



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board July 14th, 2025 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

Select Board: Steve Isham, Frank Empsall, Dennis Smith, Brendan Hughes, Tracy Zschau,
Staff: Chad Whitehead, Joe Kasprzak, Rachel Waterhouse, Katelyn Bent, Kresten Sterling, Stacy Jewell
Public: KATV, Richard Boisseau, Issiah Wilson, Bobbie Lepine, Mike and Elaine O'hara, Cari Carlet, Ian Carlet, Jim Brown, Dana Gray, Mathew Ghafoori, Kim Fontaine, Don Smith, Steve Bobrowski

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Cari Carlet inquired about any new updates on the Armory Project since the bond vote failed. Joe Kasprzak provided a reply by stating since the bond vote failed, it is now up to us as a team to try reviewing cost estimates and present next steps. Cari asked if the vacant lot on Hasting Hill had been looked at as a potential site for a combined fire and police station. Joe explained that multiple vacant sites have been reviewed. He also explained that the property she was referring to on Hasting Hill was owed by St. Johnsbury Development Fund.
- Cari Carlet also expressed concerns about Chief Joel Pierce using ChatGPT AI for the public safety action plan. Cari expressed she hopes Chief can be at the next meeting to answer the question himself. Steve Isham stated that Chief did not use AI for the public safety plan. Cari Carlet also expressed she does not believe the action plan fully addresses all the concerns in the consultants' report and stated that it lacks critical thinking.
- Mike O'hara expressed his gratitude with Chad as he spoke with him earlier in the day to address his concerns. He showed the Select Board photos of the newly- installed fire hydrant on Breezy Hill. He states it is too low below the road levels for firefighters to have quick and safe access. Town Manager Chad Whitehead reported back that an extension is on order to raise the hydrant.
- Mike O'hara also shared other photos of a sign facing down in the grass near the bridge on Breezy Hill. Chad Whitehead let O'hara know that he will touch base with DPW Director Steve Beuaregard on this issue.
- Richard Boisseua also raised concerns on Robert Brook Lane where his property was badly damaged from July 2024 flooding. He voiced his disappointment that the muck left from last year's flooding is still there. Chad Whitehead also let Richard know he will also touch base with DPW Director Steve Beuaregard on this issue as well.
- Mathew Ghafoori asked in the Tru Temper site has been looked at as a potential space for a combined Fire and Police Station. Joe explained that it has been looked at however it is currently owned by a private developer who is working with NVDA to clean up the site.

- Steve Bobrowski raised concern about the significant increase in his property assessment, which rose by 69% compared to the average, leading to higher taxes. He expressed his concern about the exponential rise in property values and the impact on retirees and long-term residents. Mathew Ghafoori explained that the tax rate might decrease to offset the increased assessments, as the total budget remains unchanged. Tracy added that a lot of people seem confused and think that because their property value increased that their tax rate will increase and that isn't always the case. Everyone agreed that better education on the reassessment process is needed to alleviate public anxiety, and it was suggested that informational materials be sent with assessment letters in the future.
- Stacy Jewell expressed her disappointment in the Select Board and Town Manager regarding information distribution related to the FY25 reappraisal. She explained that the town was forced by the state due to the CLA to complete a reappraisal.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank approve the June 23rd Selectboard minutes with the noted corrections. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Warrants:

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

Liquor Licenses/ Tobacco Licenses:

- The following Liquor Licenses were presented:
- Tap Room 3rd Class
- Tap Room 1st Class
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the liquor licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Transfer for Reappraisal Services:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to transfer \$119,500.65 from the reserve for revaluation to unallocated to cover FY25 reappraisal services. All in favor.

Transfer for Housing Development:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to transfer \$78,570 from the reserve for housing development to the unallocated fund balance to cover the remaining FY25 housing grants. All in favor.

Loan Agreement RF3-58701.0:

- Chad presented Loan Agreement RF3-58701.0 highlighting that it is for a drinking water project on Bay Street.

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to approve loan agreement RF3-58701.0 in the amount of \$20,400. All in favor.

Fire Department Union Contract:

- The Fire Department is still in the negotiation stage between the Town and the Department. The negotiation is close to an agreement. Chad Whitehead, Frank Empsall, and Dennis Smith are those on the board to negotiate with the Fire Department on their union contract.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to table the Fire Department Union Contract. All in favor.

EPA Multipurpose Grant Update:

- Joe Kasprzak provided an update, noting that some work is starting to be done at 575 Concord Ave, including testing and preliminary reports. Joe will be back in two months for another update.
- Cari Carlet mentioned that they were actively cleaning there now. Joe mentioned that they are conducting testing on site currently.

Town Manager's Report:

- Tax Sale is scheduled for August. Letters have been sent to property owners and a listing will be posted in the paper on July 25th.
- Sarah Gagne the new Rec. Director has started and summer camps have kicked off.
- Chad discussed the upcoming Public Safety Task Force kickoff on Thursday, which involves agencies collaborating to develop plans for individuals at risk of violence.
- He mentioned the rental housing improvement grant program and upcoming audit during the first week of August.
- Chad provided updates on Department of Public Works projects, including road repairs and bridge construction. He also discussed the main water break and the completion of road grading by a contractor.
- Chad reported that no significant damages were reported during the July flooding in St. Johnsbury and that DPW crews assisted other towns with road repairs.
- Chad also mentioned the Preservation Trust Grant for fire department projects, including window restoration and potential overhead door replacement, and noted that new ballistic equipment financing had been awarded and was being delivered to the department.
- Chad provided updates on several town projects, including the wastewater and water treatment facilities, which are under review at the state for final upgrades.
- Chad also gave an update that testing plans for the water treatment plant are ongoing, with challenges related to a pipe issue being addressed. Chad also discussed the tax appraisal for the town's utilities, noting that initial values were high but that the attorney and assessor found legislative limitations on what can be charged. The Town is now just waiting for the final assessment.
- The town is awaiting final tax values after a hearing with Waterford assessors.
- Chad also gave an update about the new Police Officer Shawn Pereira and the completion of his training.

- Chad provided updates on FEMA reimbursements, noting that most submissions for both storms have been processed, though some home buyout applications are still pending. He mentioned that repairs to roads and infrastructure are nearly complete, with only a few weeks of work remaining.

Other Business:

- Jim Brown wanted to thank the Kingdom Gardens for maintaining and watering the hanging flower baskets. Jim noted that the hanging basket that fell in front of the distillery can still be reused. Jim also discussed the planning commission's work on amending bylaw modernization documents, particularly regarding agricultural use permits, and informed the group that a public hearing may be held in August.

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank that there was a need for executive session. 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 Brendan to exit executive session.
- The chair had nothing to report.

On a motion by Brendan and second by Frank to board voted unanimously to adjourn.

July 14th Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/cASe7cmiJfosXkoZAHDuAO16TrJVagqxE_4yubG4FtI5DdEZaVBlijsVjhKa4PwD.u7bWXmZcEZmzeyKS

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