



# TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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## Special Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 5:30 pm

Present-

Select Board: Frank Emsall, Dennis Smith, Brendan Hughes, Tracy Zschau

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak, Stacy Jewell, Chief Bradley Reed, Chief Joel Pierce, Collin Gillespie, Kresten Sterling, Cpl. Steven Hartwell, Sgt. Lester Cleary, Officer Kevin Wilson

Public: KATV, Dana Gray, Anthony Miller, Gary Roberts, David Brown, Gillian Sewake, Don Smith, Issaih, Kevin Ignaszak (zoom), N. Albright (zoom), Chris Mercon (zoom), Peter Van Straten, Chris Beling (zoom), Joe Weith (zoom), Deb Dolgin, Mike Sullivan, Laurie Robinson

### Armory Project Bond Vote Public Informational Meeting:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager began by explaining that the Public Information Meeting was the first of two public hearings for the Armory bond vote. He emphasized the importance of the project and introduced the project team meetings, including David Roy from Lehman and Fair Architects, Christiano from Engle Birth Construction, Kevin Ignazak from Montrose Environmental, and Joe Weiss from Weidenberg Real Estate Advisors. They also mentioned that the meeting is being live-streamed through Kingdom Access Television and that we are monitoring the virtual feed for questions. He discussed the history of the Armory, proposed design, and funding challenges, as well as the need for a new police facility in St. Johnsbury. He highlighted that the redevelopment of the Armory has been in the works for about the last 10 years. The building was initially shuttered in 2009 due to high maintenance costs, extensive damage occurred over the next decade. Despite efforts to attract developers and repurpose the building, no takers were found. The town then decided to redevelop the building into a police and dispatch center. The project's initial cost estimate was \$5.8 million, but due to supply chain issues and construction industry challenges, the cost escalated to \$14 million. The town has since worked to value engineer the project and procure funding, including a \$585,000 grant from Senator Sanders' office. However, a recent \$2 million funding request was not approved. The timeline for the bond vote, which includes a short window for keeping bids active and accurate was discussed. He also mentioned the legal requirements for the vote, including the posting of documents in the Caledonian Record after reading the bond vote warning.
- Kevin from Montrose shared information about the remediation effort, including the removal of asbestos, lead-based paint, and PCBs. He mentioned the high levels of concentration of PCBs found in the building. He commended the Town for taking on the remediation of the Armory, highlighting that once the remediation is complete the Armory will be ready for development.
- Joe discussed the funding sources for the remediation, which included both federal and state funds.
- David Roy presented the design and layout of the building, highlighting the secure parking area, access points, and various rooms for the police department.

- Joe discussed the total cost of the project, which includes construction, services, permits, hazardous remediation, legal fees, and contingencies.
- Chris Beling explained the role of construction management, emphasizing their extensive involvement in the project from the design phase to the construction process. He also discussed the competitive bid process for subcontractors and the guaranteed maximum price for the project.
- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager and Chief Joel Pierce discussed the importance of the police station remaining on Main Street, highlighting its strategic location and the need for a new facility to accommodate the department's needs. They also mentioned the current challenges with the existing facility, including inadequate processing rooms and cells. They added that the current facility also serves as the town's emergency operations center, which needs to be improved to better respond to increasing storm intensity and frequency.
- The construction timeline for the project was discussed, including that construction expected to take place from July 2025 to November 2026.
- Joe presented a comprehensive analysis of the cost of constructing a new public safety facility in St. Johnsbury. He highlighted that the average cost per square foot for construction is \$710, which translates to a total cost of \$10.8 million for a new facility. He also compared the cost of building a new facility in St. Johnsbury to building one in other communities, finding that it would cost \$79 per \$100,000 in value in other communities, compared to \$100 in St. Johnsbury. He suggested that building at the armory would be more cost-effective and faster, while also addressing the liability on Main Street..
- Gary Roberts raised concerns about the high cost and the need for a larger police station, suggesting that a 3rd floor might not be necessary. He voiced that he feels there are bigger needs in the Town such as a Fire Station, highlighting that the current fire department is not adequate. He also expressed concerns about the town's focus on using the armory for a police station, suggesting a more comprehensive solution involving a combined police and fire station. He also questioned the fairness of the special services district's tax increase, as he doesn't live within the district but is still asked to pay for the police station. Frank explained that eventually the Fire Department situation would be addressed but the Town needed to work through one at a time.
- Laurie Robinson asked about the inclusion of the previously voted \$5.4 million in the tax increase and the contingency plan for potential disruptions in supply chains. Joe clarified that the tax increase is based on the total project cost of \$9.1 million and that the team has built in a million dollars for escalation and contingency. Frank confirmed that if the project comes in under budget that the funds come back to the Town.
- Peter Van Stratten inquired about the current status of the building and continued deterioration should the project be shuttered. Joe explained that the building is in better shape now but is lacking a west wall and the roof is failing. He explained that the building would be considered remediated successfully soon.
- Joe and Chris Mercon discussed the cost of materials and the stabilization of prices over the last four years. Joe clarified that the current cost data presented in their draft guaranteed maximum price is from subcontractor bids, not estimates. Chris questioned the accuracy of the bids, suggesting they might be inflated.
- David Brown commented about the “white elephant” on Main Street and the issues with the Fire Department. He expressed that the Fire Station and Police Station could be solved together and that the Fire Station is in worse shape than the Police Station. Joe acknowledged the importance of the fire department's needs and suggested that they may have been prioritized if they could fit the Armory's footprint
- Mike Sullivan expressed concerns about the cost and the decision to fund it from the general fund, rather than the Special Service District. He highlighted some issues he had with the Police

and Dispatch in the past. He encouraged the Town to look at how many officers the Town has and How many arrests are done each year.

- Joe clarified that the historic building could not be demolished due to its significance and location. He emphasized the need for a new facility, especially for the police department, which currently lacks necessary resources. He highlighted that the bond vote is scheduled for June 3<sup>rd</sup> from 8 am until 7 pm at the Town Office.

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

May 12<sup>th</sup> Special Select Board Meeting Video:

<https://www.katv.org/vod/stjselect/2025/armoryinfo20250513>

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