



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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Meeting of the St. Johnsbury Select Board September 9th, 2024 @ 6:00 pm

Present-

Select Board: Steve Isham, Frank Empsall, Tracy Zschau, Dennis Smith,

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Joe Kasprzak

Public: Dana Gray, KATV, Jim Brown, Gillian Sewake (via zoom), Deb Dolgin, Richard Boisseau, Cory Bunnell, Lauren Jenks, Casey Lozano, Deb Thornton, Rod Lammar, Scott Campbell, Greg MacDonald

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- Deb Thornton approached the Select Board regarding the recent flooding on Cliff Street. She explained that homes on Cliff Street received 7 feet of water causing furnace, hot water heater and foundation failures. She mentioned that residents of Cliff Street are hoping to see changes from this storm. Recently met with Chad Whitehead and Chief Brad Reed after the flooding event to discuss our concerns.
- Chad explained that long term flood resiliency needs to be looked at due to the increase in rain intensity in the area. Chad explained that he has reached out to NVDA to discuss this as it is a region wide discussion.
- Deb Thornton highlighted that the main concern is that all the drains were plugged and there is lack of drainage on Overcliff and Cliff Street.
- Rod Lammar explained that there is a catch basin with a 18 inch pipe coming in from the brook but it goes to a 12 inch pipe and then to a 36 inch connection. The issue with this situation is the bottleneck. If the bottleneck was fixed it could go down better.
- Steve Isham explained that the goal is to not build back to what was before the flooding but to build in resiliency in the event of future flooding.
- Cory Bunnell expressed concern that drainage is a big issue within the Town. He mentioned that drains have not been cleaned and that there has been a lack of sweeping efforts in Town. On Duke Street bridge brook has rerouted itself, leaving erosion around a pipe. He said that a sewer line broke off during the last flood and a broken water line has been exposed. He is hoping that it can be fixed before winter. Chad explained that it is going to have to be fixed before winter. He explained that he will have crews take a look at it.

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the Select Board meeting minutes from Aug. 26th, 2024 with the noted corrections. All in favor.

Warrants:

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

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:

- Steven Isham presented the following liquor and tobacco licenses and renewals:
 - Judy's Kitchen- 1st Class Renewal
 - Javier Bill's Almost Authentic Mexican Food- 3rd Class
 - Javier Bill's Almost Authentic Mexican Food- 1st Class
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the liquor licenses as presented. All in favor.
- Casey Lozano approached the board regarding Javier Bill's Almost Authentic Mexican Food explaining that the restaurant is located on Main Street and will provide customers with affordable Mexican cuisine.
- Frank asked when they plan to open. Casey said tomorrow at 11:30 am.

Grand List Adjustments:

- Steven Isham presented Grand List # 2024-#1. He highlighted that it was a decrease in \$754.54. Grand List #2024- #2 in the decreased amount of \$356.02.
- Frank asked for the addresses. Steve explained that adjustment 2024-#1 was for 249 Severance Hill Road and adjustment 2024- #2 was for 460 Rabbit Plain.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve Grand List adjustment # 2024-#1 and Grand list adjustment # 2024-#2. All in favor.

852 Portland Street Tax Stabilization Agreement:

- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager explained that this was just follow up to the action taken by the Select Board at the August 19th, 2024 Select Board meeting regarding the tax stabilization agreement for 852 Portland Street. He explained that based on unput from the board article 5 was added to include that failure for the tax payer to complete improvements to the exterior of the building, including painting/siding improvements and basic landscaping by Sept. 1st, 2027 would result in default of the agreement. The agreement has been signed by the property owners and they are in agreement with it.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Tracy to approve and sign the tax stabilization agreement for 852 Portland Street. All in favor.

Biomass Plant:

- Greg MacDonald approached the Select Board regarding the proposed Biomass Plant at the Lyndonville Industrial Park. He explained that recently there was an article in the Caledonian

Record regarding the project and the technology is questionable. He highlighted the following recent events:

- Jan. 26th, 2024 Vermont Renewable Gas submitted an official intent to develop a 2.2 MW electric generation facility utilizing methane.
- Sept. 2nd, 2024 Vermont Renewable Gas submitted a request to the Public Utility Commission for a Certificate of Public Good through a 30 day expedited approval process. This expedited process would negate any public process and public comment period.
- Greg explained that this project titled, “VRG-Lyndon” would be the first reactor in the United States. The plant would essentially convert chipped wood into renewable gas or methane. The methane would then be converted into electricity via an internal combustion engine. He asked if it was possible to have the Select Board involved in the process.
- Chad explained that the Town received notice on Friday regarding the Biomass Plant and he believed that Stacy forwarded the notice to the Select Board.
- Greg expressed concerns that the Northeast Kingdom is being taken advantage of and slowing down the process is the biggest concern right now. The speedy process just doesn’t feel right.
- Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager asked if Greg was referring to party status through the Town. Chad explained that this was something the Town had done in the past and could do.
- Jim Brown asked who would be the lead person in the town to invoke party status. Chad explained in the past he had invoked party status on behalf of the Town. He mentioned he would also refer to the Energy Committee regarding the Biomass Plant.
- Steve Isham explained that Greg has already been in touch with the Energy Committee regarding the plant.
- Chad explained that he can submit a letter requesting party status to get the foot in the door. Steve Isham agreed with submitting the letter.
- A women asked what the benefits of plant would be and if it would reduce electrical costs. Greg explained that Lyndonville Electric actually projects that it will cost them more money and that there is no plan to plug into the Lyndonville electrical system.
- A women expressed that not a lot is known about the health concerns with a Biomass Plant and that the plant needs to be have a full evaluation and go through the full process.

Flood Response Line of Credit:

- Tracy Zschau recused herself from this agenda item.
- Chad explained that the Town cash flow remains in good shape however with the increase in costs due to flood response and repair the Town is looking to obtain a flood response line of credit in the amount of 4.7 million. He mentioned that it was a short term line of credit and would only be used if needed. Chad said it would be around 18 to 24 months before the Town receives FEMA reimbursement. The proposed loan would be through Passumpsic Bank with a 5.2% interest rate with a one year term.
- Frank asked if the line of credit could be renewed if needed. Chad said yes.
- On a motion by Dennis and second by Frank to approve the Flood Response Line of Credit as presented. All in favor.

Town Manager’s Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following report.
- DPW continues to work on road repairs and prepare for winter.

- The Town of St. Johnsbury recently participated in Capital for the Day-NEK. Staff attended meetings with the governor and his staff. The Public Safety Task Force was able to express frustrations and concerns regarding public safety, homelessness and mental health. He explained that the Town was likely in line to receive assistance in evaluating the data and determining next steps.
- Dennis asked if the second disaster has been declared. Chad explained that it hasn't been declared at this time but the Town is moving forward like it is coming. The Town has been tracking employees hours, equipment used and materials needed. The Town is still in the emergency response phase.
- Richard Boisseau mentioned that the FEMA Office in Lyndonville has been pre registering people for the second flood. He urged those that were effected to go to the office and get pre registered.
- Tracy asked if the Town could get that information out via the paper or an email list. Chad explained that the Town since the beginning has been instructing people to call 211 and 211 has been sending people to FEMA.
- Steve Isham mentioned that FEMA has been at the Farmers Market and around Town.

Other Business:

- None

Executive Session:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Tracy that there was a need for an executive session to discuss a contractual matter where premature disclosure would place the Town at substantial risk. 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 Frank to exit executive session. All in favor.
- The Chair had nothing to report.

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

September 9th Select Board: