

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, AUGUST 7, 2025

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Adrienne Parker, Eben Patch
Others: Paul Warden, Charles Flaum, Charles Gallanter, Scott Meyer, Lois Frey

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call Meeting to Order*

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:00.

2. *Consider Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda*

It was agreed to add an executive session at the end of the meeting to discuss negotiating or securing real estate.

3. *Public Comment*

Charles Flaum said at the last selectboard meeting Tom Galinat said he had been talking to Ernie Pomerleau about what will happen to his property. He knows the town applied for a \$6 million grant to implement Adrienne's idea. He wants to know if the board is committed to doing outreach to the community before any decision is made and if the board is willing to incorporate citizens in the design process for the supermarket property after the building is taken down.

Adrienne said we didn't get the congressional funding we applied for.

Charles asked if the board will do outreach to the community to see what they would like to see there. Adrienne said the Planning Commission has something scheduled in September. Paul Warden said the Johnson visioning meeting is scheduled for September 4. The purpose is to get public input on how people see the downtown, and the Pomerleau property is one of the properties to be discussed. Nothing discussed will be binding on the selectboard. After this initial meeting the consultants will develop a map which will be presented to the public and given to the selectboard. Paul envisions what comes after the public meeting as a Planning Commission effort with public input.

Board members agreed they would want public input. Charles asked Paul and Charles Gallanter if they agree as well. Paul said yes. Charles Gallanter said we will see what bubbles up.

Scott Meyer said he was hoping for a more definite statement from the board that the public will be involved. Eben said he is willing to have a public hearing when the process goes through. He doesn't know when the town will possess the property. Eben and Adrienne pointed out that a different pot of money would pay for the Sterling Market buyout as opposed to the other buyouts, so the buyout process for that property is behind the process for the other buyouts. Scott asked if this buyout money has the same restrictions. Eben said he thinks so. Mike said there are also issues to be worked out with the bank. The bank needs a parking area. He would never make a decision without public input. He thinks there will be a lot of thought about any decision. Eben said we have talked about the potential for brownfield remediation being needed for the property.

4. Public Question and Answer Session for All Candidates

Eben asked the candidates to introduce themselves. Paul Warden said he and wife have lived in Johnson for more than 30 years. They raised 2 sons here. They have been involved in town activities in a variety of ways over the years. His wife Margo was on the selectboard and the school board. He was involved in the rec program coaching soccer and he has been on the Planning Commission for 11 years, the last 4 or 5 as chair. He is also the Johnson representative to Lamoille FiberNet. He is on a number of committees there.

Charles Gallanter said he lives in the house his parents bought before he was born, so he has been in Johnson for more than 75 years. This is the fourth time he has put in his name as a candidate for the selectboard. He has petitioned his way onto the ballot twice. He received a high number of votes, indicating support from the community.

Scott asked the candidates what they think they can do for the selectboard. Charles said he has a business background. One of the biggest things the selectboard does is prepare the budget. He has experience analyzing where money comes from and goes to. The tax base is shrinking with the buyouts. We need to consider where to trim or find other sources of revenue. We won't get the grant money we have gotten in the past. He doesn't think the state PILOT payments we have received are sustainable. He thinks we need to take a hard look at where we spend our money. That is one of his top priorities, along with roads, safety and public health. He is a big supporter of Lamoille Home Health and Hospice. They are not funded in the town's general budget but he thinks they should be. We have to be careful looking at law enforcement. He is opposed to policing for profit. A major portion of the budget is police. Another is roads. Another issue coming up is that we are losing our town and village clerk and treasurer. We need to consider how to deal with that.

Paul said he also has a business background but, more importantly, his time on the Planning Commission and the Lamoille FiberNet board gives him experience with the functioning of a board. He thinks an environment of open communication is important, as is a supportive environment among board members. He thinks this is the time to think big about improvements to Johnson. He thinks Johnson's best days are ahead of it. He doesn't think the road to prosperity lies in budget cuts. He thinks we need to aggressively pursue ideas like the ones coming from the Recreation Economy Task Force.

Lois Frey said she has noticed that the selectboard has a lot of executive sessions for personnel evaluation. She asked what kind of experience the candidates have with personnel and evaluation.

Paul said in his current position working at a microbiology company in Williston he does the hiring and firing. He is the top person at his local office. He does hiring interviews with a committee. He thinks it is important to have regular and frank dialog with employees. He thinks a review every 6 months is a bad idea. When issues occur they should be addressed head on and they should be fixed or there should be a change in personnel.

Charles said he was a union contractor and he chaired the negotiating committee when contractors negotiated with the union. He was elected chair of a joint committee established to review grievances. The union people were comfortable with his objectivity. He thinks most of

the decisions were made collectively. Each particular situation needs to be dealt with on its own merits, depending on the facts of the case. He is college educated and an entrepreneur. He has a lot of empathy for the working poor, which is most employees.

Charles Flaum said he knows one of Charles Gallanter's pet peeves is form based code. If there is something Charles would like to address about that now, he would like to hear it. Or if there is something else Charles would like to focus on, he would like to know that. What would Charles want to focus on?

Charles Gallanter said repeal of form based code. Charles Flaum asked why. Charles G. said currently we have it and we don't enforce it. We have work going on with no permits. Why have an ordinance that is not enforced? Charles F. asked what buildings he is referring to. Charles G. said when you are doing any work on a building you must obtain a permit, according to form based code. For instance, work is being done on a building on Pearl Street that has the front jacked up.

Charles F. asked what specifically Paul would focus on. Paul said he would not repeal form based code. He thinks it will be important as the state is doing redistricting of downtown designations to have some zoning for those areas. He would make smaller tweaks, such as allowing exemptions for flood mitigation.

Charles F. asked if there is anything else that is very important that he would like to address. Paul said he thought Charles F. was asking about form based code specifically. Charles G. said that is what he thought as well. He thinks we need to look at our income stream and expenses and readdress our priorities. That is his top priority.

Charles F. asked if Charles G. believes the future of the town is one of contraction or growth. Charles G. said the town is contracting. It's a fact. We are losing properties and we are not building housing to replace it. He is hopeful but not optimistic that things will bubble out of the Reimagine Johnson task forces.

Charles F. said the selectboard is talking to DEW about the possibility of building. Supposing that money took the place of the money on the tax rolls that used to come from the buyout properties, so things stayed even. Would Charles G. still be in favor of solely tightening the budget? Or trying to grow the town more? What is his vision if the tax base stays the same?

Charles G. said we have the industrial park to complete. That is the major capital project. The library is well on its way to completion. One advantage Johnson has for economic development is that we are an enterprise zone. That has substantial federal tax benefits. No one talks about it. He believes we need to find a developer partner to help us with the industrial park. No one on the selectboard is a developer.

Charles F. asked Paul to answer the same question. Paul said his vision is growth – for the industrial park, the recreation economy and cultural events. He sees Johnson becoming more and more a place people want to come to.

Scott asked if either of the candidates has authored or co-authored a grant application and what the success rate was. Paul said he played a minor role in helping to write the Northern Border grant application. He has written several grants in his scientific role. Applying for grants requires trying to figure out what they are looking for and making sure the proposal is tailored to that.

Charles G. said he never has applied for a grant and never intends to. He thinks it is important to decide what you want to do first and have a plan. For the Main Street project, a plan was in place before the grant application. He thinks that is preferable to seeing a grant, applying for it and doing whatever it is for. In his experience in the private sector, companies would try for tax benefits and go broke because they were not planning out what they wanted to do but taking the money and doing what the government told them they could do.

Charles F. asked if Paul agrees with what Charles G. just said. Paul said yes, in general. We should not take grants willy-nilly. There should be some rationale behind it. But he doesn't think we can have every possible project planned out and then wait for money to come along. We need to do a little bit of both.

Eben said the board had talked about the selectboard interviews being in executive session. He noted that there are 17 properties the board has approved for buyout applications. The property values total just below \$3.5 million. That would mean the effect on the grand list would be about \$35K. Our grand list is about \$2.4 million. Charles F. asked how much tax revenue we are going to lose. Charles G. said about 1.5%. Eben said if the voters approve the same budget, the town would not lose any tax revenue. There would just be a higher burden on each taxpayer. Charles G. said taxes will be 1.5% higher because they will be spread among fewer people.

5. ***Interview Candidates for the Vacant Seat on the Selectboard***

Adrienne moved to go into executive session for candidate interviews under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3), Mike seconded and the motion was passed at 6:41. It was agreed that the candidates would be invited in one at a time.

The board consented out of executive session at 8:41.

Peter moved to appoint Paul Warden to the vacant selectboard seat until town meeting 2026, for the reason of his interview responses, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed with Mike opposed. Mike said he hates to see Paul leave the Planning Commission.

6. ***Executive Session – Real Estate***

Mike moved to go into executive session for negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(2), with Paul Warden invited to remain, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed at 8:43.

The board consented out of executive session at 8:59. No further action was taken.

7. ***Adjourn***

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00.