

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, JUNE 2, 2025

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

Others: Tom Galinat, Rosemary Audibert, Charles Flaum, Paul Warden, Lois Frey, Scott Meyer, Sue Lovering, Noel Dodge

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call Meeting to Order*

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:01.

2. *Consider Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda*

Adrienne added the resignation of Johna Keefe from the Beautification Committee. Eben said items 14 and 15 should be swapped. Tom added a resignation from the Skatepark Committee, reviewing and approving the sheriff's contract, and an agreement with DuBois & King for Johnson downtown visioning. Duncan added designation of someone to participate in a meeting on Wednesday with Mumley on the industrial park project. He noted that the Interlocal Signature Delegation item also includes asking the board to approve a job description and offer letter.

3. *Public Comment*

Charles Flaum said he thought Randall Szott did an amazing job. He was a great attribute to Johnson. His connections were very helpful. Charles is chairing a new nonprofit to do marketing for the town and it could not have gotten off the ground without Randall. Randall set up appointments for them and helped them meet people. He hopes the selectboard will not take long to get someone else to fill Randall's position. It is really important for the town to have someone like him, though we won't get someone else with his connections.

Paul Warden said he agrees with Charles. He noted that the Planning Commission is in support of the visioning project Tom mentioned.

4. *Selectboard Updates and/or Concerns*

Eben said with the departure of the Community and Economic Development Specialist we should probably schedule a special meeting for more in depth conversation on that. It was agreed to schedule a special meeting for June 9 at 6:30 downstairs in the municipal building.

Duncan said he thinks the board owes Eben thanks because he went out on Saturday on his own time and posted the agenda so this meeting would be properly warned. Board members thanked Eben.

5. *Consent Agenda*

The consent agenda consisted of the minutes of May 5/May 12 and May 19, appointment of Paul Warden as the representative to Lamoille Fibernet, and acceptance of the resignation of Randall Szott as Community and Economic Development Specialist. **Adrienne moved and Mike seconded to approve the consent agenda.** Duncan said he concurs with Charles' opinion. He was said to see Randall submit his resignation. He is very talented and we should extend our thanks to him. **The motion was passed.**

6. *Beautification Committee Resignation*

Peter moved to accept the resignation of Johna Keefe from the Beautification Committee with thanks, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.

7. *Skatepark Committee Resignation*

Mike moved to accept the resignation of James Whitehill from the Skatepark Committee with thanks, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed

8. *Clerk & Treasurer's Report: Warrants, Licenses and Any Action Items*

Rosemary said we have spent 81.33% of budget. A couple of large capital equipment notes will come due in June. We will need to transfer money from the capital equipment fund. We received \$34,687 from the library grant.

Duncan asked if requests for reimbursement have been submitted for all the invoices we have received. Tom said yes. There have been some requests for true-ups. We paid for the utility work based on estimates and now that the work has been done we may owe them more money or they may owe us money. We need the true-ups before we can get reimbursement.

Rosemary said the tax sale will be in December or early fall. The percentage of the current year's taxes collected is about on par with the past 2 years. Tom asked if the buyout properties are paying taxes. Rosemary said some are.

Adrienne asked about recently issued form based code permits. Tom said the most recent was for the library, in March.

9. *Library Relocation*

Tom said the walls were being poured today. We are 2 weeks from the deadline to get the building set down. That is planned to happen the week of June 16. The architect is close to having bid documents for the civil engineering work. The bid documents for the mechanical work should also be done soon. Hopefully they will be ready by the first July meeting.

Duncan said he assumes the core tests on the footings met the minimum requirements. Peter said they did. They are expecting the core sample on the pouring today to exceed what is needed. Tom said the footings were oversized for the worst case scenario to avoid the engineering cost and time to determine what size was needed.

10. *Highway 5th Employee*

Tom said there was a request to put this on the agenda so the board could make a formal motion about hiring or not hiring a 5th employee.

Mike moved to table this item until the board has further information. We asked for information on the number of highway employees in towns with comparable size and mileage to Johnson but haven't received it. We should wait until we have that information before making a final decision. **Duncan seconded.**

Duncan said on June 9 when we talk about the CEDS position he thinks he is going to recommend hiring a neutral third party consultant to evaluate all of the town's positions. The 5th highway employee could be one of them. There are numerous opportunities for us to think about perhaps doing things differently. We can at least have current employee levels and job descriptions evaluated. That is why he is supporting the motion to table. Tom said he thinks the consultant idea is a good one.

Tom said just for work on town roads it is clear that we should have 4 highway employees. Five employees for 40 miles of road looks high. But the employees do more than just take care of roads. A fundamental decision for the board is whether we want a highway department or a public works

department. If we want just a highway department we need 4 employees. If we want a public works department maybe we should take over sidewalks and storm drains from the village and even hire 6 employees. We need to decide the path we want to take before comparing to other towns so he knows whether to compare public works employees or highway employees. Duncan said in either case he thinks the decision to hire a 5th employee is premature.

Peter said one reason he wanted the board to revisit this tonight is that he doesn't think we did a good enough job of considering the impact of where we were headed at the last meeting. We didn't fully consider the impact on town committees and volunteers. Eben said we need to consider all impacts, including the cost impacts of the property buyouts.

Tom asked if the board wants him to compare our highway department to other highway departments or compare to public works departments as well. Eben said it might be easier to compare highway employees to highway employees and separately note how many hours our employees spend doing work for committees.

Tom said the board should be mindful that we have an agreement with Dale Percy to sell gravel from our pit. We bought all the sand we need for next winter already. We budgeted \$50K for sand and spent \$45K more than that because we anticipated having 5 employees and being able to process and haul gravel from our pit to sell to Percy before July 1. If that is not happening we will be \$45K over budget on that line. But we will have savings of \$35K from not paying a 5th employee. Usually employees haul during mud season but they didn't have time to work in the pit. We were going to sell gravel to make up for some of the cost of buying sand.

Duncan asked how many cubic yards we are talking about. Tom said if we have 3 people working they can haul about 18 loads a day, so it would be about 2 ½ weeks of work. They could get that done but in the meantime other projects – grading and ditch work – would not be happening. He suggested that the board could direct them to work on hauling gravel before starting summer projects.

Mike and Duncan discussed rescinding the signatures on the invoices already signed for sand and using gravel sales to cover the cost.

The motion was passed.

Eben asked if the board agrees that Tom should compare our town's highway department to other towns' highway departments and also look at time sheets to see how many hours of work were done for committees. Duncan asked how good the employees were about accurately recording time on their timesheets. Tom said he would guess that unless they were working on a grant-funded project it may not be very accurate. Mike said our responsibility as a town is to maintain highways. Everything else the crew does is extra. He would like a highway to highway comparison.

Sue Lovering said it seems like by concentrating on a highway to highway comparison the board is ditching any consideration of public works. There would be nothing in town without what volunteers have built. The work of the Historical Society, the Tree Board, the Rail Trail Committee, etc. is all worth money. Right now we are losing taxes but if this town is going to grow, volunteers need the town's help. She hopes the board keeps that in mind. Mike said a lot of people in the community struggle to pay taxes. He doesn't want to put more burden on them. Sue

said she understands, but we need people who want to start businesses. Duncan said it may be worth asking people at town meeting about this. People used to get things done by getting together and volunteering their labor and equipment. Sue said there are some things volunteers can't do, like putting in paths at the arboretum. Duncan noted that the arboretum hired a private contractor for some work. Sue said that was done with grant funds. Noel Dodge said in the past the Tree Board has let Jason know what they need when he is able to do it and he has figured out when it makes sense to do the work. Duncan said in the past when we knew the highway department couldn't help, things still got done. Peter said volunteers are dwindling now. Adrienne said younger volunteers nowadays don't have the money to have the kind of equipment they may have had in the past. Peter said he feels that we have yet to really consider the repercussions of having 4 vs. 5 employees – not just in terms of budget but in terms of ability to help the volunteer groups.

Duncan said he thinks there may be a need for a person to assist community groups, but that may look different from having a fifth highway employee. Tom said he thinks it would be good to have clarity on what the board wants employees to do if we have a fifth employee.

Eben asked if Rosemary remembers what the justification was for hiring a 5th highway employee. Rosemary said a big part of it was allowing employees to have time off without being on call.

Noel asked if anyone has thought about a part-time employee just for the summer. Rosemary, Eben and Duncan said there used to be a part-time employee, but in winter, not summer.

Peter said he thinks if we are going to do a highway to highway comparison with other towns we should also do a public works to public works comparison. Duncan said he doesn't know how we can do that when towns that have a public works department usually are handling water, sewer, sidewalks, storm drains, etc. Tom said that is what he is struggling with. All highway departments do pretty much the same things, but compared to other public works departments we have public works lite.

Duncan said Adrienne might have a good point. She had suggested earlier that having Tom do this comparison might be unnecessarily creating work for him when the question would be answered if we hire an efficiency consultant. Eben said he thinks if a highway to highway comparison is easy, Tom should do that. It gives us data. The board agreed to that.

It was agreed that Tom should ask Jason to have his crew spend a couple of weeks working at the gravel pit to pay for the sand we bought.

11. Industrial Park

Duncan said there will be a meeting with LCPC and Mumley on Wednesday. He thinks it is important to keep the project going. He volunteered to participate. **Adrienne moved to authorize Duncan to represent the town at the upcoming meeting on the industrial park, Peter seconded and the motion was passed with Duncan abstaining.**

12. Interlocal Agreement Signature Delegation and Approval of Amendments to Assessor Job Description

Duncan moved to approve the interlocal agreement by and between the Towns of Johnson, Hyde Park, St. George, Berkshire and Sheldon for shared assessor services serving the five municipalities for a term beginning July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 unless extended in writing by all parties, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

Peter moved to accept the amendments to the Assessor Level 1 job description, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.

Mike moved to authorize Duncan or the town administrator to sign the interlocal agreement for shared assessor services and the offer of employment letter for the assessor, Peter seconded and the motion was passed with Duncan abstaining.

13. Committee Restructuring Meeting Summary and Recommendations

Adrienne said last Wednesday there was a meeting with most chairs of committees and commissions as well as anyone from public or the committees that wanted to attend. It was a really collaborative meeting. The goal was to discuss restructuring committees and to prioritize all the projects and ideas groups would like to get funding for. She would like to present information from the meeting at the next selectboard meeting or the one after. The board agreed the next meeting would be a good time for that.

Tom thanked Adrienne for organizing the meeting. The Vermont Council on Rural Development helped facilitate. People from Fletcher came to observe the process.

14. Committee Communication Checklist/Manual

Adrienne handed out a draft checklist/manual for committees, as suggested by Lois Frey at the last meeting. She will email copies to the board. She suggested people can send her any comments on it.

15. Ted Alexander Welcome Center Repairs RFP

Tom said we only got one bid for the Welcome Center repairs. It was \$16,875 from Back Forty Builders. The Rail Trail Committee budgeted \$12,800 for the work. He spoke to Doug Molde, who told him the committee does have enough funds to pay the additional \$4K, but it might affect other projects they had planned. There is no match needed from the town.

Peter moved to accept the \$16,875 bid from Back Forty Builders for improvements to the Ted Alexander Welcome Center, contingent on approval by the Rail Trail Committee, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed with Mike opposed. Mike said he was opposed because he likes to get more than one bid.

16. Old Business

Scott Meyer asked where the town is with buyout property planning. Tom said we are still waiting to see what properties go through buyouts. At any time a property owner can withdraw their application. We are expecting deeds to start being transferred within 6 months. Once the properties are in hand then the board will probably start researching what we can and can't do with them. Duncan said Vermont Emergency Management has approved 16 total buyouts, not including the Pomerleau property. Tom said the Pomerleau buyout is going through a different process with a different funding path. Tom noted that appraisals of the properties have begun.

Scott asked if people are still paying full property taxes on the properties. Tom said he believes taxes on some have been reduced based on decreases in value and some are still paying the full amount. Duncan said the assessor lowered the values of some properties and some property owners grieved their assessments.

Duncan asked if the RFP for cemetery maintenance went out. Tom said yes, he sent it to one person and it is on the town website. He wants to reach out to the Old Cemetery Association for a list of people who do this work. Duncan named a couple of people Tom could send the RFP to.

17. DuBois & King Visioning Contract Signature Authorization

Tom said he had emailed the contract to the board Saturday. This would be for DuBois & King to make renderings of proposed projects so the public can visualize them. The contract is for \$6400. LCPC has already applied for and received a \$5K grant to cover part of the cost. The Vermont Community Foundation has said they will cover the \$1400 gap, so there is zero match for the town.

Duncan said LCPC is getting a lot of questions and requests for services from the Reimagine Johnson task forces. They can't really deal with those. Is there a way to try and blend this work with the work of the task forces? There is not a lot of communication between the selectboard and the task forces. As an example, he heard that the economic group communicated directly with Ernie Pomerleau and asked him not to participate in a buyout. Adrienne said that communication was by a resident, not a task force. Duncan said in his opinion no group should be in communication with Ernie Pomerleau asking him not to take the buyout because the town is going to do something different with the property. Is there going to be an attempt to try to bring ideas from Reimagine Johnson into the DuBois & King process?

Paul Warden said the Planning Commission has been in touch with LCPC about the continuation of the Reimagine Johnson effort. There will be public meetings where people will be invited to talk about things like FEMA and non-FEMA uses of the Sterling Market property. There will be graphic depictions of ideas that come out of the meetings. This visioning project is a small one. It is not taking over or redirecting the Reimagine Johnson effort.

Duncan said he thinks this is a good idea but he also wants to try to bring the process to some sort of logical nexus where this board and Reimagine Johnson task forces are not working at cross purposes. Adrienne said that was part of the intention of the committee restructuring meeting.

Adrienne said she thinks the proposal from DuBois & King looks wonderful. It looks like they will provide a lot for the cost of the grant. **Adrienne moved to approve the Johnson Visioning Design and Community Engagement Support agreement for services by and between DuBois & King, Inc. and the Town of Johnson and to authorize Tom to sign the agreement, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.**

18. Sheriff's Department Contract

Eben said the contract is for the amount that was in the budget. The language is the same as in previous years' contracts. He would like language in it similar to the language in the NEMS contract about ownership upon termination. Duncan agreed. But this is a contract between 3 towns and this is a late date to try to make changes to the draft contract. Eben said they are 3 independent contracts. But maybe this is something to think about for a future year. Duncan said maybe we should rethink the contract. Maybe there could be a better county-wide solution. But he advocates signing this contract tonight and having a broader discussion in the future.

Duncan moved and Peter seconded to sign the contract with the Lamoille County Sheriff's Department for \$569,338 for patrol services and \$75,464 for communications.

Duncan asked how the patrol on School Street turned out. Tom said the sheriff's department is supposed to put a speed cart there today or tomorrow. He told them what we wanted as far as patrol. They may not be able to get there every day. For instance, today they had a drug-related DUI. That takes an officer away from patrol for processing and it takes priority. Mike said they can

still provide 14 days of patrol even if the days are not all consecutive. They can be told that is what we want.

The motion was passed with Adrienne opposed. She said she didn't feel she had enough time to look at the contract.

19. *Executive Sessions*

Peter moved to go into executive session for the negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options in accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(2) as well as an executive session for employment evaluation in accordance with 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3), with Rosemary and Tom invited initially and leaving during the session. Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed at 8:22. The board consented out of executive session at 9:25

20. *Adjourn*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:26.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths