

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, JUNE 9, 2025

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Duncan Hastings, Adrienne Parker, Eben Patch

Others: Tom Galinat, Lynda Hill, Emma F., Jesse Whitworth, Doug Molde, Diane Lehouiller, Charles Flaum, Jan Gearhart, Paul Warden, Lois Frey, Kathy Black, Joseph Salerno, Sue Lovering

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call Meeting to Order*

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:33.

2. *Consider Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda*

Duncan added an update on the industrial park.

3. *Public Comment*

No members of the public wished to comment.

4. *CEDS Planning / Industrial Park Update*

Eben said our Community and Economic Development Specialist resigned to take another job. The selectboard needs to consider whether to repost the same job description or change it, and whether to consider an interim solution for the industrial park.

Duncan said he attended a meeting last Wednesday on the industrial park with LCPC and Mumley. Randall Szott had been attending these meetings. A consultant is doing an environmental assessment. At the meeting, Duncan asked LCPC if they have any administrative capacity to help bring the industrial park project to fruition. They said they do not. He feels it is too much work for a selectboard member. Tyler Mumley sent out an email this afternoon indicating that Mumley made revisions to the draft letter for the NEPA environmental assessment. It appears that all the changes suggested by the Northern Border Regional Commission consultant have been adopted into the environmental assessment. LCPC is hoping that will be ready to go by June 15. Duncan thinks that is on track. The traffic analysis has come back indicating there is no need for improvements at the intersection, which is what we were expecting. Duncan would be happy to help with the industrial park project but doesn't want to be responsible for all the administrative pieces. He thinks we should consider hiring a project manager on an interim basis to make sure this project and any other projects being worked on do not fall through the cracks. He has a list of potential candidates.

Mike said he thinks hiring an interim would be a good stopgap. Eben said he was thinking of having an interim only for the industrial park project but is not opposed to having the interim working on all existing projects. Duncan handed out a spreadsheet Randall had of existing projects. There are not a huge number of projects. Eben read the list of projects. The amount of money involved totals \$915,960.42. Of that, \$861,945.42 is the NBRC grant for the industrial park.

Duncan said one question is whether the interim position should be done as a contract or for an hourly rate. When Carl Rogers was working for the town on an interim basis he preferred to be a temporary part-time employee with an hourly rate. He thinks some people would prefer to work on a contract basis and others might be interested in the concept of being a limited part-time employee. He is open to either. Eben said he would prefer an hourly rate. Peter asked if we can

negotiate that depending on the preferences of those in the applicant pool. Duncan said that is what he would suggest.

Adrienne asked if the thought is that it would be easier to hire someone for an interim position. Duncan said he thinks the process of replacing Randall will take a month or more. A month would be very fast. He is thinking we should get an interim working as soon as possible.

Tom said the industrial park project is the main one we need someone to work on. The need is huge and we need someone quickly.

Duncan volunteered to contact some people who might be available for the interim position. He said we should also probably post it immediately on the VLCT web page.

Eben asked if the board should have a special meeting next week. Duncan suggested just devoting time at the regular meeting to responding to proposals.

Duncan said he would argue that this is an emergency situation so we can waive any requirements in the procurement policy. Tom said policies are for the board and the board should not let policy stop its action. The board can just explain what it feels is best at a public meeting.

The board agreed that the interim person should handle all existing projects and that Duncan should contact people he knows who might be interested. Adrienne and Peter offered to help if there is anything they can do.

Doug Molde said 3 of the current grants are for the rail trail committee. Two of them are for projects the committee would like to do this building season and one is about rail trail access to the village and he thinks a report is projected for September. These are ongoing projects and it would be really good to have an interim dealing with them so they don't get lost.

Eben asked if for the long term the board wants to revise the job description for the CEDS. Doug Molde said Rosemary sent him the existing job description and he liked it.

Charles Flaum asked about the salary range. How does it compare to the state average? Duncan said the job description doesn't discuss salary. That is determined by negotiation during the hiring process. We are currently paying \$41/hr and that is within the range considered acceptable for that type of position. Eben said it is comparable to other towns.

Charles said right now the grant situation is extremely tight. He wonders if there is anything in the job description about knowing the intricacies of state and federal grant opportunities. Duncan said it says one of the main functions of the position is researching grant and funding opportunities and writing and administering grants. This is a part-time 3 day a week position and there is a lot of demand for services from the CEDS. The board discovered that we need to set priorities so the person doesn't become overburdened. The selectboard is supposed to set annual priorities for the position. Committees come to the selectboard to request assistance from the CEDS.

Charles asked if assistance from the CEDS will be restricted to town committees. His nonprofit has gotten assistance from Randall and Mike Mignone's business is being helped. He wants to make

sure the CEDS will still be able to help with those things and he wants to know who that person answers to.

Eben said the CEDS answers to the board as it is now. Part of the reason for that is to reign in what they are working on if it gets out of control. Helping businesses is a slippery slope but key partner businesses have always been supported by town government. Duncan said he views the CEDS as a resource for local businesses to tell them what agency might be able to help them. He doesn't think the town will offer direct financial or technical assistance other than revolving loan funds.

Charles asked about assistance for nonprofits. Duncan said he doesn't see those as different from businesses. A few years ago a consortium was looking into whether a wood pellet factory could be established in Johnson. We provided a basis level of assistance with suggestions of where they could go for help. Charles said the difference between a business and a nonprofit is that a for profit business doesn't necessarily need to be for the betterment of the community, but a nonprofit does.

Duncan said he thinks it is appropriate for the CEDS to direct a nonprofit or business to people they can talk to, like Randall did.

Peter said before we post for the permanent position he wants to know if we are still talking about hiring a third party consultant to evaluate all of the town's positions. Duncan said he thinks we should look at that before posting the position. Another benefit of hiring an interim is that it gives us more flexibility to evaluate our needs. Eben said as an individual he doesn't agree about waiting to hire for the permanent position.

Adrienne asked if the CEDS can be remote. Duncan said Randall did a significant amount of his work remotely. One of the people who may be interested in the interim position is residing out of state and would not be able to come in person, but could participate in meetings remotely. Adrienne said she thinks it is fine for the temporary position to be remote but for the future she thinks it makes more sense to have someone here in the community who can be in the office at least a couple of days a week. Maybe we would require that they go to committee meetings every once in a while.

Adrienne said she agrees that if we do decide to get a consultant we shouldn't put out the job posting for the CEDS before the consultant looks at the bigger picture of all roles.

Jesse Whitworth said to him the CEDS is a revenue generating position. It seems like a required function. He suggested the board might consider alternative compensation arrangements like offering a performance bonus so the more money they bring in, the more they get paid.

Kathy Black asked about a grant for recreational support. She believes it was housed at the EPA. It did not provide money, just advising and community hearings to help prioritize recreation projects. Johnson was a finalist. Eben said we got an email about it. Final selection is this summer. Kathy said it is focused on getting town input on what to do with lands and buyout properties. It would be beneficial to receive the grant.

Kathy said through the FEMA long term recovery plan, for every project that gets mentioned they have someone researching funding sources for those projects. She was told they were focused on non-governmental sources because there is no much unknown about government grants. The EPA

grant provides coordination and evaluation and community input and comes with recommendations about potential funding sources.

Kathy said her experience on a Reimagine Johnson task force has been that there is a tremendous amount of interest in participating. Reimagine Johnson is a rich source of volunteers but we need prioritization to help decide how to use limited resources.

Duncan said Randall's computer is not backed up to the server. He and Rosemary tried to figure out if it could be. Randall indicated it is backed up on a cloud server somewhere. Rosemary indicated this is a Tech Group issue. He thinks we need to use the Tech Group to get the computer backed up. Randall's email needs to be forwarded to someone. That is also a Tech Group issue.

Tom said when Randall started and a new computer was purchased it was supposed to have a drive set up that was attached to the server and could be accessed by Randall and Rosemary. We paid the Tech Group for that. The board should decide who should have access to Randall's folders on the server. Tom can probably have the backup issue remedied at no cost because we paid the Tech Group to connect Randall's computer to the server every time he was in the office. Duncan said there is a file on the server software but no files saved to it. Maybe Tom can figure out how to do it but Rosemary could not figure out the path to save to the server. Tom said it may be that Randall didn't understand the process of how to save things to the server. He can work on trying to move the files to the server and he will take care of the email question. The board agreed that Randall's emails should be forwarded to the selectboard and Tom. Duncan said there should probably be an auto-reply message saying he is no longer employed here. Tom said he will work with Adrienne on that.

5. *Consider Seeking Consultant*

Eben asked if the board wants to hire a consulting firm to evaluate all the services we have and see where they are lacking or where we are overspending. Mike said yes. Adrienne asked about the possibility of VLCT doing it. Duncan said they can do it. When we were previously searching for a town administrator and CEDS, VLCT put a bid in and they were the highest bidder. Eben said they also said that because they work for all the towns they would not solicit potential candidates from other towns. Peter said he doesn't know that we are looking for someone to solicit employees. Adrienne said they specifically offer the type of consulting we want.

Duncan said he thinks we need to structure what we are looking for in the study. There are some firms that would be good if we were looking for wage salary surveys. He thinks salary could be part of what the consultant looks at but he is more interested in someone analyzing what we are doing, how we are doing it and whether we have the right number of people doing it. Adrienne said she thinks it would be beneficial for board members to conduct their own research as well. Peter said VLCT's Municipal Assistance Center may be able to provide the kind of person we are looking for. He can reach out to them.

Eben asked what we want for deliverables. Peter said he thinks we want a comprehensive look at the structure of town government and town employees, with an eye toward efficiencies. Adrienne agreed. She wants multiple options – the ideal structure, a practical structure and the minimum structure. Duncan said his interest is primarily in analysis of what we have right now and a recommendation for what the most efficient operation would be. Mike would like to know more about some of the unknowns we are facing, like the impact of the buyouts. We are going to discuss tonight whether we want a public works department or a highway department. He thinks if we get

figures they may prove that we can't afford a fifth highway employee. Doug Molde said he thinks the town should talk about how employees integrate with town committees. Eben said he wouldn't mind knowing how we compare to other towns with similar population, road mileage, grand list, etc. He would be interested in how our budget and employee hours compare, and in recommendations for efficiency. Paul Warden asked if there is any opportunity to look at what things other towns are doing that we are not doing. Jesse Whitworth said efficiency is important but effectiveness is also important – how well the government is doing at making people's lives better by giving them what they need. He suggests also looking at effectiveness in doing the things the town is trying to do and in how we compare in effectiveness to other towns. Charles Flaum agreed.

Eben suggested that board members each bring 5 suggested bullet points for deliverables to the next meeting. Board members agreed.

6. Other Business

Adrienne said Jeanne Engel won a Marvin Award. The awards ceremony is tomorrow if anyone wants to come.

Paul Warden said LCPC will be hosting a session with SLR about the hydrologic modeling they have been doing. It will be July 7 at the school.

7. Executive Session

It was agreed that no executive session was needed.

8. Public Works vs. Highway Department

Adrienne asked if we are going to stop talking about public works vs. highway until we get the consultant report. Mike said that is what he thinks we should do.

Duncan said our town doesn't have traditional public works services. He would like the highway crew to continue to provide services to committees to the extent they are able to. The board has given Jason authority to determine whether and when he has time to do work for committees. He doesn't see any reason to change that. Peter said he thinks that is a good way to proceed for now.

Doug said his understanding from talking to Jason is that with only 4 employees Jason can't provide services to committees. Duncan said if a grant is paying for a project the board may decide to hire someone from outside to do the work – trucking material removed from Holmes Meadow, for example. If there is a pressing need for a group to have something done they can always come to the selectboard and if it sounds like a high priority the selectboard can direct the highway crew to do it. It might be dependent on Jason's schedule.

Doug said with 5 people the crew had the ability to do work for committees. It was part of a toolkit to accomplish effectiveness in government. Without someone who is available with a truck committees may not be able to get their work done. Duncan asked how it got done in the past when we had 4 highway employees. An efficiency /effectiveness study may suggest that we should have another employee who can help committees but it may not look like a traditional fifth highway employee. There might be a different job description. That is part of the reason doing an efficiency/effectiveness study makes sense. In the short term there probably will be impact on committees.

Sue Lovering said it seems Jason is tied up for 3 months hauling gravel and not doing much else. Tom said gravel hauling will only take 2 more weeks.

Sue asked what a group should do if they need something from the highway crew. Eben said he thinks it is situation dependent. Duncan said if there is a grant to pay for the work, maybe it is best to contract for the service. Maybe volunteers could do some work.

Tom said right now the town is renting an excavator that is not being used. As soon as the work in the gravel pit is done the priority will be ditching. Committees can ask if they have needs but the highway department has 2 major grant funded projects to complete and major ditching that needs to be done and if they are paying for the excavator and not using it, that is taxpayer money lost. The crew will be tied up for a couple of months. He and Jason will help people problem solve.

Lynda Hill said to her the point of having grant money is that it allows contracting out for work and not using in-house resources. Duncan said that also provides employment for local contractors. Tom said we can charge grants for our time, so it becomes a revenue source. But we have to balance that against the work the crew is being taken away from.

Paul asked, if a group has a new project who do they call as a first step? Eben said has been Jason. Paul said he thinks maybe that is not the best approach now that Jason is short-handed. Eben said he would have to talk to Jason.

Sue Lovering said Jason had told the Tree Board he could finish the paths at the arboretum in the fall after the grant work is done. She would like to know if they can plan on that.

9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:53.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths