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

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Adrienne Parker, Eben Patch, Paul Warden
Others: Tom Galinat, Lois Frey, Carrie Johnson, Art Klugo

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. ***Site Visits***
   Eben called the meeting to order at 4:32 for the site visit to TH-22. Tom Galinat, Dan Lenel, Eben, Adrienne and Paul were present. Peter Hammond and Steve Burns arrived at 4:45. Inspection of TH-23 began at 4:49. Inspections of TH-22 and TH-23 were closed at 5:13. The inspection of TH-21 began at 5:27. Chris Stearns arrived at 5:41. The inspection closed at 5:49.
2. ***Hearing for Reclassification of TH-21, TH-22, TH-23***
   The hearing was called to order at 6:01. All board members were present. No members of the public were present initially. Eben read into the record the times the site visits started and ended and the names of those present at the site visits.

   Dan Lenel arrived at 6:07. He asked the reason for the reclassification. Tom said the cost of maintenance required by the Municipal Roads General Permit outweighed the services provided to the residents.

   Dan asked if anything will change other than plans to maintain the roads. Tom said no.

   Dan asked, there are no plans to throw the roads up? Eben said we have not talked about throwing up any town rights of way. Dan suggested throwing up TH-23. He said it doesn't serve any purpose for anyone anymore.

   Mike said he has been on all these roads numerous times but could not make it to the site visits today. All the times he has been on the roads could be considered inspection, though not an official one.

   The board waited until 6:15 to enter deliberations in order to give other members of the public time to show up. The board entered deliberations at 6:15.
3. ***Call Regular Meeting to Order***
   Eben called the meeting to order at 6:33.
4. ***Consider Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda***
   Eben said he would bring up a question related to salt under Selectboard Updates and/or Concerns. Mike said he would bring up gas prices. Eben added approval of an Errors and Omissions form.
5. ***Review Invoices and Orders***
   Mike asked about the AT&T charge for the car charging station. Rosemary said the town has an account with AT&T. There are other phones on it in addition to the charging station. Tom and board members said the car charger should be removed from the account.

6. ***Public Comment***
Lois Frey asked what the detour signs on Foote Brook Rd. and Clay Hill Rd. are for. Eben said there is a culvert where Foote Brook crosses Foote Brook Rd. that is being replaced under a grant from the Lamoille County Conservation District. It is being changed to a live bottom culvert. There should have been information about the project on the town Facebook page and Front Porch Forum. The road will be closed for about a month for the project. Tom said work started on the project today. There was miscommunication between the Lamoille County Conservation District, the contractor and the town. There will be information posted on Front Porch Forum. Lois asked for clarification on exactly where the project is taking place. Tom said it is about 50 yards from the intersection of Foote Brook Rd. and Plot Rd., so it is not possible to drive far down Foote Brook Rd. coming from Plot Rd. Eben said it is possible to drive all the way through on Plot Rd. Lois said the signs aren't clear.

7. ***Selectboard Updates and/or Concerns***
Mike said it has bothered him for a while that gas is 10-15 cents cheaper per gallon in Cambridge or on the north end of 100C than it is in the Village of Johnson. Some of the same people sell gas cheaper in adjoining communities. He doesn't understand why they can't sell it cheaper here. But he doesn't know what could be done about it. Eben said he doesn't know what we can do about it. Mike said based on the price for crude oil, it seems like it should be cheaper. Paul said prices are similar in Newport. He said he is not sure what we can do. Adrienne asked if we could ask the state to investigate price gouging. Mike said he is not sure if we would want to do that.

Eben said Tom is asking the board for direction about whether to go out to bid for salt or go with the state bid. He thinks we should go out to bid. Mike said we always go out to bid. Tom said the state hasn't put the contract out to bid yet for our district. Under the current state contract there is no obligation for it to be honored for municipalities. It is voluntary for the vendor to honor it. We might be able to buy salt under the state contract. Eben said the state will get it for $20 a ton less. Tom said historically towns could get the same bid rate as the state, but last year we found out that the state contract couldn't be honored for municipalities. Paul asked, if we go out to bid, are we obligated to go with the low bidder? Eben said we can reject any or all bids. Tom said delaying a decision is to our benefit, because we can compare any bids we get to the state price. The board agreed to go out to bid and also have Tom verify with the state whether we can get the state contract price.

Adrienne said she has gotten feedback from people who want us to post more updates – maybe monthly or every other month updates on Front Porch Forum, the town website and Facebook. She would be happy to do that every month. She is thinking of posts that would be a couple of paragraphs or less. Eben said we have an employee to do that. Tom said he has been thinking maybe he could copy and paste motions and decisions from the minutes and post them on Front Porch Forum with a quick one or two paragraph synopsis of the meeting. Adrienne asked if he thinks he has the capacity to do that. Tom said yes. Paul suggested maybe he could include a link to the minutes. Mike said if we include a link to the website then people get used to going to it.

Peter said he wanted to give a shout out to all the people who planned the final pizza night and community feast. There were many people there. The food was abundant and good spirit was even more abundant. There was good music. It was a great event, one of the things that make Johnson a special place.

8. ***Consent Agenda***

The consent agenda consisted of the minutes of August 4, August 7 and August 18, acceptance of Paul Warden's resignation from the Planning Commission and signature of the LCPC delegation form for Paul Warden as the town's representative. **Mike moved to approve the consent agenda and the motion was seconded and passed with Paul abstaining.**

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

Rosemary asked if she should contact Jim Barlow, a former staff attorney for VLCT, about handling our tax sale. Eben said Stitzel Page & Fletcher does not want to handle our tax sales as it could be a conflict of interest. Mike said he has been to a tax sale run by Jim Barlow. He did an excellent job. He thinks the town would be pleased with his expertise. **Mike moved to direct Rosemary to contact Jim Barlow about handling town tax sales, Paul seconded and the motion was passed.**

Rosemary said we received a little over $7K for opiate remediation from a national opioid settlement. Tom said we can use the money in town for an organization such as Jenna's Promise or by default it goes to the state. Recipients have to meet certain guidelines. He needs to check on what the guidelines are. There should be money coming from other settlements in the future. It was agreed that Tom should determine who the eligible recipients are and the board can decide at a future meeting how to allocate the funds. Tom said it will probably be several years before we see the other two settlements.

10. ***Errors and Omissions***

Rosemary described a change to the 2025 grand list due to a property sale. **Mike moved to accept the grand list errors and omissions form as presented, Paul seconded and the motion was passed.**

11. ***Road Foreman Report and Any Action Items***

Eben said two quotes were received for a welder the foreman wants to buy. Both were exactly the same. He thinks replacement of the welder is planned due to its age. Tom said the current welder doesn't have a feature the public works crew wants. By getting this new welder they will no longer need an arc welder. Mike said where he used to work they welded everything with a stick welder. Eben said the cost is about $350 less than we had budgeted. It would come out of the capital equipment fund.

Peter moved and Adrienne seconded to approve purchase of a welder for $4,729 from Haun Welding. Eben asked why the motion specified Haun when both vendors offered the same price. Peter said we have done business with them before. **The motion was passed with Mike opposed.**

12. ***Industrial Park***

Eben said the board needs to approve the form that shows the town match for the NBRC grant. **Peter moved to approve Form 1002 as presented tonight and to authorize Tom, Rosemary or Carl to sign it, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.**

13. ***Staffing Study***

Carrie Johnson of Maple Hollow Consulting said she felt it was important to meet the board and figure out what they desire from the staffing study. She has some questions for the board. She thinks it would be helpful to meet with the board 3 times. Today is the first meeting. She would like to come back with a rough draft and then come a third time with the final report.

She wants to sit down with employees one-on-one to talk about the needs they see. She will look at what towns of similar size are doing. She will consider population and also factors such as miles of road. Does the board have a desired completion date? Is the information needed for budgeting purposes for 2026-27? Her plan is to get the study done in 2-3 months.

Eben said he thinks it would be helpful to have the report in time for budgeting. Tom said addressing the question of public works staffing as soon as possible would be helpful for planning for this winter.

Eben said one question he has is whether it would be better to combine the community and economic development specialist position with the town administrator position rather than hiring another community and economic development specialist. Another big question is about Rosemary's positions. She has been town clerk/treasurer for a long time. We don't know who her successor will be. We moved from elected to appointed positions. Currently she is treasurer and clerk for both town and village and there is a shared assistant. We talked at a joint meeting with the village trustees about the possibility of the town and village each hiring a separate clerk/treasurer, with each serving as the other's assistant. He thought that was a good idea. He doesn't think we have any say over who the clerk/treasurer appoints as their assistant. His top questions are about the CEDS, TA, clerk/treasurer and highway department positions.

Adrienne said one of her top questions is whether we should hire a fifth highway department employee. Another is whether we should separate from the village or not for the clerk/treasurer positions. She would really like more clarity around the shared employee aspect between town and village – what people actually work on and whether we should do restructuring. We will have a lot more green spaces after the buyouts. The town will be responsible for them. Some will be in the village. Her thought is that maybe we will need a groundskeeper. The highway department doesn't currently have a fifth employee. They have had to cut out providing some help for committees that is in the realm of groundskeeper work. She feels our structure is difficult in a human resources sense. She doesn't think there is clarity on who employees go to to say something is wrong. She would love recommendations about that. She made an organizational chart and did a couple of employee surveys that she can send to Carrie.

Peter said he has the feeling that our employees tend to work in silos. There is not an interrelatedness. He doesn't know that he would necessarily advocate for an organizational chart with one person at the top and everyone else below that person, but there is something attractive about that. He thinks the current structure makes our work hard and makes it hard on employees. He would like to see more about how this whole system works together. He likes it when employees are happy and feel supported, valued and respected. He also thinks it is important for employees to respect one another and work as a team. He is aware that is not always the case. Sometimes things are said to the public by people who work in this building about other people who work in this building. He doesn't think that is right. He thinks it is important to get beyond that somehow.

Mike said he disagrees with the concept of shared employees. If there are shared employees, in essence they have two bosses. It is better to answer to only one boss. He would like to get away from shared employees.

Paul said he agrees that some of the things already mentioned are important. He would like to see attention paid to the community and economic development specialist/town planner function. How have other towns our size negotiated that?

Adrienne said she wants to know if having separate town and village employees would make work easier or harder for employees. If we had separate buildings, would that make their work easier or harder?

Eben pointed out that the "shared employees" being discussed are technically reimbursed services. His mother-in-law works for the village, which provides all her pay and benefits. The town reimburses the village for 20% of her time. Some other employees are town employees with the village reimbursing for 40% of their time.

Eben said if all the buyouts go through, 18 properties will come off the grand list. We don't have a traditional public works department, which would typically include highways, sewers, gutters, stormwater, and sidewalks. Our public works department works on highways and helps committees. Sewers, stormwater, and sidewalks are handled by the village. A previous board renamed the highway department the public works department. A big factor is how the properties coming off the grand list will affect the tax rate for the next decade. We did not fire any public works employees. We had one that resigned.

Carrie asked how many miles of road the public works department maintains. Tom said 42. Carrie asked how much of the mileage is gravel and how much is paved. Tom said some Class 2 roads are gravel, so it is hard to say.

Carrie asked roughly how long winter plowing takes. Eben said last year it took 4 hours. Tom noted that that was with 5 employees. Carrie asked if the town and the public are happy with that. Did the town get complaints? Eben said he thinks the condition of our roads is great. They are usually plowed by the time the school buses go out. Sometimes we pay employees overtime to do that and then school is canceled. Maybe we need to have a winter maintenance policy. Hyde Park just changed to a new policy. He doesn't think they start plowing until 5:30 a.m. That would reduce overtime. Tom said some towns have a policy where anything under a certain number of inches won't be plowed until business hours.

Eben noted that our union contract for public works employees renews December 31.

Carrie said her plan was to invoice at the end of each month when work is completed. There was discussion about language that could be added to her contract.

<u>Paul moved to direct Mike and Tom to review the contract with Maple Hollow Consulting for the staffing study and to authorize the town administrator to sign it if it is found to be satisfactory, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.</u>

14. ***Executive Session for Negotiating or Securing of Real Estate Purchase or Lease Options***
<u>Peter moved to enter executive session for negotiating or securing of real estate purchase or lease options as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(2), inviting Rosemary, Tom, and Art</u>

<u>Klugo to attend, Paul seconded and the motion was passed at 7:34.</u> The board came out of executive session at 8:09 with no action taken.

15. ***Financial Policies, Introduction and Review***

Eben said Tom took 5 standard policies from VLCT. Tom said he thinks he needs to work with Rosemary to get any financial policies in place now before the transition to her replacement. Eben said he would like it if Rosemary could review the draft policies and weigh in. The board agreed she should look them over and make recommendations.

16. ***Library Update***

Tom said there will be a meeting on September 9 to finalize drawings for the new addition. A decision was made today to split the project into 3 sections. Phase 1 is to happen before winter. That involves getting utilities across the road and attached before November 1 and getting the foundation poured before December 1 so we don't have to wait until spring to start the wood construction. Phase 2 is the frame for the addition. Phase 3 has a different funding source. It is renovation of the historic part of the building, using insurance money, not Department of Libraries funds. We might need to put out a first RFP for the utilities and foundation right away. The entire project has to be done by December 31, 2026 because of ARPA requirements, so being able to do work this winter is critical to the project.

Paul said he thinks it is advisable to put out a separate phase 1 RFP. Eben asked why phases 1 and 2 need to be separated. Tom said it is a municipal building, so the whole building has to go through structural engineering and go to the Division of Fire Safety for review. That has not yet been done. We may not be able to go out to bid for phase 2 until mid October and if we wait until then we may not be able to get the foundation poured. We already have drawings for the foundation and civil drawings for water, electric and sewer. We can get that part done so we can start building the wood frame. If have to wait for structural engineering for the wood frame we might miss the opportunity to get other work done.

Eben said he doesn't understand why we are still waiting on the engineers. He said concrete can be poured throughout the winter. Tom said we were advised today not to pour after December 1. Eben said he thinks we should just have one RFP.

Peter said based on his experience so far he feels it would be really good to get one phase of the project out for bid without waiting for the engineer.

Tom said different companies can do the foundation and the rest of the project, rather than having a single contractor with multiple subcontractors. Eben said we previously talked about getting one bid from a general contractor. We also talked about a clerk of the works. At that time they didn't have the elevation done, so the civil engineer wouldn't stamp it and we couldn't get clerk of the works quotes. Tom said clerk of the works compensation is based on a percentage of the total project cost. Once we get a project out to bid and know what the price is, we can go after a clerk of the works. He thinks we should put phase 1 out to bid as soon as possible. Peter said we don't need a clerk of the works for the first phase.

<u>Adrienne moved to direct the town administrator to put out an RFP for phase 1 of the library project (bringing utilities across the road, some site work, concrete), Paul seconded and the motion was passed.</u>

Tom said he will check with the architects and engineers while drafting the RFP. Then he probably will call a board member to review it before it goes out. The board agreed to that.

The motion was passed.

Eben asked if Tom is working with Erik Bailey on an RFP for the sidewalks as well. If we are getting concrete in for the foundation, it would be a good time. Tom said Dale Tatro is doing the curb cut to Legion Field this week. He doesn't know what is happening with the rest of the sidewalks. Originally the town had a credit with the village and the village was going to pay a contractor with the cost to come off our credit, but instead the village paid us. Tom doesn't know that it is appropriate for the town to put out an RFP for village infrastructure. It might be more appropriate for the village to put out the RFP, with the town paying the cost. Eben said that is why he asked if Tom was working with the village.

Paul asked where the Legion Field curb cut is being put and why. Tom said there is currently no access to Legion Field. The idea was to put in the curb cut before the tractor parade. Otherwise there would be no place to bring the tractors in. The tractor parade is happening this weekend. The curb cut will be all the way on the left, along the Studio Center boundary.

Eben asked Tom to talk to Erik about the sidewalks. If they need a commitment from us to pay for the work, we can provide it. Tom said the last time he met with Erik he said he felt uncomfortable putting out an RFP for village infrastructure and Erik said he understood. There was a mutual understanding that the town would pay. Eben said an email Erik sent implied the town should put out the RFP. If Erik wants to do it, he is fine with that. Tom should talk to Erik and get clarity.

17. ***Special Town Meeting Warning Review and Approve***

Eben read the proposed article for the special town meeting. At Peter's suggestion, it was agreed to change the wording to clarify that the purchase price is $1 and in addition the town will need to reimburse some taxes and pay closing costs.

Paul moved to approve the special town meeting warning as written with an amendment to Article 1 to read "for a price of $1.00 plus reimbursement of Village and Town taxes in the amount of $7,090.78, plus estimated closing costs of $3,000." Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

Eben asked if we want the attorney to determine whether the article is binding or advisory. He is okay with paying for that. He thinks the board needs to know whether it is binding or not.

Mike asked if the petition being circulated could be addressed under Article 2 (other business) if it is submitted in time. Rosemary said yes, if it is non-binding. Mike said he thinks the petition article should be addressed separately from this meeting. Paul asked if we have to have Article 2. Eben asked, why not ask our attorney?

Paul asked, do we want the article to be binding? Eben said he isn't tied to wanting it one way or the other; he just wants a legal opinion on which it is. Paul said we should be able to tell the townspeople either that we will do whatever they vote that we should do or that we are just asking for input. Mike said he would prefer that it isn't binding. Adrienne would like it to be binding. Mike said if it is non-binding, then we could back out if we found some reason that acquiring the building would be detrimental to the town. The board agreed that the intent is to follow the will of the voters but that the article should be non-binding as a safeguard against unforeseen circumstances.

Eben moved and Mike seconded to rescind the previous motion and to authorize Rosemary to speak with the town's attorney to reword Article 1 so it is non-binding and separately lists the dollar purchase price, the taxes and the closing cost, and to approve the special town meeting warning as reworded by the attorney.

The board discussed whether Article 2 should be removed if the attorney says it can be removed. Adrienne said she doesn't think we should restrict people from bringing up other business. Eben agreed. Mike said he feels this meeting should only address the Lowe Lecture Hall and it would be better for the question on the petition to be addressed at a separate meeting. Peter suggested the petitioners could be asked if they would consider a separate meeting rather than bringing the petition question up under Article 2.

Eben moved and Mike seconded to amend the motion to include seeking legal counsel on removing Article 2 and removing it if possible. The motion to amend failed with Mike in favor and Adrienne, Paul and Peter opposed.

The original motion was passed with Mike opposed.

18. Update on Grant Opportunities for Lowe Lecture Hall

Paul had written up information on potential grant opportunities. He suggested that board members review it. Eben suggested having a special selectboard meeting just to discuss potential plans for the Lowe Lecture Hall. He said an informational meeting before the special town meeting is not required. The board has talked about having an informational meeting at the Lowe Lecture Hall. We could have a meeting the night before the town meeting. Tom said he thinks the Studio Center was planning on having an informational meeting at the Lowe Lecture Hall. Paul said they talked about making it available for tours. Adrienne said Hope Sullivan sent us an outline for a presentation. She doesn't know if the intention was to have that presentation at the town meeting or at a meeting at the Lowe Lecture Hall.

Lois Frey said she thinks an information meeting would be good. She likes the idea of having it at Lowe Lecture Hall.

The board agreed to schedule a special selectboard meeting to discuss the Lowe Lecture Hall.

Tom said he got a quote for the foundation and will be meeting with an electrician to get an assessment. Is there anything else the board wants numbers on? Paul suggested getting information on hazardous materials. Tom suggested he could get quotes on drywall. Adrienne asked if we have any numbers on heat. Mike said it is a new heating system. Eben said they only use the heat one day a winter. Mike said there are home radon testing machines that can be purchased for less than the cost of having someone else test for radon. He may be able to borrow one. Eben suggested checking to see if the Studio Center has already had radon testing done. Mike said even if we test ourselves, we will still need someone certified to give us a certificate. Peter asked if someone can find out from the Studio Center if they have tested for asbestos or lead. Mike said he will. Adrienne asked about fire safety. Eben said the state fire marshal would have given them a certificate of occupancy. Tom said it only needs to be sprinklered if it is 5000 sq. ft. or more and it is less than that.

Adrienne said she thinks it is okay if we provide suggestions in our information materials about how the building could be used, but she wants the community to decide how to use it.

19. Cemetery RFP Response, Review and Approve

Eben said Tom would like to move forward with Hill House Estates to create a cemetery maintenance plan. Tom said it would be nice to get someone on the books who can tell us what they can do before winter and help us come up with a plan to cover all cemetery maintenance over 5 years.

Mike asked, this has to happen this year? It can’t wait until spring? Tom said it can wait until spring. We could put the RFP back out. Mike suggested waiting until spring.

Eben said he would like to get some stones straightened sooner rather than later. He would rather move forward. Tom and Duncan called other companies but only got one bid. Mike said he thinks we need to get two bids. Peter disagreed. He said we have tried to get more.

Eben said he thinks Duncan’s thought process was to get one cemetery done, then start on another. Tom said we haven’t had a cemetery plan. We keep budgeting money and not spending it. Once we are caught up, the annual amount will probably be less. We have relied on Duncan to do all the cemetery work himself. Board members discussed what the priorities should be. Tom said he thinks it is more important to develop a relationship with a contractor so we can come up with a plan than to focus on what specifically needs to be done. Paul asked who will decide what gets done. Tom suggested he would talk to the company about what is worst and start with the worst first.

Adrienne moved to accept the quote from Hill House Estates, LLC for cemetery maintenance, to authorize spending an amount not to exceed $10,000 for cemetery maintenance and to direct Tom to work with Hill House Estates on a cemetery maintenance plan, Paul seconded and the motion was passed with Mike opposed.

20. Part Time Highway Employee Job Description

Eben asked if the board wants to see how quickly Carrie Johnson can get us back some information before Tom puts time into this. Mike said yes.

Tom said he hasn’t time to sit down with Jason. It would be great to have him say exactly what the part time person should do.

Mike said most of this summer the highway crew only worked a 4-day week. They are using CTO or comp time on Fridays. He doesn’t know how that can be addressed. We could have 2 people working on Friday instead of having the whole crew gone. Paul asked if Mike’s concern is that things are not getting done or if he just wants them available. Mike said they should be available. There are things they could be getting done.

Adrienne said she thinks we should wait to see what Carrie says before Tom works on the job description. Eben asked if she is opposed to Tom and Jason talking to each other about it. She said no.

21. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:21.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths