



TOWN OF ST. JOHNSBURY

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

Present-

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

Staff: Chad Whitehead, Rachel Waterhouse, Steve Beauregard

Public: KATV, Richard Boisseau, Jim Brown, Dana Gray, Gillian Sewake, Patrick Shattuck, Becky Masure, Jen Buteau, John Lenzini, Tom Turek

Agenda Amendments:

- None

Public Comment:

- None

Minutes:

- On a motion by Dennis and second by Brendan to approve the minutes from Nov. 25th meeting with the noted corrections. All in favor.

Warrants:

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

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses:

- Steve Isham, Select Board Chair presented the following liquor licenses.
 - Spoonthawee LLC- 3rd class license
 - Vermont Catering Company LLC- 1st class license
 - Vermont Catering Company LLC- 3rd class license
- Steve Isham highlighted that the Spoonthawee is the Thai restaurant in St. J Center and the Vermont Catering Company LLC is the Salt Bistro.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the liquor licenses as presented. All in favor. Brendan abstained.

Caledonia Renaissance Project- VHFA Application:

- Patrick Shattuck, Executive Director of Rural Edge explained that Rural Edge is working on obtaining funds to help update a few of their older buildings in St. Johnsbury. Part of the requirements for the grant is to attend a public meeting and provide a pro
- Becky Masure provided a general overview of the project which includes rehab to 5 properties scattered throughout St. Johnsbury. She explained that the Caledonia Renaissance Project aims to address some essential rehabilitation of the older housing stock including repair of retaining walls, site work with improvements to walkways and driveways, review of mechanical systems, energy efficiency upgrades, and exterior repairs to roofs and porches. The proposed project includes funding from Vermont Housing Conservation Board and the Vermont Housing Finance Agency for a 4% low-income housing tax credits. The timeline for the project includes final funding round in June, with the project expected to be completed by the end of 2026.
- Dennis inquired about 380 Portland Street being part of a previous rehab. Becky explained that previously 390 Portland Street was rehabbed as part of the Hilltop Family Rehab Project. She explained that the Caledonia Renaissance Project is very similar to that project.
- Frank agreed that the properties listed do indeed need rehab.
- Tracy asked about the other 3 older properties owned by Rural Edge. Becky explained that 3 were not put into the funding and other funding is being sought for those properties. Including one of them potentially being a homeownership opportunity.

St. Johnsbury Recreation Committee:

- Jen Buteau from Impact Consulting provided an update on the progress of the recreation program review of St. Johnsbury, she highlighted the strong community support and the committee's efforts to make the program sustainable. She mentioned that they have conducted surveys, interviews and focus groups, and are considering different structures and case studies from other rural areas. She also mentioned that the final report will be shared next week, which will include data on the economic and community benefits of investing in recreation. She also mentioned that the committee is considering reintegration of the Recreation Department under town management and a full time director of recreation programming.
- John Lenzini added that the committee is passionate about seeing the community have good recreation and is interested in the long-term sustainability, including suggestions on fee structures to make the program affordable to all.
- Steve Isham expressed concerns about the survey's promotion and the taxpayer's capacity to bear an increase in taxes. He emphasized the need for transparency about proposed changes in line items and the necessity to ensure a return on investment for taxpayers.
- Jen explained that the committee discussed the possibility of reallocating funders from surplus-running nonprofits to support the proposed recreation department. She mentioned that they also consider the option of a one-time appropriation to facilitate the transition. The final decision on the funding pathway would depend on the Select Board's choice.
- Tom Turek mentioned that he has seen struggles with the recreation department and sees the potential benefits of shifting the programs funding away from the Academy and back to the town, allowing for the solicitation of grant funds. However he also expressed concerns about the potential increase in taxes due to the proposed full-time recreation administrator.
- Steve Isham expressed concerns about the potential increase in taxes due to the proposed full-time recreation administrator.
- Jen discussed the potential benefits of creating a "Friends of St. Johnsbury Recreation" group to increase community involvement and support for recreation programs. She suggested that this group could help raise funds for scholarships, organize equipment swaps and events. However she emphasized the need for organization and oversight for such initiatives. She explained that with an

expanded recreation program they could focus on expanding program capacity and revenue through increased community engagement.

- Tracy raised questions about the timeline for the work, the process for the report and the structure of the recreation board. Jen explained that she would be happy to come back to the Select Board. Frank agreed with coming back with the final report and continuing the conversation.
- Tracy asked if the Recreation Committee Board had managed the Recreation Department in the past. Chad said that it is currently in the agreement with the Academy but he was not sure how it worked prior to that agreement. John Lenzini explained that it is very specifically written in the municipal ordinances and suggested shifting the recreation responsibilities to a recreation commission. Chad explained that the only other position within the Town that is managed by a committee is the sexton. He explained that he would have to check with state statute regarding the recreation department.
- Richard Boisseau inquired about the cost vs. benefits. He ask for a ballpark of the number of individuals who used the program this year. Jen estimated that the program currently serves around 225-250 people.

Resolution to Accept the VCDP CDBG #07110-IG-2022- St. Johnsbury-21 Grant:

- Chad discussed that the Town has been awarded a \$330,000 grant for environmental work at the Armory. He read the resolution to accept the VCDP CDBG #07100-IG-2022- St. Johnsbury-21 grant in the amount of \$330,000. He explained that the resolution designated the Assistant Town Manager as the person with overall administrative responsibility and the Town Manager as the authorizing official to execute the grant agreement. The final step is for the Select Board to accept the resolution.
- On a motion by Tracy and second by Dennis to accept the VCDP CDBG #07110-IG-2022-St. Johnsbury-21 grant resolution and designate the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager to execute. All in favor.

November Financials:

- Chad Whithead, Town Manager presented the following November financials.
- At the end of November the General Fund had a surplus of \$74,604.
- The Armory remediation expenses have been moved to the grand fund this fiscal year. Since we are in the remediation phase, the majority of the expense will be reimbursed by grants.
- The delinquent property tax balance is \$109,000 and the cash balance is \$1.7 million at month end. Unreimbursed flooding expenses are affecting cash flow however the Town does have access to a line of credit if necessary.
- The Special Services Fund had a surplus of \$97,094. Regular and overtime wages are 37% of budget which has positively impacted the bottom line in this fund.
- At the end of November the Highway Fund had a temporary deficit of \$2,426,572. This deficit is due to \$2,299,205 in expenses associated with the July flooding events.
- The Water fund had a temporary deficit of \$346,194. This is due to audit reversals and billing in arrears. Additionally the property tax expense is significantly over budget due to the appraisal of the new water filter plant. Additionally, semi annual loan payments were made during November.
- At the end of November the Sewer Fund had a temporary deficit of \$445,135. This was due to audit reversals and billing in arrears. Additionally solid handlings are at 62% of the budgeted line item and several semi annual loan payments were made in November.
- The Parking Meter Fund at the end of November had a deficit of \$6,168. This is cyclical as the majority of permit revenue is received during December and January.

- Dennis inquired about the property tax rate for the Water Treatment Facility. Chad explained that the new water treatment facility is about 77% completed and has been reassessed which included an increase in tax rates. He explained that the increase is an unbudgeted expense however the Water Facility is valued in the millions. Dennis asked how much the taxes increased. Chad said he would have to get the information and get back to him.

Passumpsic River Water Main Crossing:

- Chad discussed the need to replace the aging water main crossing underneath the Passumpsic River. He explained that the pipe has developed another leak and unfortunately since the pipe is from the 1920s more leaks are bound to happen. He proposed a temporary repair, which would be connected to the bridge and insulated for winter, with the possibility of a permanent bridge crossing as part of the Bay Street project next summer. Chad explained that he spoke with the Water Operator who is concerned about waiting due to the large water demands that could present such as fires. This made the temporary project a priority.
- Steve Beauregard, Director of DPW mentioned that the estimated cost for the temporary solution is \$84,839 and a contractor is ready to get started once it has been approved by the Board.
- Dennis asked how much additional funds would be needed for the permanent solution. Steve explained that he was not sure of the total cost for the permanent solution at this time. Chad explained that the goal would be to incorporate it into the Bay Street Water project but if he had to guess it would be around \$400,000.
- Frank agreed that the project needed to be completed sooner rather than later.
- Dennis asked if the \$84,839 would come from reserves. Chad said yes it would come from the water fund which currently has around \$231,000.
- On a motion by Frank and second by Dennis to approve the temporary Passumpsic River water main crossing project in the amount of \$84,839. All in favor.

Town Manager's Report:

- Chad Whitehead, Town Manager provided the following report.
- Town Managers Office continues to work on developing the FY25/26 budget. Including meeting with department heads. Will be working on scheduling meetings to review the budget with the Select Board in the coming weeks. Planning on presenting the budget at the next Select Board meeting on Dec. 23rd.
- DPW is working on catch basins in preparation for the upcoming rain storm.

Other Business:

- Gillian Sewake mentioned to the Select Board that Discover St. Johnsbury is working on a project to redevelop the Welcome to St. Johnsbury signs. She explained that the Design Advisory Committee approached her regarding the signs. A grant for the redesign and construction has been obtained and Discover St. Johnsbury will working on a process including engaging the public in the design. Currently a RFQ is out for a designer with hopes to have someone by January. She is hopeful that in the late spring Discover St. Johnsbury will be able to come forward with 2-3 designs and have the community vote. Ideally installation would be before Memorial Day weekend.
- Steve Beauregard, Director of DPW offered to assist Discover St. Johnsbury with the installation of the signs.

Executive Session:

- None

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

December 9th Select Board Meeting Video:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/2X_xjDFO3_ZUPyiWU4yqf0Z31NktvmjKDC921Isnd6tCF7n_8MUdYVCCpYVqN_dv.XPrI5LV4IXT2H8gN

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