Select Board back in May of 2023 the goals of the project was to provide quality middle income rate housing, contribute to downtown revitalization, enhance the arts and demonstrate the ability for middle income housing. He explained that those goals have been met. 7 of the 9 apartments have been rented with tenants ranging from municipal employee to a nurse to an engineer. He invited the board to come for a tour of the facility.
- Steve Isham asked if the building will have a name. Evan said 560 Railroad.
- Frank commented that the project was a home run and thanked Evan and Northern Forest Center.
- Steve Isham asked what Northern Forest Center's next project might be. Evan said they are looking at potentially a parcel of NVRH property.
- Dana Gray asked if the commercial space has been spoken for. Evan said yes.

#### 2025 Local Emergency Management Plan:

- Chad Whithead, Town Manager explained that annually the Town comes to the Select Board with the updated Local Emergency Management Plan for approval.
- Chief Bradley Reed mentioned that the requested corrections from the March 24<sup>th</sup> meeting have been made to the plan.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to approve the 2025 Local Emergency Management Plan as presented. All in favor.

### FEMA Buyouts:

- Chad Whitehead, recapped that several properties in St. Johnsbury completed FEMA pre-buyout applications. He explained that if properties are approved for the buyout by the Town a deed restriction is placed on the property and it has to be kept as a natural space. Chad introduced Paul Luciano stating that he was hired as a consultant to assist with determining the process and procedure for the FEMA buyouts.
- Paul Luciano explained that a set of metrics was created to assess the applications including if the property was eligible, if it has a history of flooding, if construction can make the property flood proof and what the tax loss would be. He explained that out of all the properties that completed pre-applications only the Gilman property currently has people residing there. He mentioned that because all of those properties are eligible he recommended moving forward.
- Steve Isham asked if the buyouts were approved previously. Chad explained that the Select Board had approve the pre-applications that have now been evaluated more.
- Steve Isham asked how many properties were being considered for the buyout. Chad said 5 and gave a run down of the properties.
- Brendan asked what the process for removal of the structures was. Chad explained that the property would be bought at the pre-damaged assess value and then the Town would pay for the demolish but the cost of purchase and demolition would be reimbursed back to the Town. Paul Luciano explained that the State of Vermont would be the sub-guarantee and would take over the management.
- Brendan asked if the project manage would look at the landscape to help prevent future damage to the surrounding area. Paul said yes as a general rule they would.
- Steve Isham asked if the Town was to move forward with a pocket park would it be at the Town's expense. Chad said that was a safe assumption.
- Tracy asked what the next steps were. Chad explained that Paul will work with applicants to complete the applications.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Brendan for the Town to move forward with the 5 FEMA buyouts as presented. All in favor.
- Richard Boisseau asked for a ballpark time frame. Paul explained that all applications are due at the end of the month. However turnaround time for FEMA can be up to a year once it is in their hands.

### Sarah Gagne- DAC Appointment:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that the Design Advisory Committee had reached out to inquire about the Select Board appointing Sarah Gagne as a member. Sarah has attended some meetings and is looking forward to being on the committee.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Frank to appoint Sarah Gagne to a one year term on the Design Advisory Committee. All in favor.

### RF1-215-3.2 Loan Amendment:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained the RF1-215-3.2 Loan Amendment for the Gilman and Pleasant Street Project. He explained that the loan has already been approved by the Bond Bank and the work has already been completed. This just needs to be done so the Town can be reimbursed for the funds.

- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to approve loan amendment RF1-215-3.2 as presented. All in favor.

#### St. Johnsbury Gateway Signs:

- Gillian Sewake, Director of Discover St. Johnsbury presented the Select Board with the two designs for the St. Johnsbury Gateway Signs. She explained that the committee which consisted of members from the community, the select board, design advisory committee and chamber worked together with ChamberlinChamberlin to narrow it down to two options. She explained that voting is open to the community and will close at 3 pm on Saturday during the Maple Fest. So far over 870 people have voted which shows a great representation from the community.
- Steve Isham asked how the votes were coming in. Gillian said one design has consistently been ahead of the other but there is still time.
- Steve Isham thanked Dana for the article on the signs and helping get the information out to the community.

#### Municipal Highway Grant Application:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager that the Town is interested in applying for the FY 2025 Municipal Highway Grant through the Vermont Agency of Transportation. He explained that if the Town is awarded the grant the funds would be used to complete work on Breezy Hill and Severance Hill Road. The estimated project costs are around \$240,000 and would include shim coat and paving as much as possible with the grant funds.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to approve the Municipal Highway Grant Application as presented. All in favor.

#### Certificate of Compliance for Town Road Bridge Standards Network Inventory:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained this is something that the Town readopts annually. He explained that the certification of compliance for Town road and bridge standards and network inventory hasn't had any changes in a number of years.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to readopt the certificate of compliance for Town Road and Bridge Standards Network Inventory as presented. All in favor.

#### Annual Financial Plan- Town Highways

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that each year the Select Board needs to certify that the funds raised by municipal taxes is equivalent to or greater than the sum of \$300 per mile of class 1, 2 and 3 Town highway in the municipality. He confirmed that this is the case and asked the Select Board to consider certifying it.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to certify that the municipal taxes are equivalent to or greater than the sum of \$300 per mile of class 1,2, and 3 roads. All in favor.

#### Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.

- Two new certified level III officers have joined the Police Department. Officer Kevin Wilson comes to St. Johnsbury with over 17 years of policing experience and Officer James McGowan comes to St. Johnsbury with over 15 years of policing experience. Stephanie Anderson was hired as a part time office and comes to St. Johnsbury from the Caledonian Sheriffs. The Town is excited to have them here in St. Johnsbury. Joel commented on the nice recruitment efforts of Chief Joel Pierce.

#### Other Business:

- Richard Boisseau recognized Chad Whitehead and Paul Luciano for pulling the FEMA buyout together. He thanked the Select Board for their support through the long haul.
- Chad Whitehead mentioned that the Goss Hollow Bridge is currently closed. A structural engineer has been onsite to inspect the bridge and there is a list of repairs that need to be complete before the bridge can be reopened.

#### Executive Session:

- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank that there is a need for an executive session to discuss a contractual matter where pre-disclosure could place the Town at substantial risk. All in favor.
- On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to enter executive session and invite the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager. All in favor.
- On a motion by Brendan 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 Brendan the board adjourned by unanimous decision.

April 14<sup>th</sup> Select Board Meeting Video:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/0m9wjklTIWXwxmxQyyD5AU2lOSjqRcRiOVesrz2x0uNKEY47jYuLuR-vsjb2dPN.sS0jLWT-IAk\\_qlVk](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/0m9wjklTIWXwxmxQyyD5AU2lOSjqRcRiOVesrz2x0uNKEY47jYuLuR-vsjb2dPN.sS0jLWT-IAk_qlVk)

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