

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
FRIDAY, JANUARY 22, 2026

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Adrienne Parker, Eben Patch, Paul Warden

Others: John Sutherland, Rosemary Audibert, Carl Rogers (remote), Lois Frey, Charles Flaum, Morna Flaum, Seth Jensen, Scott Meyer,

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call Meeting to Order

Eben called the meeting to order at 6:31.

2. Consider Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda

Adrienne asked to add an executive session for employee evaluation. Eben noted that there may be a request for signature for landfill material going to Casella under Carl's report

3. Public Comment

No members of the public were present at this point.

4. Selectboard Updates and/or Concerns

Eben said he thinks we can't lose sight of the fact that we need to get a salt contract. He doesn't know if we should wait until after town meeting day for that. He asked if John can talk to Jason about putting out an RFP.

Eben said he thinks the cost of crushing material that came out of our pit will be over \$10,000, so we should probably put out an RFP. He doesn't know if we have to do that right away but he doesn't want to lose sight of it.

Adrienne asked if John emailed the rec group. John said he talked to Isabelle Sullivan about material for the town report. She can make it to the February 2 meeting.

5. Consent Agenda

The consent agenda consisted of the minutes of January 5 and January 14, 2026. **Mike moved to approve the consent agenda, Paul seconded and the motion was passed.**

6. Library Update

Peter said the library will give an update on February 2.

Eben asked if we can sell the lot the library used to be on. Rosemary noted that that lot did not go through a buyout. Eben said it is something to ask the library about. We do need their permission. Sale of that lot could bring in some money. Peter said he will mention it to Kelly Vandorn. Eben said he would probably want a covenant not to build.

Peter said he has an email almost ready to send to Mark McClary from the Vermont Department of Libraries. At the meeting on Tuesday, Mark McClary was not able to answer the question of what it means to say the project has to be completed by December 31. Is the town on the hook at that point? McClary needs to follow up with the treasurer.

The library board met last night. It was a very productive session. They talked about fundraising and grants.

7. Review Invoices and Orders

Mike said he thinks we are paying too much for diesel and #2 fuel compared to what other people are paying. The next time around he thinks we should have the bidders sharpen their pencils.

8. Community and Economic Development Discussion

Carl said the Northern Border Regional Commission report that was due at the end of January was completed and emailed to Pat Ripley as required by the grant. Pat said it is okay to submit. Eben can sign it tonight so he can submit it to NBRC.

There is nothing new on the prime ag soil question. Regarding deer wintering area, Carl got an email from Bob Fletcher's law firm advising which attorney is taking on this matter now that Bob Fletcher has retired.

Surveyors completed marking for tree removal at the industrial park. Today two Vermont Land Trust staff members were out marking trees they would want for a VTrans floodplain restoration project in Jericho. They marked over 100 trees, with the vast majority being in the area that has to be cleared for constructing the road, putting in utilities and creating the stormwater pond. There are maybe 25 to 40 trees outside that area that they marked as well. We will talk to the state about bat habitat regulations to see if it is an issue to have trees removed from outside the road and utility area. Luke Willey from Mumley does not think it will be an issue.

Carl said he wants the board's thoughts about the construction contract bid form. Mumley has seen construction bid forms set up where the bidder has to determine the quantity of bid items such as sewer manholes. They feel using this method produces better contract documents with a more precise estimate of quantities. But there is a lot of work currently available to contractors and if they are looking at several sets of specs and Johnson asks them to figure the quantities while others provide those numbers, they may skip over Johnson's bid request in favor of pursuing others. What option for the bid form does the board prefer? Carl's suggestion would be the more traditional option where we provide the estimate of the quantity of bid items.

Paul asked if we can easily enumerate the bid items. Carl said Mumley will help with that. They can provide estimates of numbers of sewer manholes and water hydrants, number of feet of water and sewer line and conduit for communications, etc.

The board agreed to Carl's suggestion to use a form that already has estimates for bid quantities.

Eben asked if Carl thinks we can get the logging done by April 1. Carl said the logger who went to the January 5 site visit seemed to think so. There are a lot of small trees and brush that would not be a lot of work for a well-equipped logger or even a tree service company. The time consuming part is getting blessings from the state. We have to get an Act 250 permit. Bid documents need to comply with NBRC grant conditions. Pat Ripley is helping us comply. He will talk at the next week's team meeting about how much work it will be to put together bid specs for having the trees removed.

Paul asked what will be done with the trees that are removed. Carl said the logger knows of a piece of equipment that can cut the roots off in the ground so it is easier to topple the tree. Then the tops will be cut off to a specified length and the logs will be stored, probably on Lot 2 of the industrial park. At the restoration site, the logs will be laid with their roots toward the water. A course of them will be laid down, then backfill material will be dumped between them. Then another row will be interlaced with them. This is to improve fish habitat. Logs will not get as warm as boulders on the riverbank. In

places where large stones have been used on banks, it warms the water, which is not good for aquatic life.

Carl said the second meeting for the Johnson visioning project was postponed. He asked if the board has any thoughts about getting this back on schedule. Paul said he, Seth Jensen and Jesse Whitworth felt that DuBois and King did not have a product yet that was ready for another meeting. The next meeting may be in late February or early March.

Carl said work is underway on the Welcome Center at the trailhead.

He met with Jackie Cassino last Friday about the lease agreement at the trailhead. He is planning to have a lease agreement for board approval on February 2.

Mike said the Welcome Center is costing about three times as much as it was supposed to. We keep putting money into it. Eben said Mike is referring to a previous project as well as this one.

Carl said he was contacted about a culvert at the entrance to the town gravel pit that goes under the rail trail. Jackie Cassino made it known that the state is looking to do some maintenance work at the inlet of the culvert sometime in spring or summer. The town will be contacted about doing that work.

The introductory Recreation Economy for Rural Communities meeting has been scheduled for January 29 in the afternoon. This will be a virtual meeting with people from the EPA planning assistance team, Carl and steering committee members.

Adrienne asked about the next step after the rail trail connector scoping study. Carl said if the selectboard is interested, the next step is trying to implement the improvements recommended along Railroad Street.

Adrienne said she wasn't really enthusiastic about any of the solutions they presented. She doesn't know if other board members feel the same way. Paul said he thinks their presentation was pretty good. What they suggested is the only thing we could do quickly to get people into town. Adrienne said she was discouraged that they said a bike lane was not possible and that their solution was to widen the sidewalk and use paint to indicate that the road is shared with bicyclists. She doesn't know if that is solving anything. Mike said the road is tight as it is and they are talking about taking a foot off of it.

Carl said the Recreation Economy for Rural Communities Peer Convening session and introductory meeting are scheduled. But there is no word on when they might want to have the community workshop, which is a 2-day in-person session with the EPA planning assistance team. They gave us a range of possible dates for that from May 2026 to the end of March 2027. Once that date is set, we will backtrack from that to determine when the steering committee should start their meetings, which should be 3 or 4 months before the community workshops.

Paul asked what the Peer Convening meeting is. Carl said it will have the EPA planning assistance team, their consultants, and prior year grantees who will talk about their experience and what they have accomplished. The planning assistance team will talk about the process and what can be done.

Carl said Eben had asked how we are measuring the quantity of the gravel being extracted from the town's pit as part of the Holmes Meadow project. Jason and people from Boulder Construction agreed on how many cubic yards a dump truck could carry and they have been counting truckloads hauled to the public works yard. The SLR engineers are going to measure and calculate the volume of gravel there.

Carl said the selectboard is being asked to approve Change Order #3 for the Holmes Meadow project so Eben can sign it. It means an increase in cost of \$14,740 for three different work items. The first is cutting and capping two water lines and possibly a sewer line crossing the meadow, as requested by the village. It will cost \$1,800 to cut and cap the two water lines and if they find a sewer line they will do that for no other cost. The second item is dealing with soil that showed contamination for PAH and knotweed. Those soils would be buried on site according to a plan approved by the project engineer and complying with permits for the project. That would cost \$11,740. The third item is dealing with logs. Some logs are going to be saved and possibly used for a project the village is contemplating. They need to stabilize the area around a utility pole along the Gihon River near the former Union Bank. They are looking at using logs for that. Some logs from Holmes Meadow would be stored at the town gravel pit until they are needed. That cost is \$1,200. He asked the lead project engineer if this cost is after deducting the cost they were originally planning on for dealing with these logs and she said yes, that was factored in. These items are recommended by the project engineer to be added to the construction contract. They fall within the approved grant contingency funding and will be covered by the grant.

Peter moved to approve Change Order #3 in the amount of \$14,740 for the Holmes Meadow project, Paul seconded and the motion was passed with Mike opposed.

Adrienne said a lot of people have reached out to her wondering what is happening at Holmes Meadow. Could we put something on Front Porch Forum and Facebook to let people know it is a flood restoration project? Paul said he thinks that is a good idea. He has gotten questions too.

Carl said we got a Holmes Meadow construction observation report from the engineers dated January 20. They are doing rough grading with the excavator. Final grading will be done 4 inches below the final elevation. They will use GPS equipment to make sure the grade is right. SLR is also checking on the grades in the restored floodplain area. All the knotweed soil has been hauled and dealt with so it should not resprout somewhere in the future. The contractor expects the first phase of the project to be complete next week. At that time they will do more stabilization and then take out their equipment until the final seeding, planting and mulching of trees and shrubs can be completed in spring.

Eben said he believes he needs to sign a Waste Characterization Profile form for Holmes Meadow. He said he asked Seth Jensen if he could e-sign it tomorrow and Seth said that would be fine. There are some lab results we don't have that need to go with the profile report for the material that has to go to the landfill. Carl said Eben was already authorized to sign Holmes Meadow documents and signing this form is not committing the town to anything. The town is just signing as owner of the property the materials are coming from. Eben said he will sign the form tomorrow morning.

Carl said the soil will be hauled to Coventry next week. They are planning to have a project team meeting next week and then the site will be stabilized until winter.

Peter asked about the statement in Carl's report that the library will need only 700 cubic yards of fill instead of the 5,000 yards previously thought. Is that just for stabilization of the foundation or does it include final grading of the site? Carl said it includes final grading. That figure came from the architect and then the engineers did their own calculation and came up with 700-800 cubic yards. The architect and the engineers have checked the measurements. It seems that someone from the town just provided the figure of 5000 yards without getting it from someone who knows how to calculate it.

Carl said he is planning to call a state staff person tomorrow about the revolving loan fund to try to figure out what the town has to do for submitting two reports.

Carl said he was asked to write the CEDS report for the town report and he has done that and submitted it.

9. *Letter of Support for Grant for Celebration of Blueberry Harvest with Music*

Morna Flaum said she is representing Discover Johnson, a non-profit 501(c)(3) dedicated to promoting agritourism, recreation tourism and wellness tourism to bring more visibility and traffic to town. The Tuesday Night Live committee has agreed to co-produce a Blueberry Jam concert on Legion Field August 1. She is requesting a letter of support from the town, but not any money. Discover Johnson is getting a grant for the concert, and probably other grants for other aspects to the festival they are envisioning. She has been talking to blueberry farmers in the area. They are thinking of having multiple small events that encourage people to come and pick blueberries in town. They would like a letter of support for using Legion Field on August 1 as well as the day before and the day after for preparation, other events and cleanup. The concert will be in early evening.

Eben said a facilities use application should be filled out. Charles Flaum said a letter of support is needed to get the grant. John said if the board approves sending a letter of support he can use the standard one the town has used before and make a few changes.

Peter moved and Adrienne seconded to direct the town administrator to issue a letter of support for the Blueberry Jam concert to be put on by Discover Johnson.

Eben said someone should review the letter before it goes out. John said he will send it to the board.

Adrienne said Isabelle Sullivan likes to give input on events so the grounds don't get messed up.

The motion was passed.

10. *Review and Sign Upcoming Municipal Budget*

The board reviewed the budget. Rosemary made a suggestion about where to show the revenue coming in from our audit reserve.

There was discussion about whether to include estimated year end finals in the town report. It was decided to not to include that column because it is not up to date.

The amount of the appropriation for Salvation Farms was corrected to the \$700 they requested.

Eben said he thinks we should cut the appropriation for Lamoille Housing Partners because they merged with Downstreet. He thinks if Downstreet wants an appropriation they have to go through a petition process. The board agreed.

Paul pointed out a formula in the budget spreadsheet that was wrong.

Eben said we have roughly \$395K of cash on hand. We are proposing to use \$180K to reduce taxes. We had talked about possibly using \$40K to rebuild the tax anticipation reserve fund. If we did that there would be about \$139K left. He thinks we probably should put some toward industrial park expense. He thinks the project will go over budget and if it doesn't, we can reduce what we bond.

Eben asked Rosemary if there are any reserve funds she is concerned about. She said the board hasn't put anything in the bridge reserve fund for some time. There is \$91K in it.

Scott Meyer asked if this would be an appropriate time to ask the voters if they want to establish an emergency fund for situations like an emergency furnace repair or other unexpected expense. Eben said we have a buildings and grounds fund, a capital equipment fund and an emergency management reserve fund.

Mike said the cash on hand includes money we don't actually have yet from delinquent taxes. If we had a major emergency we could call an emergency town meeting to get permission to spend money. He wishes we could do the budget without even considering money owed to us that we don't have in hand. Rosemary said the figure he is looking at is from 6 months ago. Paul asked if there is any reason not to find out the amount we have now. Eben said we could ask for a delinquent tax report for the next meeting. But all the figures we have are just a snapshot in time.

Eben proposed committing \$40K for industrial park expenses and then having the board know that if there is a funding problem with the library, a special town meeting could be held and maybe the voters would support using cash on hand for that. Paul asked, Eben does not want to budget a specific amount for the library? Eben said he doesn't want the library to lose steam on fundraising as they might if we said we had a certain amount of money on hand that we could spend on the library. We would be leaving almost \$100K in cash on hand uncommitted for next year's board.

Peter suggested committing money to survey the line that is in question on the Gomo lot. Eben agreed with that. Peter said he got quotes of about \$9K for a complete survey. He doesn't know how much it would cost to survey just one line. The board agreed to commit \$5K for surveying.

Paul asked about the grant match reserve fund. Eben said it is healthy. Paul said most of it is obligated to be spent on the industrial park project, so we don't have a huge grant match reserve fund. Eben looked up the amount we plan to use for the industrial park. Paul said that leaves about \$20K. He suggested putting \$40K in the grant match reserve fund. The board agreed to that.

Those decisions leave \$54K in cash on hand.

Lois Frey said line 549 is labeled "Conservation Commission Reserve Fund" but she thinks that is the Conservation Reserve Fund, not carryover of unspent Conservation Commission funds.

Mike moved to approve a municipal budget of \$3,630,569.15, with \$2,400,171.73 to be raised by taxes, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

11. FEMA Buyout Update

Scott said the buyout houses are being inspected to make sure they are vacated and cleaned. The state has an environmental firm that checks for asbestos, vermiculite, gas, fuel tanks, etc. The question of

salvage has come up. He does not recommend that anyone go back into homes after they have received the check for them. If people take out windows and doors then we can't secure the building easily. We did three more houses this week. Two have been inspected already and the third will probably be inspected on Monday. The town has a responsibility to ensure that the buildings are razed within 90 days after getting the title. Rosemary said the buildings will be demolished this week or next week.

John said the former owner of one of the houses wanted to know if he could salvage some windows. There has also been talk about maybe letting Habitat for Humanity see what they could salvage. How does the board feel about that?

Eben said he called the homeowner. He is not sure it even matters how the board feels. He dug into the Vermont Emergency Management and FEMA regulations. If someone has something in the structure they want to salvage, they should salvage it before closing, but that will reduce the payment they receive.

Mike asked, if someone goes down to the building while the contractor is there and asks the contractor if they could go in and take a newel post, for instance, and the contractor says it is fine, is that all right? Scott said no. The contractor can say they don't care, but they have to clear it with the town. If the contractor can pull the post out and put it by the curb, that is great. But the town has legal authority, not the contractor. Most contractors won't allow someone to go onto the property or into the building.

Mike asked, what about people who are already approved for a buyout going into the building before the papers are signed? Scott said is it is still their property then. Mike said they received the value of the house the way it was, so technically they shouldn't haul things out themselves at that point. Scott said that is right. If you get a check for fair market value and you pull stuff out after that, a lot of people would say that is not fair.

Scott said he thinks some of the homes do not have much that is reusable. It is up to the contractor whether they want to try to reuse some of the materials to try to recoup their expenses. Paul asked if he is saying that the contractor could pull stuff out and use it somewhere else. Scott said yes. He is not sure what the contractor will do with some of the older post and beam houses in town. Mike asked if the town is just getting the deed for the land or also the buildings. Scott said he thinks the town is getting the deed for the entire property, including buildings.

Scott said soil that is being removed from Holmes Meadow is still in the 100-year floodplain and he did not give permission for that. Eben said it will move. The soil is not from Holmes Meadow; it is from our gravel pile. Scott said it is displacing flood storage.

Adrienne said it sounds like it would be up to the contractor whether to work with Habitat for Humanity. Eben said not really. Tom had a great idea about being able to recycle the materials, but he doesn't think one person can make the state and feds change regulations quickly. Tom said it is a good point that once windows and doors come out the property is no longer secure.

Rosemary said she told our insurance company about the buyout properties, so they are covered under our insurance.

Paul asked, we are leaving any salvage opportunity in the hands of the contractor? Eben said yes, per their contract.

12. Review and Sign Fire Department Contract with Village of Johnson

Mike moved to approve the fire department contract for the Town of Johnson 2026 fire service in the amount of \$108,992 and to authorize the chair to sign it, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

13. Historical Society – Review and Consider Quotes for Building Insulation

Mike said he talked to the Historical Society chair today. The decision was made to go ahead with the original proposal for adding insulation to one wall. The Historical Society can go back at a later date to try to insulate more of the building. They plan to go with the lowest bid for cellulose insulation for \$720. But they don't want the board to claw back the authorized amount of \$5,000. They want to keep that for more work on the building at a later date. Adding more insulation will reduce heating costs.

Most board members agreed to that. Eben questioned leaving \$4,300 for the Historical Society to use as they see fit. He thinks they should develop a project and get bids. Mike said they are going to do that.

Adrienne asked if we can stipulate that the money needs to be spent by a certain time. Eben added that it should be spent in accordance with our procurement policy. Mike said they will get two bids. Adrienne suggested the work should be done before July 1. The board agreed to that.

Mike said the Historical Society wants to wait until the weather is warmer to get the rest of the work done. They don't want damage to the siding in the cold weather.

14. Review and Discuss the Julian Scott House

Eben said the Julian Scott house is in the buyout process. We don't own it yet. A lot of people in this town are passionate about its historic significance. Rosemary said the closing is supposed to be next week. Eben said he would like to form a short-term advisory council to look at what can be done with that building. Mike said he thinks we should not do anything to put a wrench in the closing. After we close, we have 90 days to deal with the building.

Scott said there was a historic building in Milton that the Milton Historical Society took apart. They left the foundation and salvaged the post and beam structure and they are storing it until they can figure out where to reconstruct it. Maybe Johnson can do something similar. We have cold storage at the old talc mill property. He is not sure if that is still being used since the village garage is almost back in use. Could the post and beam pieces be stored there while the town decides what to do with it? We could potentially rebuild the house with grant money. We could ask Milton about how expensive it was for them to have the house deconstructed and who did the work and we could see if our contractor would be willing to deconstruct the house.

Adrienne suggested the Historical Society could be the group to look into this.

Eben said his primary concern is protecting the town and making sure the property owner gets their check is second. He doesn't think we are at risk, because the state and the feds checked the boxes regarding historical significance of the house, but what if we end up with it and it turns out it is on the historic preservation list? Mike said the owners checked and were told that the only thing historic was the marker. It is hard to believe it is not on the historic register, but evidently it is not. Eben asked if we should take the homeowner at their word. Mike said he is sure the feds have looked into this. We

are not going to do anything until the paperwork is signed. The more digging we do now, the more possibility there is things could get sticky with the feds and the property owner.

Scott asked if the Lamoille County Planning Commission has historic preservation data. Seth said they may have data on that house if it is listed. He hasn't checked that one in particular. Lois said there must have been research done when the marker was put up outside that house and that wasn't that long ago.

Eben said he would like to ask the Historical Society to come up with a plan if they are willing. Adrienne said she thinks the majority of people discussing this were members of the Historical Society. Paul said we might get other volunteers as well. Adrienne suggested the Historical Society can form a subcommittee and invite members of the public to participate.

Scott said we should be open-minded. If it turns out the building has insect damage, we may not want to store it.

Eben asked if Scott thinks there is any risk that the town may take ownership and then be told that we cannot demolish the building and need to reimburse FEMA. Scott said he is not a lawyer. It is a potential concern. He would think that Vermont Emergency Management has been doing due diligence. Seth said the state Historic Preservation office needs to concur on demolitions before they are done. It has been cleared. There may be a question as to why that happened.

Paul asked, are we asking the contractor to tear the building down and save the posts and beams? Who is paying for that? Eben said he would like the Historical Society to come up with ideas. That is most likely the most reasonable idea.

Adrienne said there may be groups that take down historic buildings. Scott said they would need to have proof of workers comp and liability and they would need to work with the contractor.

Lois said she can't speak for the Historical Society but she can take them the message that the board would like them to at least talk about the Julian Scott house. How much time do they have? Eben said not much. Scott said we have 3 months after the closing to deal with it.

15. *Lowe Lecture Hall Update*

Peter said the environmental inspection for lead and asbestos at the Lowe Lecture Hall showed there is no asbestos. There is lead, as expected.

We got a proposal from an engineer for a simple assessment for \$35-52K. The piece of that that was an analysis of existing conditions was \$9-12K. He feels the building inspection we had done identified structural work that needs to happen. He doesn't feel we need to look for an engineer for an assessment. He suggests asking the town attorney to begin drafting relevant documents for the sale.

Adrienne moved and Peter seconded to direct the town's attorney to draft closing documents and work with the Vermont Studio Center on sale of the Lowe Lecture Hall to the town.

Paul said we probably will have to have an engineering study done to move forward with whatever we are going to do, but we need to decide what to do first. Peter said he thinks some historic preservation grants specifically mentioned an engineering study.

The motion was passed.

16. Executive Session – Union Contract Update

Paul moved to enter executive session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(b) because premature public knowledge of the contract information to be discussed would place the town at a substantial disadvantage, Peter seconded and the motion was passed at 9:12. The board consented out of executive session at 9:24.

17. Sign Annual Town Meeting Warning

The board reviewed the town meeting warning. Rosemary said the only thing that changed since the last version was that she put in the budget numbers that were approved. **Peter moved to approve the 2026 annual town meeting warning as presented, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.**

18. Executive Session – Employee Evaluation

Adrienne moved to enter executive session for employee evaluation under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) with only the board remaining, Paul seconded and the motion was passed at 9:28. The board consented out of executive session at 9:35.

19. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths