



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board June 9th, 2025 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Lesley Russ, Kresten Sterling, Stacy Jewell, Chief Joel Piece, Collin-Alan Gillespie

Public: KATV, Richard Boisseau, Issiah, Gillian Sewake, Don Smith, Bobbie Sterling, Frank Harris, Cory Bunnell, Cari Carlet, Ian Carlet, Jim Brown, Leia Scofield, Matthew Gans, Melissa Gans, Kevin (via zoom), N. Albright (via zoom), Lester Iphone (via zoom), Jordan Cady, Ariel Kittredge (via zoom), Jason Marks, Sarah Marks, Mrs. Emerson (via zoom), Elijah Iphone (via zoom)

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Cari Carlet expressed concerns about public safety and lack of emergency communication systems in the town, highlighting four shootings in her neighborhood since 2018. She addressed her concerns with the town's focus on protecting vulnerable populations rather than addressing broader safety issues and suggested creating a public safety enforcer position. She questioned the town manager's control over the police chief and called for both of their resignation, citing a lack of trust in both the police department and town management. She also expressed concerns about the recent statistical reappraisal in St. Johnsbury.
- Frank asked when VT Alerts would be implemented. Chief Pierce said that currently the Town is going through the Watch Commander process for these alerts but once everyone has completed the training the Town would be able to distribute their own alerts. He highlighted that the initial training link provided didn't work. Frank asked for an update when the system is ready. Chief Pierce said absolutely.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy to approve the May 27th Select Board minutes with the noted corrections. All in favor.

Warrants:

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

Liquor Licenses/ Tobacco Licenses:

- None

March Financials:

- Lesley Russ, Finance Officer, presented the May Financial Memo highlighting the following.
- At the end of May, the General Fund had a deficit of \$681,517. The deficit is due to a revitalization expense of \$225,000, Armory expense, storm damage expense of \$48,000, fire truck repairs, computer expenses, contracted services, legal services and employee turnover. Additionally, the general fund was budgeted with a deficit of \$200,000.
- The delinquent tax balance was \$401,000 at month end, down 93, 000 from the previous month.
- At the end of May, the Special Services Fund had a surplus of \$150,575. Regular and overtime wages were at 86% of the budget which has positively impacted the bottom line in this fund.
- The Highway Fund had a temporary deficit of \$2,854,114 at the end of May. The deficit is due to \$2,948,441 in expenses associated with the July flooding events.
- Winter maintenance has exceeded the overtime budget by 92,000 due to both regular and overtime wages.
- At the end of May the Water Fund had a temporary deficit of \$451,815. This is due to billing in arrears and property tax expense from the new water filter plant.
- The Sewer Fund at the end of May had a temporary deficit of \$572,376 due to billing in arrears.
- She explained that the water fund and sewer fund are billed a quarter behind and would be adjusted at year end.
- The Parking Meter Fund at the end of May had a surplus of \$22,316.
- Auditors will be in the office Monday and Tuesday of next week from the preliminary audit and then back the first full week of August.
- Dennis asked if it was expected that there would be a deficit at year end and any idea of what it would be. Lesley explained that there will be a deficit in the general fund at year end but it is hard to determine how much.
- Dennis asked if the deficit in the Highway fund was all FEMA. Lesley said yes however if the funds are not received within 60 days it will be deferred.

Loan RF3-450-3.1:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager highlighted that the approval of Loan RF3-450-3.1 will allow the Bond Bank to release the remaining bonds for the Water Treatment Plant. The loan is for the construction of a new water treatment facility building with a membrane filtration equipment and modifications to the existing facility to be used for pretreatment. He reviewed the terms of the loan including the loan forgiveness of up to \$7,619,522 and 0% interest for the term of the loan.
- On motion Dennis and second by Tracy to approve Loan RF3-450-3.1 as presented. All in favor.
- A resident asked what the loan was for. Chad explained that it was for the new Water Treatment Facility.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following Town Manager's Report.
- The Statistical Reappraisal completed over the past 6 months is complete. Reappraisal notices have been mailed out and we are fielding calls to set up informal meetings with the Assessors.

- The Armory bond vote was voted down, therefore we will begin reassessing options. General public input included support for replacement of the facilities, and many comments received supported a new all in one, Police, Fire and Dispatch to be housed together.
- Tax sale is scheduled in late August, and information has been delivered to the Town Attorney. People that have found themselves delinquent should reach out to me as the Delinquent Tax Collector to discuss payment arrangements if eligible.
- The Recreation Director position has been filled and Sarah Gagne has been appointed as the Town Recreation Director. She will be coming on the beginning of July.
- Annual fuel oil bids were requested from Fred's, Irving, Bourns Energy and Dead River, and we awarded the bid to Irving Energy being the low bidder at \$2.392 per gallon.
- Frank and I attended the Vermont Community Development Program board meeting with board members from the Caledonia County Co-Op to sponsor their \$1M Community Block Grant application.
- Ribbon Cutting at the Northern Forest's 560 Railroad Street apartment building with Northern Borders Regional Commission, State Treasurer Mike Pieciak this last Thursday.
- Thursday May 29, staff attended the Public Safety Summit at Lyndon State College hosted by the Governor's Public Safety Consulting Team. Discussion about the Situation Table as well as how other communities are working on Public Safety.
 - The Situation Table is a unique, risk-based, rapid triage model that brings together multiple human service providers to address situations where individuals and/or families face a specific threshold of Acutely Elevated Risk (AER).
- The Code Compliance Officer continues with proactive inspections in rental units for compliance with the State Fire Code. To date, 675 buildings (approximately 1100 units) have been inspected.
- The Code Compliance Officer is working with rental unit owners to close out last year's Rental Housing Improvement Grant program awards. The next round of grants will be open soon and rental owners should receive grant information in the mail soon.
- Department of Public Works:
 - Maintenance crews have been patching potholes, ditching and changing failed culverts, adding gravel to back roads affected by last year's flooding, mowing cemeteries and parks, repairing hydrants, cleaning out catch basins and sewer mains, street sweeping and beginning sidewalk and stop bar painting (weather permitting).
 - Mt Pisgah road had a collapsed retaining wall near Memorial Drive that has been rebuilt.
 - Currently working on the riverbank slide out at the Public Works Garage.
 - The Goss Hollow Road slides have been bid out and was awarded to Alliance Construction with an anticipated start date in August of this summer.
 - Anticipate about 3 more weeks of work to do on flooding repairs. Cathy Hanks is working with FEMA officials to get projects submitted for reimbursement.
- Fire Department:
 - Finalizing Preservation Trust Grant for the restoration of windows and exploring if the funds can include restoration of the front overhead doors.
 - Starting a new firefighter at beginning of fiscal year
 - Arrival of new apparatus is anticipated late summer
 - Initiating a new dorm safety fire prevention program for SJA

- Working with the Town School at beginning of next school year to produce our own fire prevention video for elementary schools
- Exploring funds for adding more ballistic equipment to improve our tactical response capabilities
- Initiated a new officer development program in partnership with Littleton Fire
- ISO evaluation is anticipated to be this fall.
- SAFER grant application is currently open and we will be submitting to fund additional fire fighters.
- Police Department:
 - Shawn Pereira has graduated from the Vermont Police Academy and is working on our internal training requirements.
 - The Town received a grant from the Vermont Department of Public Service to replace the 2015 unmarked Explorer with a new EV.
 - The PD has received new computers for all officers and will be completing IT installation this week.
 - The Chief is reviewing and updating policies as outlined in the JW Leadership Consulting report.
- Dispatch:
 - The Town has signed up for a Department VT Alerts account and Dispatchers are completing the training. We have been using VT Alerts since the flooding last year through the State's platform. The changeover will allow us to send out alerts directly without contacting the State.
 - A new intercom system with broader capabilities was installed on Friday at 1187 Main Street.
 - Replacing outdated Computers. Computers have been received and are scheduled for IT to bring online this week
 - Replacement of Cameras and Switch at PD is underway
 - 2025 Audit with the State of Vermont for Criminal Justice Informational Services (FBI) compliance is underway
 - Identifying recent radio issues and replacing all outdated equipment on both Dispatch work stations
 - Simulcast radio project is in construction phase and will result in broader capabilities for Radio coverage and service area. Anticipation of completion by August.
- Wastewater Treatment Facility:
 - There are new pumps and mixers arriving that will be included in the upcoming Solids Handling project. The 90% designs for the solids handling project were submitted to the State of Vermont for review. We anticipate that this project will be bid this fall.
- Water Treatment Facility:
 - Continue start up testing and we anticipate the new plant will be online in July with final work wrapping up late summer.

Other Business:

- Jim Brown inquired if the Bylaw Modernization was on the Select Board Agenda for June 23rd. Chad said he would confirm with Matt Walsh, Zoning Administrator that the meeting had been warned.
- Jim Brown asked that the appointment of Issaih be on the Select Board Agenda for June 23rd
- Melissa Gans inquired about the evaluation process for the Town Manager. Frank agreed that an evaluation was needed as it had been some time since one was completed.
- Brendan expressed that it was his understanding that the chair and vice chair do the evaluation annually. Frank mentioned that the board would discuss how to move forward with the evaluation.

Executive Session:

- None

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

June 9th Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/H_olkfhc_5Shx76vAcFemZoxCgQnaKKVa9nB2hXZO3h1OiDjFneXKjV00432d4a0.ugtLOAbMbhlQptp

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