JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, APRIL 29, 2026

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Adrienne Parker, Eben Patch, Paul Warden
Others: John Sutherland, Lois Frey, Charles Flaum, Pat Persico, Morna Flaum
Absent: Mike Dunham

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. ***Call Meeting to Order***
   Paul called the meeting to order at 6:03.
2. ***Consider Additions or Adjustments to the Agenda***
   No changes to the agenda were needed. Paul noted that this meeting is intended as a selectboard working session.
3. ***Public Comment and Public Announcement***
   Pat Persico said he has some questions about the planning process the board is going through. It was stated at the last meeting that the board would set up a prioritized list and wouldn't get public input until later. The minutes show that Paul and Adrienne said the planning meeting would be for the board, not the public, and that the board would like to get public input in the future. It was concerning to him that the public would not be there to give input. Did he misconstrue what was said?

   Paul said his thought was that the selectboard would make lists of obligations, high priorities and things they are going to work on this year. His thought was that the selectboard should get ideas together and then ask the public what they are thinking.

   Pat said he thinks it will be a daunting task putting a budget together. Fuel costs are going up. Has the town bought ahead? Are we going to be in the hole before we even get to next year's budget? Eben said we don't prepurchase in bulk amounts, but we get rack plus pricing. *(Adrienne arrived at 6:06.)*

   Paul said the idea tonight is to talk about topics, not get into details of any topic. Pat asked when the board will get public input. Paul said there will be multiple selectboard meetings devoted to the budget, which are open to the public. Eben said he thinks Pat is talking about input on priorities.

   Pat gave the town hall as an example. Is that a priority? Paul said that is what we are here to discuss tonight. He understands that one task this year will be to start a townwide discussion on how we want to use it. Pat said he thinks budget and planning go together. He thinks this will be a tough year.

   Lois Frey said she was impressed with the framework laid out for identifying priorities. She thinks it is right on target. Paul said thanks should go to Donna Griffiths, who thought of it.

   Pat said he thinks the town hall and rising costs will be big issues. There is also the question of possible costs for the house across the street.

4. *Discuss Goals and Priorities for the Upcoming Year*

The board and John started by listing known obligations for the upcoming year. Each person listed the items they had thought of.

Eben
Transitioning from a single town clerk/treasurer
Updating our financial policies
Finalizing the union contract
He thinks we should look for a better IT contract and do a server upgrade.
Budget development
He thinks we should develop a facility use application for the old town hall.
Industrial park
Supporting buyout properties, including potential extra work on the Julian Scott house
He thinks we should meet with other selectboards and think about interlocal agreements to save money on things like fuel.

Paul said he is not sure all the things Eben listed are obligations. He might personally put some of them on a different list.

Peter
Clerk/treasurer transition
Budget
Finishing the FEMA and commercial buyout processes
Finishing library construction
Holmes Meadow project
Work on Wilson Road

Adrienne
FEMA buyouts
Library construction
Holmes Meadow
Industrial park
Holcomb House
Lamoille River hydraulic model/restoration projects
Skatepark improvements
Brownfield assessments for commercial buyout properties
Capital asset planning with Morristown
Clerk/treasurer transition
Julian Scott house
Legion Field improvements using grant money
Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) program

John
Office staffing
Buyout property follow-up
Library
Town facilities – parks and recreation, municipal – looking for deferred maintenance
Flood resilience

<u>Paul</u>
Library funding
Capital plan development
Completing FEMA buyouts
CEDS hire
Julian Scott house
Legion Field phase 1 (spending grant money)
Skatepark grant work
Industrial park
Salt purchase

Paul asked if members of the public wanted to add anything.

Charles Flaum said, regarding brownfields, one thing that came up in the RERC call the other day was the brownfields at Old Mill Park and the nearby town property. There is an EPA brownfields specialist who is part of the RERC program. It looks like consideration of brownfields will be a component of the RERC work.

Next each person listed high impact projects/big picture items.

<u>Peter</u>
Old town hall options
Potential sale of the old library site
Form based code changes
Acquisition of a piece of property neighboring Journey's End

<u>John</u>
Identifying what is next for the old town hall
Attracting businesses to the industrial park
Housing
Grocery store/post office in town
Improve Main Street economy
Railroad Street improvements (will involve town, village, rail trail committee and local businesses)
5 year municipal and economic plan
Form based code update to ensure code is not too restrictive
Upgrading the website

<u>Adrienne</u>
Long term flood resiliency strategy
Affordable housing strategy
Grocery store/food access
Community center
Form based code
Townwide visioning project/5-year plan
Economic development strategy
Recreation master plan
Infrastructure modernization for foot and bike traffic

Renewable energy municipal plan
Work with partners to take economic advantage of rail trail

Paul
Old town hall steering committee or plan
Rail trail to downtown improved access, part 1
Plan for new green spaces
Options for former Sterling Market property
LCPC/SLR flood resilience projects
Looking into the state’s new downtown designation program
Form based code
Communication with Vermont State University at the local and the state level
Old Mill Park improvements
RERC grant process – board involvement and support

Eben
Paving capital plan
Town building inventory to identify needed improvements
Consider uses for old town hall
Plans for buyout properties, including possible move of Tuesday Night Live to Sterling Market site
Old Mill Park updates
Bike path similar to Stowe
Possible road reclassifications
Sell all industrial park lots
Long term plan for committees (structured plan with end goals or defined roles)
Long term plan to get every structure out of the floodplain
RERC program
Railroad Street rebuild
Work on the municipal building

Paul invited comments from the public.

Pat said he thinks there should be some prioritizing of the college. There is a new president coming on in July. He suggests inviting them to meet with the selectboard.

Charles said he feels one thing that stands out is a Railroad Street connection to the rail trail. That would drive more people into the town. He thinks we need to make the Sterling Market property into some kind of park. That will also pull people off the rail trail. We are being told that rail trail users are bypassing us for Morrisville and Jeffersonville because we don’t have infrastructure like bathrooms.

Lois asked if the town has a capital budget plan. Paul said we don’t currently have a long term one. Part of the grant work we are doing with Morristown is developing a plan. Peter asked if it will be the type of plan that says what we intend to do in year 1, year 2, year 3, etc. Paul said he would imagine so.

Paul said the next list will be suggested priorities for this year. These will be in addition to known obligations, so maybe the board should revisit and define what known obligations are. He thinks those are things we have to do, like developing a budget. For example, we have grant money for the Legion Field improvements and a timeline to use it, so he would list that under obligations. Donna said she sees the first list not so much as obligations, but as things the board already knows it will spend time on, like the industrial park.

Each person listed ideas for this year's action priorities.

<u>Eben</u>
Industrial park
Town /village municipal structure
Agritourism

<u>Peter</u>
Highway capital plan
Community and economic development and settling the question of what we are doing for a community and economic development specialist
Grant funding for identified projects
Gomo lot survey
Holcomb House repairs
RERC project/rail trail
Downtown designation
Wayfinding and "Welcome to Johnson"

Charles said Discover Johnson plans to tackle "Welcome to Johnson" signage.

<u>John</u>
Industrial park
5-year plan
Improving college relations and using college assets
Improving the website
Julian Scott house
Skatepark
Form based code
Office staff

<u>Adrienne</u>
Continued flood resiliency projects
Industrial park
Old town hall planning
Wayfinding signs
Town clerk/town treasurer
CEDS
Gomo forest
Holcomb house improvements
Library

<u>Paul</u>
Everything he included in the list of known obligations

RERC program
Starting investigations into downtown designation
Old town hall discussion
Town and village office reconfiguration – employee and structural
Form based code
Green space planning

Everyone was asked to list things that felt unfinished or stalled from last year that they want to revisit.

Eben
Paving plan
Gravel pit
Bulk salt contract

Adrienne
Holcomb House
Old town hall
CEDS
Town clerk/treasurer
Gomo lot survey

People listed things residents are saying matter most to them.

Adrienne
Library
Old town hall
Town acquiring more properties – how will we take care of them?
Railroad Street improvements
Connectivity to the rail trail
5th public works employee

John
Condition of Railroad Street
Skatepark
Library budget
Rail trail

Eben
Rail trail
Library
Industrial park
Curiosity about Holmes Meadow
Complaints about Old Mill Park
High tax rate
Committee growth being out of control

John asked if there are any particular issues Eben has heard about with Old Mill Park. Eben said there are complaints that it used to be more lush and green and there were no hypodermic needles. It looks rough. Maybe it needs some reseeding and updates to the baseball diamonds. Maybe the parking lot flow needs to be looked at. He doesn't think the trail around the park has ever had maintenance.

Everyone was asked to list any obligations the board might not be aware of. Eben said the town garage needs a new boiler. He believes the contract with the Lamoille Regional Solid Waste district is past its renewal date. The compost facility site was paid for by the village but there was an agreement that the town would acquire it after 20 years. He doesn't know if the paperwork for the transition has been done. That is probably worth looking into. He believes there will be a new sheriff at some point. It is helpful to develop a good relationship with the sheriff's department. They are not forced to contract with us for services. The structure of fire departments may change statewide in the next decade. The town does not own the fire department but we contract for its services. We could see a model with a paid full-time fire chief and assistant chief.

Everyone was asked to list things they feel the board should stop doing or deprioritize. Paul said he would like to change our process for reviewing expenses and checks. They get passed around at the beginning of the meeting. He thinks that is a bad way to give them attention. He suggests cutting off payments earlier so the board can have time to review them before meetings. John suggested that the treasurer could upload warrants at the same time board packets are made available so the board can view them before the meeting. If there are one or two critical items that come in after that that need to be paid, they could be on a second warrant that the board might not see until the meeting.

Eben asked how much time we need to review packets before the meeting. We have been getting them on Thursdays and that is fine for him. Adrienne said she thinks Thursday morning is ideal. Peter said he could live with Friday.

The forms Adrienne sent out had asked who will lead or champion each of the top 3 action priorities for this year. But no one had prioritized the items on their lists. Peter said when we do identify top priorities, that is an important question to ask about each one.

Adrienne used an AI to identify items that appeared on multiple people's lists and showed the results.

Charles said Adrienne has a meeting coming up about a village/town merger. Sometimes the village can get in between us moving in a positive direction. A lot hinges on what will happen with Railroad Street. If the village doesn't want work to happen on that, the idea of a merger could come to a head. Adrienne said we will have a joint meeting with the village trustees soon. We could put Railroad Street on the agenda for that.

Eben mentioned that he thinks support for our server ends this year. Charles asked, the town isn't going to move to the cloud? Eben said he thinks there is an obligation to keep land records, vital records, etc. stored on the premises. He would need to ask Rosemary to be sure. He thinks our land records are backed up externally.

Paul asked how we feel about building security. He suggested we might want to have a policy that the building should be locked if only one employee is present. Adrienne said she would like to have PIN code locks on the doors. Committee chairs could know the codes.

Paul suggested that the lists be put into a sortable format for board members to review and then we can come back together to discuss them further and ask for town input.

Morna Flaum asked if explanations will be put under some things if it is going to be opened up for community input, like the most important next step for each. Paul said we haven't necessarily agreed on the next step for all of them. Morna said maybe that could be included for the ones where it is known.

Paul said he would like to have the AI summary Adrienne created sent out.

Pat said he doesn't see how the board will get from here to a budget. He has concerns about taxes.

John said once the board identifies needs and has a plan to address them, there is grant funding available to offset the costs of some of these items. If a project is part of a plan, we have a better chance of getting grant funds.

Lois said one thing Eben mentioned is an increase in the numbers of volunteer groups requesting money each year. The policy on appropriations was set in 2003. She thinks it is time for the selectboard to revisit that. Maybe a couple of people from the community can come and help with ideas. She clarified that she is talking about appropriations to outside organizations, not town committees. One issue is that once a group is on the list they don't ever have to make a new request as long as they don't increase the amount they are asking for.

Charles asked how much the total amount of appropriations is. Eben said it is about $32K, almost 2% of the budget. Charles said he thinks the taxes lost from the buyouts total more than $30K. Paul and Eben said the state is making up the lost taxes for a certain amount of time, initially giving the town 100% of the amount and then reducing to 50%.

Adrienne showed the board a spreadsheet made by an AI of the items that had been listed. She included a column to show what phase each item is in if that is known.

Paul said board members should think about the lists individually. Adrienne suggested that two people work on a final list that can be edited at a future meeting. It was agreed that Paul and Adrienne will do that and then circulate their list to other board members for feedback.

5. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00.

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Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths