

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2025

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Adrienne Parker (remote), Eben Patch, Paul Warden
Others: Rosemary Audibert

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*

It was agreed to add an executive session for confidential attorney-client communications and an item regarding acceptance of a job offer. It was noted that the agenda should have said “Monday” instead of “Wednesday.”

3. *Public Comment*

No members of the public were present.

4. *Selectboard Updates and/or Concerns*

Mike said he had sent out examples of road policies from other towns. He would also like to talk about a moratorium on new roads in the town. Some towns have a moratorium on taking over private roads. Rosemary said no new roads have been added in Johnson since the 1980s. She believes our policy requires a road to be paved before the town can take it over.

Peter said he wanted to acknowledge our hard-working road crew who were out there doing a good job while others were at home for the holidays. The rest of the board agreed. Eben said our town has good employees.

Paul asked about something in the SLR construction report. It says trees have been limbed and stockpiled for installation on the restored floodplain. Does anyone know what that means? Other board members did not know. Eben said he can follow up on that.

5. *Budget Review*

Eben said the board needs to decide how much of an increase to budget for health insurance starting January 1, 2027. Last year we decided to budget for a 10% increase. Peter said he thinks it is reasonable to go with that again.

Paul asked why we don't pay 90% of the cost of the MVP Gold plan rather than 90% of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Gold plan, since MVP is cheaper. Eben said he doesn't know why – probably because that is what we have always done. The board agreed he should find out how it would affect cost if we made that change.

Rosemary pointed out that Eben had been using the wrong rate sheet for health insurance. She provided the correct sheet and Eben entered new figures into the budget spreadsheet, which lowered health insurance costs.

The board reviewed salary figures. Eben noted that there was a request from the library to increase the part-time librarian's hours. He budgeted for that change, which was small.

Eben said the current draft includes 5 highway employees. When we added a fifth employee in the past, we removed 600 hours of part-time work from the budget and changed the amount of overtime budgeted from 300 hours to 250 hours. If we decide not to budget for a fifth employee, we need to budget for a part-time employee and we may need to budget for more overtime hours.

The board reviewed the capital equipment replacement plan. Eben said he increased the estimated cost for the salt truck that is due for replacement in 2027-28 based on new cost information. Mike said he thinks we can keep the truck for longer than we had planned.

Eben said a couple of people at town meeting last year felt we should stop using cash on hand to inject extra money into the capital equipment fund and should instead budget for a larger annual appropriation to the fund. After some discussion, the board agreed to increase the budgeted contribution to this fund from \$7K to \$10K.

Eben said with the changes made this evening, the increase in the amount of money we need to raise from taxes is 8.83%. The increase needed to the tax rate is 8.067% based on current grand list figures. As the grand list goes up, the tax rate goes down.

Rosemary suggested adding a line to the budget for the tax stabilization revenue we will be getting for the FEMA buyout properties.

Eben said the board needs to decide whether we want to plan to do paving before July 1, in the current budget year, or include the expense and corresponding revenue from the paving reserve fund in the budget being developed now, for the year starting July 1, 2026. Since we can use money from the paving reserve fund, it will not affect taxes.

Eben noted that the budget does not include anything for the Lowe Lecture Hall. We previously estimated we would need to spend \$16,915 for maintenance. Peter said he would be inclined to budget conservatively. We may not need that much, since we are planning to make a minimal investment just to stabilize the building as we determine the plan for its usage and what funding we will go after.

Eben asked how many expense lines we should add for the Lowe Lecture Hall. Adrienne asked how many we have for the Holcomb House. Eben said there are quite a few. He listed them. There was general agreement that Lowe Lecture Hall expenses should be broken out in a similar way. Eben said he will work with Rosemary on that.

Eben said he needs to work with Rosemary to make sure the cash on hand figures in the budget are accurate. The current draft shows \$180K of the cash on hand being used to reduce taxes. He thinks that is too high. Mike suggested \$150K. Eben said that would change the increase in taxes to 9.362%.

Eben said a quick calculation that does not include all the budget changes that may be needed shows that budgeting for a part-time highway employee instead of a fifth employee changes the increase to 6.173%. That is without anything budgeted for the Lowe Lecture Hall.

Eben said after talking to Jason and finding out what he felt he needed, he increased the amount budgeted for winter sand from \$65K to \$85K.

Eben said he doesn't know if the voters will support a 6.1% increase.

Eben said he will find out the cost difference between MVP and BCBS and the cost difference between a fifth highway employee and a part-time highway employee. He will add Lowe Lecture Hall expenses and revenue from buyout property tax stabilization. The board will need to decide how to allocate the cash on hand we have.

Rosemary asked when we will need the money for the industrial park that we didn't bond for. Eben said he doesn't know the exact timing. We probably need to add an expense line for that.

Rosemary asked if she should contact the insurance company to add the buyout properties that the town now owns. There was general agreement that she should.

The board agreed to have Jason at the next meeting if possible.

6. Acceptance of Job Offer

Eben announced that a job offer was made to a town administrator candidate who accepted the offered terms and passed a background check. John Sutherland will be the new town administrator starting January 5, 2026.

Paul will draft a public announcement and send it to Peter for input.

7. Executive Session to Discuss Attorney-Client Communications

Paul moved to find that premature general public knowledge regarding the town's legal matters would clearly place the town at a substantial disadvantage by disclosing strategy and to enter executive session to discuss town legal matters under the provisions of 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A), Mike seconded and the motion was passed at 8:06.

The board consented out of executive session at 8:30. No action was taken

8. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths