JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, APRIL 6, 2026

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Adrienne Parker, Eben Patch, Paul Warden
Others: John Sutherland, Rosemary Audibert, Eric Schultz, Scott Griswold, Doug Molde, Susan Tinker, Lydia Putvain, Howard Romero, Casey Romero, Gene Richards (remote), Erin Desautels (remote) Mary Lou Kopas, Jan Gearhart, Adrian Schmidt, Steve Hatfield, one other person

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. ***Call Meeting to Order***
   Paul called the meeting to order at 6:30.
2. ***Consider Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda***
   No changes to the agenda were needed.
3. ***Public Comment and Public Announcement***
   No members of the public wished to comment.
4. ***Selectboard Updates and/or Concerns***
   Adrienne said we get the sheriff's department reports emailed to us. It would be nice to see a breakdown of hours per town so we can determine if Johnson is a hotspot or just better covered. The board agreed to reach out to the sheriff's department and ask if they can provide that information.

   Eben said he would like to make sure we do not lose sight of purchasing salt for next year. He believes we will try to purchase it out of this year's budget. Peter asked if there is any chance we can buy it under the state contract.

   Eben asked if we can estimate the industrial park bond amount for setting the tax rate or if we have to have the funds. Rosemary said we don't have to have the money; we can do a projection. She asked when we expect to need the money. Eben said he assumes sometime in the next fiscal year.

   John said he will see if we can buy salt under the state contract.
5. ***Consent Agenda***
   The consent agenda consisted of the minutes of March 19 and March 26, 2026. **Adrienne moved to approve the consent agenda, Eben seconded and the motion was passed.**
6. ***Clerk/Treasurer's Report: Warrants, Licenses and Any Action Items***
   Rosemary said to date expenditures are at almost 60% of budget. Revenues are at 92% of budget. The state will be sending a true up on school tax payments in April, so at the next meeting she will have a better figure for current taxes, which should be closer to 100%. Payment for the grand list from the state should be coming shortly. We got the first payment on the library construction invoice. We should get a second one this week. We got USDA money for the Lendway Lane project. We are still waiting for money for the VEC stormwater project. She emailed Mumley last week and has not heard back. The board agreed that John should contact Mumley. Eben asked, we don't have any reimbursements for Holmes Meadow yet? Rosemary said they are all up to date except the most recent one. We now own the old town hall. Blackjack Properties paid off their loan on April 2, after they sold their building. Now we have $30,000 more to lend
7. ***Town Clerk and Town Treasurer's Job Descriptions***
   The board reviewed the latest town clerk and town treasurer job descriptions, which incorporate feedback from Rosemary, the selectboard and Lydia and Susan. John noted that he got quite a bit of

feedback from Paul. Peter noted some misspellings of “assessor.” Eben noted some places that refer to deputy clerk or treasurer instead of assistant clerk or treasurer.

Eben said the job descriptions set up the clerk to be subordinate to the treasurer and the treasurer to be subordinate to the clerk because they are each other's assistants. Are we handling that with policies? Paul said he thinks that is a valid concern. That is part of what he was trying to get at with one of his suggested edits. They both report to John. Rosemary asked if it is being changed so that they report to the town administrator instead of the selectboard. Adrienne said that is not the structure we approved. Eben suggested maybe we could add a line stating how any disputes between the town treasurer and town clerk are to be settled (by the selectboard or by the town administrator.)

Adrienne asked if board members think that the clerk and treasurer should both report to the selectboard. Eben said that will cost us more because then both will need to come to selectboard meetings. Lydia said she thinks the town treasurer should go to selectboard meetings and if the town treasurer is also the assistant clerk, the treasurer can report on clerk matters like liquor licenses. She and Susan both agree that the treasurer should attend meetings. She thinks if conflicts arise between the clerk and treasurer there are enough resources to handle that. The town administrator can be a mediator or they can come to the selectboard. Paul said he agrees but the job descriptions should say who each person reports to and they don't.

Adrienne said she is fine with both roles reporting to the selectboard. Peter and Mike both said they think the town administrator should be the supervisor for the positions. Adrienne said she thinks that could lead to a bottleneck. If both report to the town administrator, they wouldn't be able to communicate with the selectboard enough. Eben said they all need to work together. He sees no harm in having the treasurer report to the board. Paul said he doesn't think the board should be supervising. That is not our job. Our job is setting policy and having the town administrator implement. He thinks the clerk should report to the town administrator. He does think the board should hear directly from the treasurer, though. The board’s duty is to make sure we know what is going on financially. He would have the treasurer supervised by the board.

Eben said he would be happy if a line could be added stating how it will be handled if there is an adversarial situation between the two employees. He doesn’t know if this needs to be in the town treasurer job description or not, but it might be helpful to have a policy that orders are closed on Thursday and are sent out with the meeting packet. He also suggested that ordering and maintaining purchase orders should be part of the treasurer's job description. Rosemary said we don't have purchase orders. Eben said we have talked about implementing a purchase order system. Maybe this is the time to do it. Rosemary said Jason would have to be on board with it.

John suggested we could say that in the event of a conflict, the clerk and treasurer should report to him and if they are not satisfied with the result then they could report to the board. Eben said he doesn't mind that recommendation. Lydia suggested that maybe John could be the office mediator or HR person – the starting point if there is an issue.

Eben said Rosemary's last day is June 30, so it would be best to have people hired and have cross-training start by June 1. That means holding interviews in May. John said he feels we have two qualified internal candidates. His recommendation is to fill the positions with internal candidates. He reached out to VLCT and they said it would be up to the board whether to post externally. The board agreed to post the positions internally.

Eben moved to approve the town clerk/assistant town treasurer and town treasurer/assistant town clerk job descriptions with the edits made tonight and to have the board chair and vice chair review the changes before posting the positions, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.

8. ***Review Invoices and Orders***
   Mike said at the last meeting we talked about holding some payment back from a vendor. There is another charge in these director's orders for the same vendor. He approved the other orders with a "no" by the vendor in question and he requests that the rest of the board do the same.
9. ***Application for Gene Richards, d/b/a Gihon River Spirits, LLC***
   Gene Richards said he is planning on having a restaurant with up to 100 seats, with a bar and kitchen. They don't have a menu yet. They are hoping to have affordable food.

   Eben asked if the outside consumption area will be fenced in. Gene said the area will be defined in some way. Eben asked if the plan is to serve alcohol outside until closing and if so, what the closing hours are. The town has a noise ordinance that does not allow loud noises after 10:00 p.m. Gene said they are not anticipating that the restaurant will be loud. Their hope is to have regular hours that will conform to the rest of the town. They don't have hours yet. But he doesn't anticipate it being a late venue.

   John said Gene gave him and Rosemary a tour. It is beautiful what he has done. Mike agreed that it will be an asset to the community. Gene encouraged anyone who hasn't seen it to come over. He would love to show it to anyone who would like to see it. He has tried hard to make it a spot where people will be able to celebrate Johnson and the Gihon. He has had Airbnbs open for about 2 weeks now. He wants to build back what Johnson has lost so people have a reason to come here and people in Johnson have something to do without driving to another community. Paul said the board is appreciative of what he has done.

   Eben moved to approve the application from Gihon River Spirits, LLC for first class and third class liquor licenses with outdoor consumption, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.
10. ***Grand List Signature Page***
    The board signed the grand list signature page (Certificate of No Appeals or Suits Pending.)
11. ***Ambulance Contract***
    Scott Griswold said he is here to have the board sign the 2026-2027 contract with Newport Ambulance Services that was approved by all five ambulance contract towns. They started service here July 1, 2003. It was agreed that costs would be divided among the five towns on a per capita basis, based on the 10-year census. There has been an average 3.5% increase in costs per year since then. This year the increase is 3.1%. The Johnson station was the second one that Newport Ambulance built. Since then they have added two more locations. One reason they can keep their costs down is that they have a CEO and CFO for the business as a whole. Eben said they are able to provide their own mutual aid to some extent because of their size, which has also kept costs down. Scott said they currently charge $50.03 per capita now. That compares to services around that are slightly over $125 per capita. The cost per capita for Newport is less, but there are more calls there.

    Eben said last year Scott had said that Newport Ambulance was trying to work with the state to get Medicare billing repaired. Scott said they are always lobbying for Medicare and Medicaid increases. This year there is a 2.5% Medicare increase in Vermont. Newport Ambulance bought new software a year and a half ago that enables them to find secondary insurances more easily. People in their billing department have gone to classes and they are making sure they are filling out the paperwork correctly, which makes it more likely that they will get paid.

Eben moved and Peter seconded to approve the Ambulance Services Agreement with Newport Ambulance Services, Inc. in the amount of $174,654.73 as presented tonight, authorizing the chair to sign on behalf of the town.

Peter asked if their ability to find personnel is improving. Scott said they are fully staffed in Johnson. They are down one paramedic in Newport. They are interviewing to have additional AEMT employees so they can pay less overtime.

Peter asked if personnel compensation is competitive these days. Scott said they change their compensation annually. They are lucky to have some very good, dedicated employees. One reason they stay is that this is one of the busiest services in the state.

The motion was passed.

12. *Johnson Rail Trail Committee Update*

Adrian Schmidt said the rail trail committee has selected benches and a bike rack that they would like to purchase. John said information and pictures were included in the meeting packet. Mary Lou Kopas said the proposal is to get benches and bike racks made of recycled plastic, which are very durable. They found an online vendor but because they preferred to use a local vendor, they went to Lamoille Woodcraft and talked him down on his price. The large bike racks are $900 each from Lamoille Woodcraft. The other vendor, located in Tennessee, is asking $800. Lamoille Woodcraft is able to deliver the racks already assembled. Mary Lou said the money to pay for these is coming from a Vermont Community Fund grant.

Eben asked about the locations. Mary Lou said there will be one bike rack at the Cold Spring, where the village will make a cement platform. There will be two at Jenna's Coffee House, between the Studio Center Building and the café, There will be one at the General Store and one in the green area between the Masonic temple and Butternut Farms. All the property owners are okay with having the bike racks there.

Mike asked if the racks will be secured. Mary Lou said they could be, but she doesn't think they need to be. They weigh about 500 lbs. Mike said he thinks they should be secured. Mary Lou said she thinks others on the rail trail committee also felt that they should be. Adrian said the concrete pad needs to be able to be removed for snow removal purposes.

Mike moved to authorize expenditure of $5,154 for bike racks and benches, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.

Adrian said there was a scoping study on connecting the rail trail to the village. Some starting steps were identified that could be done in the short term to attract people to the village. The rail trail committee discussed them. They support putting sharrows on the road (white markings showing a bicycle and arrows.) Those markings would invite people from the rail trail. Eben said sharrows already exist on the road. They probably need to be repainted. John said Jason plans to repaint them as part of spring maintenance.

Mike said Doug Molde's memo to the board says that we accepted the scoping study. He doesn't remember that. He remembers discussing it. Paul said the selectboard voted to accept the report as a work product. That does not mean we are going to implement everything in the report. Doug said the selectboard minutes do say that the board accepted it. It was mentioned in the minutes that there are some big problems with the recommendations. Some have to do with cooperation with the village. He suggests that the selectboard, in conjunction with Jason, look at what can be done to patch or raise the area around the drains to make the road safer for bikes. We also need to look for alternative routes. The board could consider using buyout properties in conjunction with an easement.

Mary Lou asked, wasn't a sidewalk curb another simple thing recommended? Doug said it was recommended to have sidewalk in front of what used to be the Parker and Stearns property. That would very much help to direct people and close the gap in the existing sidewalk. Paul said, as he recalls, that was step one in the report. Doug said the rail trail committee would like the selectboard to move ahead with step one.

Mike said village infrastructure needs to be replaced. It will be a big job and it needs to be done right. We can't do band-aid fixes.

Doug said we need to encourage people to come into the village as much as possible. Jan said our town is in a perfect location for people who are riding the rail trail to stop for food and lodging. Adrian said it is midway on the trail. Most people complete the trail in 3 days and Johnson is on their second day, no matter which way they are heading. Mary Lou said that is the day they have the most time.

Adrienne asked if putting in sidewalk in front of the old Parker and Stearns parking lot would involve repaving the street first. Eben suggested perhaps John could talk to Jenna's Promise and see if they would let us paint a pathway in front of their parking lot.

John said he has talked to Jason about potentially repaving Railroad Street. Jason's big concern is the condition of the storm drains. John talked to Erik Bailey. The village is looking at some grant funding to redo infrastructure under Railroad Street. John suggested to Erik that the town and village could go together on a grant to pave the street and fix the infrastructure underneath it, but that won't happen this year.

Eben said last year we talked about repairs to one area of Railroad Street with a lot of potholes. Perhaps that could be done in June. That and painting a path could be two things that could be done quickly.

Doug said he thinks Eben's idea is wonderful. He mentioned that Jackie Cassino wants to visit Johnson in late April or early May. VTrans is planning to do more signage.

Adrienne asked what the rail trail committee thought of the scoping study. Doug said he thought they missed the boat. He told them at the beginning that they needed to talk to the village. He thinks they misread the community. The purpose of this is to get traffic into the village. Connecting to the skatepark area is not what the community wanted. Adrian said plan 3B, involving a route around the outside of Old Mill Park and onto River Road, seems to have the most favor among committee members due to practicality. Jan said also because of safety.

Adrienne said Doug has done some research into the possibility of a trail on the buyout properties. Is that still a viable option? Doug said using buyout properties we can get a path as far as Seth

Manchester's. Something would have to be worked out with property owners to continue back to Railroad Street. We also talked about a bridge across the river from Holmes Meadow. We don't own and control all the land that would be needed for these options.

Eben moved to appoint Daniel Langevin to the rail trail committee, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

13. Open Bids for the Skatepark

John opened and read the bids. Catamount Skateparks bid $228,155 with an additional $4,000 for hydroseeding. Rampage, LLC bid $232,000.

Eben asked how we will make up the gap between the amount of money available and these costs.

John said there is $10,176 in the skatepark reserve. The budget has $3,750 for maintenance and $5K for capital. That would give us an additional $18,926.61 to add to the $160K we have. Casey said the skatepark committee is still looking for grant funds. We would need to talk about a construction loan. No one has talked to Carl Rogers yet about potential grants. Fundraising will help.

Eben said the funding gap is $45,000 based on that information.

John asked, the Tony Hawk foundation has money available? Casey said that is one potential grant source. We should talk to Carl about potential sources. John said one option would be to go back to whichever contractor is selected and ask what can be done to save money.

Mike asked, haven't we had constant problems with vandalism at the skatepark? Howard and Casey said not with concrete features.

Casey said the skatepark committee knows a lot about Catamount but nothing about Rampage. Paul said he thinks we need to read the bids in detail and check references. And we don't have the money yet. He suggests not awarding a contract now.

Casey said there is a firm June 30 deadline for total completion. One estimate she has seen for how long the work will take is 5 to 7 weeks. John said we are still working on the Act 250 permit.

Eben said he thinks we should reject both bids and ask the contractors what they can cut to get the cost down to $160K. Casey said the FEMA budget was built by FEMA in 2024. It was $29 per square foot, which is not realistic. The current price per square foot is more like $45. Contractors are not going to be able to do the work for an unrealistically low price. She thinks we need to talk to Carl and find out about other grant sources, but we can't dawdle. Paul said we can't wait for grants because of the June 30 deadline. Casey said that was why she brought up the idea of a construction loan.

Eben moved and Mike seconded not to select a bidder tonight.

Casey said the deadline for finishing construction is June 30. If we don't meet the deadline we risk losing all the FEMA money. It seemed to her that the approval for the extension we have already gotten came from the State of Vermont. The original deadline was December 31, 2025. Board members suggested asking if we can get another extension. John said since we are still working on the Act 250 permit, we could talk to FEMA about how that will delay the project.

<u>The motion was passed.</u>

14. ***RFP for Legion Field***

John said he worked with Howard to develop an RFP for Legion Field. The scope of work includes building a stone base for the bandstand to rest on, moving the bandstand, doing repairs to the bandstand, installing the storage container, establishing a gravel pad, installing electricity to the site (including bandstand, community oven and two locations for Tuesday Night Live vendors) and grading and rolling the skating rink area. Contractors are required to maintain general liability insurance, workers compensation insurance and business equipment insurance.

Mike asked if Howard wants to be clerk of the works on part of the project or the overall project. Howard said he could go either way. He would like to use Mike Lamphere to move the bandstand. He proposes that moving the bandstand not be in this contract. He and Mike would deal with that separately and he would get clearance for the expenditure from the selectboard. John asked if Howard wants Mike to move the container as well. Howard said anyone can do that. Paul said Howard needs to bid on this if he wants to do the work. We can’t be discussing who will do the work now.

Eben suggested taking out the conduit for the light poles and making it an add alternate in case we don't have the money for it. Adrienne suggested including some other add alternates for things from our priority list that it would be nice to have. She thinks we should also include the drawing we approved. John said we could award a contract and then make decisions with the contractor on adding or subtracting items. Howard said that is what he would suggest.

<u>Eben moved to approve the RFP for the Legion Field work as written except with installation of electrical conduit to locations other than the bandstand changed to add alternates, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.</u>

15. ***Highway Grant in Aid Application***

<u>Eben moved and Mike seconded to approve the highway Grant in Aid application as presented.</u>

John said we are applying for $200K. Jason would like to pave part of Wilson Road to the bridge. He is working with Pike on getting a quote. The application is due April 15. Eben said the amount included on the application needs to be only for paving Wilson Road, not Spitzer Hill, because Spitzer Hill is a Class 3 road.

<u>The motion was passed.</u>

16. ***Letter of Intent FY2027 Road Grant in Aid Program***

John said there is a Grant in Aid program for up to $15K with a 25% match. The match can be town equipment or manpower. The purpose is for projects that will increase water drainage and make our community more weather resilient. The grant period is from July 1, 2026 to September 2027. Jason has some ditching and other work he would like to do with the grant.

<u>Mike moved and Eben seconded to approve the Letter of Intent to Participate in the SFY27 Municipal Roads Grants-in-Aid Program. The motion was passed.</u>

17. ***LNMUU School District Director***

Rosemary said the school board has already appointed two people to the board – Scott Meyer and Elizabeth Aloisio.

18. ***RFP for Gravel Processing***

John said Jason told him that 10,165 yards of material have been moved from the gravel pit. He would like to get the material processed to yield a product that is ¾” minus. The material will be crushed and stored in a pile. He would like to have the work done around June 1. He talked about getting salt at the same time so that it could be mixed in.

Eben brought up MSHA requirements. The contractor needs to have a license to run a crusher. Paul suggested adding a line stating that the contractor must have all appropriate licenses.

Peter moved to approve the request for proposals for gravel processing with the addition of a requirement for the contractor to have necessary licenses, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.

Eben asked John to have Jason verify the amount of material moved from the gravel pit and get the information to Rosemary so we can purchase the material.

19. Adjourn

Adrienne moved to adjourn, Peter seconded and the motion was passed at 8:28.

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Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths