



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Special Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board May 27^h, 2025 @ 5:30 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak, Stacy Jewell, Chief Joel Pierce (via zoom), Collin Gillespie, Kresten Sterling (via zoom)

Public: KATV, Dana Gray, Don Smith, Kevin Ignaszak (zoom), Joe Weith (zoom), Mike Sullivan, Lauren Jarvi, Lenny Gerardi, Chris Yandon, Peter Gummere, Kiko Nobusawa, David Pacum, Ellen Burt, Mike Burt, Richard Boisseau, David Roth, Otto Wurzburg, Lynn Wurzburg, Jeannettee Keenen, Steph Churchill, Jay Churchill, Dorothy Jackson Turek, Tom Turek, Madeline Winfill, Barbara Edelman, Darryll Rudy

Armory Project Bond Vote Public Informational Meeting:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager began by explaining that the Public Information Meeting was the second 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. He presented the project's background, current status, proposed design and funding challenges. 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. He explained that the armory, which has been vacant since 2009, requires significant renovation due to environmental and structural issues. The Armory location is not suitable for a Fire Station it was then looked at for a Police, Dispatch and Emergency Operations Center. The project's cost has increased from \$5.8 million to over \$12.5 million, and the town is now seeking a bond vote to finance the project.
- Joe read the bond warning to the public. He explained that all legal requirements have been met and there is a short time line due to waiting to get the bid documents back from contractors so the Town was able to provide numbers for construction so the voters would all necessary information to make an informed decision.
- Collin Gillespie- Dispatch Director presented the current state of the St. Johnsbury Police and Dispatch station, including photos and descriptions of the existing facility's inadequate spaces, including a small holding cell and limited office areas.
- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager explained that consultants have pointed out concerns with the building deuteriations and it has hindered the Town's ability to recruit and retain employees. He also mentioned the response time from Main Street and the importance of keeping the Police

Station there. He explained that both schools have expressed how important it is to have the Police Department so close and how it effects how the schools address student safety.

- A resident asked if moving the Police Department to the second floor at 51 Depot Square has been addressed since it is not in current use. Joe explained that it has been discussed briefly but doesn't co-exist well with the Welcome Center.
- Kevin Ignazak from Montrose discussed the successful remediation of PCB contamination, which cost 2.7 million and 2.4 million was funded by various grants. 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.
- David Roy from Lehman and Fair Architects presented a site plan for the new facility, highlighting the unique needs for police department functions like processing, detention, and training. The discussion touched on the challenges of sharing space with other town departments and the need for dedicated police department facilities.
- A resident asked if there was an existing elevator in the Armory currently. David said no.
- Joe reviewed the project timeline and cost of the construction, highlighting a significant increase in costs due to COVID-19. Construction could begin in July if the bond is approved with an occupancy date of Dec. 2026.
- Chris Yandow explained the guaranteed maximum price contract with the town and the importance of securing subcontractors. He highlighted that the project has had a great deduction in size since the beginning.
- Joe Kasprzak highlighted the project is funded by various sources, including EPA, Brownfields Revitalization Fund, and FEMA, with an estimated completion date in 2026. The team emphasized the historical significance of the building and its location, as well as the need for addressing downtown Brownfields. He presented a cost analysis comparing the redevelopment of the armory for a police and dispatch facility to building a new facility, finding that the armory option would cost approximately \$21 more per \$100,000 in value increase compared to a new build. He noted that a new facility of similar size would cost about \$79 per \$100,000 in value increase. He also compared the Town's proposed project to similar initiatives in other municipalities.
- Pete Gummere expressed that he was impressed with what was shown tonight and that in the last 48 hours his opinion has changed and he believes this is the right decision and the Town has done their homework.
- Lenny Gerardi asked about the urgency and timeline for a new firehouse and inquired if the Armory development could wait. Joe said the urgency is there for both and estimated it would take 3-5 years for a new firehouse if the work were to begin immediately. He expressed that locations within town are scarce and most available land is contaminated.
- Joe discussed the challenges and costs associated with developing a combined facility. He explained that the project would require approximately \$23.5 million, including assessment and cleanup, and emphasized the need for specialized rooms for police training and improved communication during emergencies. He also discussed the potential for grants to fund remediation but noted that development is often required for funding approval. He explained that alternative uses for the armory, such as a community center have been discussed, but there are difficulties in finding suitable partners or funding.
- Lenny inquired if the Armory needed to be done right away. Joe said no but shuttered as is would cause more damage.
- Brendan Hughes inquired if the bond vote was to fail what would the Town be faced with. Joe explained that it is a bit of unknown. The Town would be tasked with deciding to moth the Armory project or find an alternative use for the facility.

- Stephanie Churchill expressed that the can has been kicked down the road for many years and based on the recent events in Town this is an opportunity for the PD. She said the Town has an opportunity now to do it and it will not get cheaper. It is known that the current facility is inadequate and the Town has a golden opportunity.
- Mike Sullivan expressed concern that the special services district covers 2 square miles and the Town is asking for residents outside of the special services district to help cover the cost. He questioned how the Town intended to tax all residences. He also expressed concern that the warning included language regarding a public safety facility and the loan information that was suggested.
- Lauren Jarvi asked for clarification on the spaces within the secure park area. She asked if that area would be adequate for the total Police needs. She also expressed that there did not seem to be able of spaces for the public to park. Chad explained that there was 17 spaces within the secured area for parking and believed it would be adequate for staffing needs. Chad confirmed that there was 5 spaces on the side including handicap and on street parking for visitors. He mentioned that the facility is also within walking distance from the Main Street Parking lot.
- Tom Turek thanked the Town for all the work they have done. He asked about the construction costs as the graph presented didn't reflect a drop from the supply demand. Joe Kasprzak explained that reality is the cost to build has doubled at this point. Chris Yandow explained that sheet goods have slightly decreased but labor costs have increased. He mentioned there is much more to the construction costs than just the goods.
- Tom Turek asked if the larger picture has been looked at and if there was a plan for the Town to deal with the Fire Department in the future. Joe explained that both a new Police Department and Fire Station are needed. He mentioned that the cost of a joint facility would be in the area of 23,000 square feet.
- Tom Turek asked what happen if the bond vote passed what happens with the Fire Department. Joe explained that the Town would start assess the need now and look at potential options.
- Ellen Burt expressed concerns with the public safety building costs presented are not comparable to the Armory project. She asked about the vacant property on Hasting Hill and suggested the Town go back to the drawing board.
- Lynn Wurzburg asked about the geothermal system. Joe explained that the geothermal network would allow the Town to capitalize on around \$200,000 to \$250,000 to help offset the cost. He mentioned that a geothermal system is a longer payback as well.
- Lynn asked if the Town looked at every empty lot in Town. Would it be cheaper to combine Fire and Police? What happens if the bond doesn't pass? Joe explained that a feasibility study was conducted and 5 properties around Town were reviewed. It was determined that the Armory was the best option. The Town has an obligation as the owners and by redeveloping the Armory it would, "kill two birds with one stone." He explained that the Town constantly is reviewing and lowing at properties around town, however there are not a lot of options.
- Ellen asked about the property on Hastings Hill. Steve Isham explained that the property in reference is owned by the St. Johnsbury Development Fund and they have plans on development on the site in the future.
- A resident asked if the McDonald's lot has been looked at. Chad said yes. He explained that McDonald's lot as it could not house a combined Fire and Police Station. He highlighted that the following properties were reviewed before the Town moved forward with the Armory.
 - Portland Street
 - McDonald's Lot
 - Republican Block
 - Renovating 1187 Main Street
 - Armory

- With other sites comes the unknown of environmental contaminants and purchase price. The Armory is a town liability.
- Tom Turek mentioned that it seemed that the Town had done its due diligent but asked about the potential for the Tru Temper lot. Joe explained that its hard to talk about other peoples property however he is working with NVDA and a potential developer on a housing project for that site.
- Joe clarified that the proposed facility would cost approximately \$100 per \$100,000 in property value for the armory redevelopment versus about \$79 for a new facility based on the current grand list.
- Mike Burt asked if the Town had asked the question that those outside of the special services district could vote. Steve Isham said yes the Town Attorney was involved. Chad confirmed that all residents are able to vote.
- Mike Sullivan questioned the ability for a town wide vote on the Armory bond based on the Charter language. Stacy Jewell, Town Clerk/ Treasurer explained that it doesn't matter what is in the building because it is owned by the Town so it is paid for out of the general fund. She highlighted that not just the Police Department will be housed there but also Dispatch which provides regional services.
- Lenny asked why this case would be different from any other Town-owned facility such at the Waster Plant and Wastewater Plant. Stacy explained that water and sewer are enterprise funds and pay for themselves.
- Pete confirmed that Calex was dispatched by the Town. Steve Isham said yes. Pete then highlighted that everyone in the room would benefit since Calex is a benefit to all tax payers no matter when in Town they live.
- Lenny asked if it was essential for the Police Department and Dispatch to co-locate. Would it be possible to just move dispatch to the Armory to scale down the project. Collin explained that many of the same systems are used for Police and Dispatch and by separating them you would be doubling the costs.
- The conversation ended with a reminder of the upcoming informational meetings and bond vote on June 3rd, 2025.

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

May 27th Special Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/lqXBFkneABQXQlgSrl4eBQcE1pEgMjlgScNSEU3T_3IVcp_latKwfFAX-mEu_xm.CmcCdZfgFX2eggza

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