JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2026

Present: Selectboard members: Mike Dunham, Peter Hammond, Adrienne Parker, Eben Patch, Paul Warden
Others: John Sutherland, Lydia Putvain, Alan Lehouiller, Seth Jensen, Tori Hellwig, Charles Flaum, Morna Flaum, Sue Lovering
Absent: Eben Patch

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. ***Call to Order***
   Paul called the meeting to order at 6:30.
2. ***Consider Additions or Adjustments to Agenda***
   No changes to the agenda were needed.
3. ***Public Comment and Public Announcements***
   Alan Lehouiller said the Sterling Market property is the most prominent piece of land we have in the town. Have we exhausted all the options with the state? He suggested it might be possible to tear down the building and get an exemption to elevate part of the property above the floodplain There is no more valuable property in the town. It has sewer and water. If this town is going to thrive, we need a good grocery store. If everything is moved to the college we won't have a great downtown. If we can move the library, why can't we find a way to get a grocery store back here? Maybe the town could give the property to a developer. Maybe fill taken from elsewhere in the village could be added to the property. He hates to give up on it that quickly. It will be a dead spot if it is just used as green space

   Paul said it does look like there is movement on the buyout of the Sterling Market property. Seth Jensen of the Lamoille County Planning Commission said the funding has been obligated. A lot of steps still need to happen. Next there will be an independent appraisal and Pomerleau has to accept it.

   Alan asked, does the selectboard have any say? Does the selectboard have to accept the buyout? Paul said the selectboard approved Pomerleau applying for it. After that we have no say.

   Alan asked, what about parking for the bank or for other people in town? Paul said that will all be part of the conversation

   Alan asked what benefit there is for the town in approving this buyout. Mike said not much. Adrienne said this has been a long process. The selectboard had to approve buyout applications. We approved all of them. After that, it went back to the federal government. The point when we could say yes or no was at the very beginning.

   Paul said he talked to Ernie Pomerleau, who said he could potentially rebuild, but to get his money back he would have to charge a higher rent than what would work. So building a new building wasn't really an option for him.

   Alan suggested the town could sell the property to a developer and maybe work with the state to try to make it a viable building lot. This is the town's most valuable piece of land. Adrienne said she

UNAPPROVED

doesn't think we can sell it, can we? Seth Jensen said the town can sell the property to a qualified non-profit, other municipality or conservation organization, but the restriction on development stays with the land. It could not be sold for an enclosed commercial building. Alan suggested that if Pomerleau didn't sell the property to FEMA, maybe he could work with the state to do something like adding fill. Paul said at this point it is Ernie Pomerleau's decision whether to take the buyout. If he doesn't take it, he will have to take care of the building.

4. ***Selectboard Updates and/or Concerns***

Paul thanked John and Erik Bailey for tackling the boxes with documents that were in the flood. He thanked the public works crew for supporting the United Way firewood project.

Adrienne said GMATV is going to come and test our microphones and see which ones need to be replaced. She requested a standing mike for members of the public to use. She talked to GMATV about the meeting at the college on September 28 and they said they can broadcast that with the college's Zoom.

5. ***Consent Agenda***

Mike moved to approve the minutes of September 8, 2026, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

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

Lydia said Jim Barlow needs a little more time to send out notices, so the tax sale date has been changed to December 10. Jim Barlow suggested that a selectboard member be present so the town can bid if there is a building that no one from the public bids on. Mike said he will be bidding on some of the properties at the tax sale, so he cannot be the selectboard representative.

Lydia said she and Susan had a great time at the Vermont Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Association conference. While there, Susan made a connection with the vendor for the voter booths, so we are getting three voter booths free of charge. They discussed other collateralization options for our bank account. Lydia will be going over those with the banks and with the auditors before doing anything. We learned that NEMRC has the ability to direct debit from people who don't have escrow accounts. That has been in demand as an option. We are going to explore it.

All general election ballots will be mailed by October 1. The general election is November 3. The selectboard would normally meet on November 2. Lydia suggested that the board may want to move that meeting because staff need to set up for the election.

7. ***Errors and Omissions Certificate***

John explained that the errors and omissions certificate is for a parcel belonging to Donald Blais and Diane Lehouiller that was created in 2024 and not added to the village grand list. The value is going from zero to $63,200.

Mike moved to approve the errors and omissions certificate for the new parcel span 11993, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.

8. ***Additional Porta Potty at Old Mill Park***

Paul said he has been approached by a couple of people who feel the porta potties at the Welcome Center don't serve young families at the Old Mill Park playground well. Isabel Sullivan thought that at least during soccer season it would be useful to have an another one in addition to the ones that are there now.

UNAPPROVED

Paul said we are currently paying $355/month for porta potties. Adrienne asked if that is for all of them, including the one at Legion Field. Paul said he thinks we need to find out more about cost before taking action. Adrienne said soccer season is going on now. We should act soon.

Mike moved to approve adding one porta potty near the playground at Old Mill Park until soccer season is over, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

9. Sterling Market Property FEMA Update

Seth Jensen and Tori Hellwig of the Lamoille County Planning Commission introduced themselves. Seth said they are here to talk about the brownfield assessment process and the site reuse plan process. There is a FEMA process and there is also a brownfield assessment process. Those are happening concurrently. Tori said the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation recommended that the town do a complete Phase 1 environmental assessment. That was done in 2025. Any future assessment can be supported through LCPC's brownfields program. LCPC just got an EPA grant for assessment work and site reuse planning. They have funding to hire a landscape architect to develop site plans based on community input. There are also resources available in the grant for additional analysis.

Paul asked about what the grant covers if we don't have a plan for the property vs. if we do have a plan. He understands that if we do have a plan then the assessment might be more in-depth and that it would be covered by the grant. Seth said corrective action planning is all eligible for funding through the brownfields program. There is also funding specifically for brownfield remediation at buyout sites. If the community has a reuse plan, then brownfields cleanup necessary to implement that plan could be funded. If the community doesn't have a reuse plan, the remediation paid for would probably just be the bare minimum. So it is in the town's interest to have a reuse plan. If the town were interested in buying the property for development, the assessment would still be important because it would provide the town access to a liability protection program.

Paul asked, the funding LCPC has for planning, design and remediation is not tied to the property going through the FEMA buyout? Seth said the assessment funding is not tied to the FEMA buyout. The cleanup funding he mentioned is specifically related to buyouts of properties affected by the 2023 flood.

Mike asked, does the property owner do anything, or does the town have to jump through hoops to get funding to clean up someone else's mess? Seth said it varies from property to property. As a prospective purchaser, the town is doing due diligence to prevent future liability. Mike said maybe we don't want to purchase it. The owner gets the federal government to clean up his mess and then gets a check for his property.

Alan Lehouiller said if Pomerleau got money for just the building and not the whole property, he could potentially invest the money to put in another building that was out of the floodplain.

Seth said the FEMA buyout process doesn't allow subdivision. A different funding source – probably a package of local, state and private funds – would need to be used to purchase the rest of the property.

Alan suggested maybe the town could entice Pomerleau with a tax break.

UNAPPROVED

Paul said Ernie Pomerleau has said that if he does go through the buyout, he would help the town do something with the property to make it whatever we want it to be.

John asked if there are any parcels along Route 15 outside the flood zone that could be considered for a grocery store location. Alan said there is not much available on Route 15. Peter asked if Vermont Electric Co-op might be interested in moving to the industrial park so their current site could be used for a grocery store. Alan suggested maybe the trailer park could be moved. He said it costs a lot of money to put in sewer and power, but that infrastructure is already in place at the Sterling Market property. He said a grocery store is critical for Johnson.

Peter asked if Pomerleau's lack of success finding someone else to run a grocery store was in spite of flood mitigation work. Paul said his understanding was that the people who wanted to operate the store in that building were fine with the plans for flood proofing, but their board was not.

Seth said he discussed with Ernie Pomerleau that the cost of new construction vs. the rent that could be justified for a grocery store in Johnson's market did not line up to make something like that work. He would likely need an additional subsidy for construction and maybe it could not be a full service grocery store.

Seth said it is challenging that FEMA doesn't allow subdivision of buyout properties. FEMA has three options: full buyout with the property becoming green space afterwards, floodproofing existing structures, and relocation. Relocation does not mean building a new building in another place; it means relocating the existing building by lifting it and moving it off the parcel to a property outside the floodplain. The idea of leveling the existing building and constructing a new one on a safer area on the same property is not one of the options.

Alan asked if the town has ever offered Pomerleau tax breaks. Paul said he doesn't believe so. Paul suggested to him that we give him a couple of lots in the industrial park, but he is not interested in building there because it is off the main road. John suggested the side road in the industrial park could be a possible location, with signage by Route 15.

Alan asked about the timeline for the buyout. Seth said it will take 6 to 8 months to get from contract approval to closing. There is time for discussions with Ernie.

Paul asked about the environmental assessment. Tori said after the Phase 1 assessment was done, the consultants recommended completing Phase 2. Paul asked if we have a schedule for that. Tori said if the selectboard is ready to take action tonight, LCPC would be looking for authorization to get that going. Paul asked if it is dependent on a green space plan. Do we need to know what the use of the property will be prior to doing testing? Tori said the selectboard can authorize the Phase 2 site assessment and also begin the process of reuse planning, and any corrective action planning can be designed around the plan.

Adrienne moved to authorize LCPC to proceed with a Phase 2 environmental assessment of the Sterling Market property and the motion was seconded.

Paul asked if LCPC would still pay for it if the town did not end up purchasing the property. Seth said yes

UNAPPROVED

The motion was passed with Mike opposed. Mike said he resents the fact that the site will be cleaned up at taxpayer expense.

Seth asked if the selectboard wants site reuse planning to begin at this time. Paul said LCPC has funding for reuse planning. How does it work if the property does not go through a FEMA buyout? Seth said the reuse planning funding will still be around 6 months from now. LCPC doesn't control the remediation funding. The money is there now, but might not be there if we wait too long.

Adrienne said she supports talking to the property owner if any selectboard members feel there is a need to make a last-ditch effort to see if anything else could be done. Paul said he would be happy to do that. He thinks that is worth doing. Alan brought up some good points.

Alan suggested that the town could help with grants for someone to do something with the property. Paul said the problem is that grant timelines are so long. Alan suggested getting state representatives involved.

10. Lendway Lane

John said he met a project estimator for Dale Percy at the Lendway Lane site. They talked about prior projects on Lendway Lane. The project estimator said that those projects were FEMA funded and so they had a lot of requirements that raised the price but would not apply for this project (e.g. planting trees.) He will try to give John a price estimate by the middle of this week. Then maybe John can reach out to AOT and give them the updated price estimate and see if there is a program that might help with the funding.

Seth said the BRIC grant program does not move fast enough for this situation. It could be good for evaluating longer-term solutions.

Paul asked about the cost of the previous rip-rap projects. John said one cost $300,000 and one cost $500,000, but estimator said this one would cost a lot less than that.

Paul asked if John had heard anything from Rich Westman or anybody about other funding. John said Rich Westman put him in contact with Seth. He mentioned that right now Vermont doesn't have much funding available. John spoke with someone from Vermont Emergency Management. Once the road washes away, they can help.

11. Public Works Truck Tire Purchase

John said the public works trucks need some new tires. We got several quotes, which are all pretty much the same because pricing is through a state program, but John thinks we still need to go out to bid under our procurement policy. He described where in the budget there is money to cover the expense. Paul said we have to put out an RFP because we need to follow our policy.

12. Salt Bids

John said we did not use Compass last year and they are not taking on new customers. We got quotes from Barrett and Cargill. Another company said they might be able to get us a price in October. Many companies are saying supply is tight and they are not looking to take on new customers.

Paul said our purchasing policy requires an RFP for this large a purchase. John said he doesn't know that there is any advantage to going out to bid. Mike said the same is true for the tire purchase. Paul said the purchasing policy says that a sealed bid process is required for purchases of $10,000 or more. Mike said maybe we ought to change it.

UNAPPROVED

13. Garage Boiler and Heat Pump

John said some suppliers he reached out to are unable to come to give a quote until October or November. There is one who will try to give a quote this week and John will try to get another quote. He will try to get an additional grant extension.

Paul asked if we need to have the boiler installed before winter. John said we originally considered some other projects for the grant funding we have, but they were too expensive. So then we decided to look at getting a boiler. The existing boiler is working for now. We have about $20,000 in grant funds and he thinks we can get a boiler and heat pump for that amount. We are considering switching over to natural gas, which would be cheaper than heating oil. He asked for quotes on both.

14. Holcomb House Tree Planting

John said there is a maple tree in front of Holcomb House with damaged bark. Some parts of the tree are starting to die. Sue Lovering has a plan to replace it and add two magnolias as well. Sue said she met with Nate and identified where the trees can go and the tree board has money for them.

Mike moved to approve replacing the maple tree and planting two magnolias in front of Holcomb House, Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

15. Town of Johnson Rebranding and Marketing

Adrienne said she designed a new logo to replace our current logo, which she also designed but does not care for. She tried to create a unified branding design system. Tonight she is looking for general feedback and a yes or no on whether she should keep going on this work. She can send out a link to the full design system and a couple of website designs. She showed guidelines she created about how to use the different designs. There are color and black and white logos, an official seal and a design for signage.

Mike suggested it would be nice to include the date when Johnson was founded on the logo. He thinks we could sell patches with the color logo.

Adrienne said she also designed three different kinds of logos with action words attached that town groups could use. Charles Flaum asked if Tuesday Night Live would be required to use one of those logos. Adrienne said she would say no.

Adrienne showed some information for employees about how to communicate with the public and what she would like town signs to look like if we ever got grant money to pay for them.

Adrienne said her idea is that the town would have two websites. One would be a redesigned version of the front-facing website we have today and another would be used for internal communication. Committee members, town employees and selectboard members could sign into accounts on that site, which she is calling the bridge. It could show each person's projects and could be connected to a grant scanner that could tell if there were any grants available that could work for those projects.

Paul asked if the public could see the bridge site. Adrienne said she doesn't think the public would see it.

UNAPPROVED

Adrienne said there would be a photo library where people could upload and download photos. She has heard a few times that people wanted a newsletter. She thought the bridge website could include a template where committee members could add items to go into a newsletter and once it was filled up the newsletter would be sent out. The bridge could be part of the same URL as the town website. Adrienne showed her vision of what the front-facing town website could look like.

Board members said they like the logo Adrienne designed and she should continue with the work she is doing.

16. Purchasing Policy

Mike said he would like to add language to the procurement policy saying that the selectboard reserves the right to deviate from it when prices for all vendors are exactly the same. The board discussed where to add this in the policy and agreed on a location.

Mike moved to approve the town procurement policy with the addition of the following language: *The selectboard reserves the right to deviate from the policy when all prices are established under state or municipal pricing and are the same*. Peter seconded and the motion was passed.

17. Public Works Truck Tire Purchase

Given the change to the procurement policy, the board agreed to revisit the tire purchase. **Mike moved to direct the road foreman to contact the three companies who provided quotes for tires and select the one that has the best guarantee and can provide the tires the quickest, Peter seconded and the motion was passed .**

18. EDA Grant Application for Industrial Park

John said he and Carl spoke to someone from the EDA about the industrial park. The town is eligible to apply for an EDA grant under their disaster program. The industrial park project was not funded in the past because there was no commitment from businesses or evidence of interest from businesses. The federal share of the $3 million cost could be as high as 80%. NBRC funding would be part of the federal contribution and an EDA grant could contribute as much as $1,535,000. There was a recent article talking about the proposed industrial park in Morristown. Pat Ripley was quoted as saying there is a need in Lamoille County for parcels that are ready for businesses to move into. We have an advantage over Morristown because we are in an opportunity zone where tax incentives are available to businesses and the Morristown industrial park has had a little bit of a stumble. He thinks our park would be more attractive. The EDA representative said that if we could make a case for a need in Lamoille County, she could try to push forward an EDA grant for the project. There would be a lot of work involved in applying, but LCPC has done some of these applications. John talked to Tori Hellwig about it. He feels it would be a worthwhile endeavor. It is a long shot but it would help relieve us of additional bond funding.

Paul said previously they declined to fund us because no business had committed to move into the industrial park. We still don't have one committed. What business will commit to a project that doesn't exist yet? He doesn't understand why they have that requirement. John said another thing we can show them is need and he thinks we can show that.

Peter asked if there is any harm in the board voting to move forward with an EDA grant application. Paul said his question is who will do it. John said he can work with Carl and LCPC on the application. He could talk to Randall Szott to get ideas. Peter said he thinks it is worth investing employee time to the extent needed, along with using LCPC. Adrienne agreed. Mike said why not?

UNAPPROVED

19. Old Business

Mike said he thinks we should look at something from the old business list at the next meeting to try to shrink the list.

20. Executive Session: Personnel Matter

Mike moved to go into executive session for a personnel matter under 1 V.S.A. § 313 (a) (3), inviting Lydia and John, Peter seconded and the motion was passed at 9:06.

Peter moved to exit executive session at 9:25, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.

No action was taken.

21. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

UNAPPROVED