

**MINUTES**  
**ST. JOHNSBURY SELECTBOARD**  
**MONDAY JULY 14, 2008**

The St. Johnsbury SelectBoard held their regularly scheduled meeting on Monday July 14, 2008 beginning at 6:30p.m. in the Board Room of the Municipal Building.

**SelectBoard Members Present:** Chairperson Bryon Quatrini, Gary Reis, Jim Rust, Daniel Kimbell, and Jean Hall Wheeler.

**REGULAR MEETING:**

Bryon Quatrini called the regular board meeting to Order with the Pledge at 6:30p.m.

**Others Present:** Peg Coutermarsh and Ira Coutermarsh, Dennis Neil, Joyce Fisk, K. Jean Beaulieu, Leo Beaulieu, Grover Boutin, Doug Morton, Rocky Bunnell, Michael Lemieux, Kimberly Lemieux, Carmen Anderson, Leland Anderson, Don Patenaude, Rodney Barrup, Bruce Wheeler, Pam Smart, Howard Crawford, Ken Davis, Ed Stretch, Stan Wilkins, Claude Donna, Rene Roy, Andrew McGregor, Lillian Schoenemann, Randall Northrop, Ken Gordon, Darlene Ahrens, Patricia Randall, Leigh Larocque, Kyle Proctor, Alison Meaders, Bruce Corrette, Taylor Reed, KATV-Channel 7, Recreation Director Joe Fox, Economic Development Director Joel Schwartz, Town Clerk Sandy Grenier, Zoning Administrator, Priscilla Messier, Secretary Ida Rainville, and Town Manager Mike Welch.

**INTERSTATE WEIGHT LIMITS DISCUSSION:**

Chairman Quatrini opened the discussion by saying that because trucks are forced to travel through the town rather than traveling on the Interstate Highway System, it causes congestion in the downtown and a real danger to pedestrians and particularly students at the St. Johnsbury Academy. The Town is ready to petition the legislature to assist in getting the weights raised on the Interstate system so trucks can avoid downtowns. He then opened up the discussion to the floor.

Several people spoke from the floor, including truck drivers Peg Coutermarsh of Bradford, Mike Lemieux of St. Johnsbury, Rocky Bunnell, Monroe, NH, Don Patenaude and Rodney Barrup of Derby, and Bruce Wheeler of Bradford. Also Carmen and Leland Anderson from Westmore, Joyce Fisk and Ira Coutermarsh from Bradford, Dennis Neil, K. Jean Beaulieu, Leo Beaulieu of St. Johnsbury, and Bradford Administrator Grover Boutin. The general consensus was that all supported the Town of St. Johnsbury and SelectBoard in their efforts to get the big trucks out of town. All indicated problems with navigating not only St. Johnsbury, but other towns in Vermont with narrow streets, winding routes through towns, children playing on roadsides and poor visibility and tight corners in various towns. St. Johnsbury has a particular problem with driving up Main Street to the St. Johnsbury Academy crosswalk, and having to stop on the hill, even though the Academy has tried to accommodate traffic and especially trucks entering Town on the uphill grade with a crossing guard. It was pointed out that, with the increase in fuel cost and the fact that virtually all of our materials and food stuffs are brought to this area by truck, it would make much more sense to allow the trucks to travel the Interstate Highway System for more direct routes and conserve on fuel. The extra cost will be passed on to the local citizens in the increased prices of items caused by increase cost in trucking.

A Derby trucker who hauls wood to the wood burning plant in Ryegate, indicated they can travel the interstate system in all surrounding states but not in Vermont. The State of Vermont will issue a permit for \$20 for one trip down and back on the interstate. With 20 trucks requiring a \$20 permit per day, that would add well over \$100,000 per year in operating expenses. He also said he has determined that traveling on US Route 5 instead of Interstate 91 costs an extra \$46 per day at the current cost of fuel. He felt it was not right that the trucking industry should have to pay from \$20,000 to \$35,000 in taxes per truck to the State of Vermont, and not be able to travel on the Interstate Highway System that the taxes pay for. General consensus was that the Interstate Highway System was built as an Army Transport highway and can accommodate 62-ton loads, so the truckers should be allowed to haul up to 100,000 lbs. easily.

Safety issues were discussed on Route 5A along Willoughby Lake, where the road is narrow and prone to rock slides. It was agreed that if a propane truck was struck or forced off the road it could cause a major incident. The speakers referred to other areas in the state with major difficulties in circumnavigating – Stowe, Rutland County, Derby Line, and other small towns where the streets are either too narrow, or bridges are not safe to use, so the trucks must go miles out of their way to make deliveries.

Howard Crawford, state representative from Burke and Director of Technical Services at St. Johnsbury Academy, arrived late for the meeting after helping to direct a tractor trailer truck onto US Route 2 West. The driver was unfamiliar with the route winding through St. Johnsbury, and missed the turn at the triangular intersection of Western Avenue and Main Street in front of St. Johnsbury Academy. Mr. Crawford indicated the Academy was very supportive of getting the “Big Rigs” out of the middle of town and encouraged representatives of all towns present to go to their Selectboards and talk to their representatives to urge them to support a bill that would allow the trucks to travel the Interstate Highway System. He suggested a coalition with VLCT, and contacting some of the larger municipalities in Chittenden County, for instance, since they are probably having at least as much trouble as the Northeast Kingdom with truck traffic, and generally have more muscle in getting laws passed. Sandy Grenier indicated that VLCT is already looking at this matter. Ken Davis indicated he had spent 10 – 20 years trying to get truck traffic out of towns. His company passes up to 500 loads of timber through St. Johnsbury per month, 163 loads in one week, all past the St. J. Academy.

There was general agreement that a concerted effort should be made by all who are affected by the truck traffic going through towns, and a committee was formed to consider future efforts to allow truck traffic on the interstate highway system. The date was set for August 4 at 6:30 in the St. Johnsbury municipal boardroom. Those volunteering to serve on the initial committee include: Bryon Quatrini, Dennis Neal, Howard Crawford, Ken Davis, Rocky Bunnell, Carmen Anderson, Rod Barrup, Grover Boutin, Doug Morton, and Leo Beaulieu.

**OTHER BUSINESS** - Chairman Quatrini asked if there was any other business to come before the Board which was not on the Agenda.

Lillian Schoenemann from the St. Johnsbury House, and Ken Gordon, representing the Area Agency on Aging, encouraged people to contact the Area Agency on Aging for anyone who needed assistance, particularly the elderly, in living expenses due to the sudden and extreme increase of fuel rates.

Patricia Randall of 44 Brunelle Street, asked the SelectBoard if anything further was to be done for her driveway, which she claimed was ruined by construction on the adjoining road. According to Ms. Randall, since the road was re-built, the transition to her driveway is too steep and difficult to maneuver. Also, the grade of the road now requires that she have steps to approach her house, which negates one reason she bought the house in the first place – it had a level lot. Chairman Quatrini explained that the street is in much better shape overall, and all entrances to driveways from the road are at a satisfactory grade.

**MINUTES** – It was moved by Daniel Kimbell, seconded by Gary Reis, and voted (5-0) to approve the Minutes from the regular board meetings held on June 23, 2008.

**WARRANTS SIGNED** - The following checks were approved and warrant signed by the Selectboard:

| <u>Grant Account</u> | <u>Amount</u> | <u>Main Account</u> | <u>Amount</u> |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|
| #2090-2095           | \$242,237.36  | #58216-58300        | \$34,5772.81  |
| #2096-2098           | \$ 57,103.79  | #58301-58319        | \$75,686.74   |
| #2099                | \$ 567.18     | #58320-58371        | \$140,212.75  |

Jay Lynn - #40, \$20,000 and #41 \$700.00

**PUBLIC HEARING – NEK WIRELESS PLANNING GRANT CLOSE-OUT** – Alison Meaders of NVDA explained the history of the Wireless Planning Grant implemented by NVDA for the Northeast Kingdom. The original intent was to have 100% cell phone coverage for the State of Vermont, especially on all main highways. Since the inception of the plan, there have been greater changes than anticipated to technology and telephone companies have initiated their own increases in coverage. Alison indicated all information gathered through the study is available and could be valuable to other studies, particularly for broadband coverage, but this particular grant is to be closed out.

**PUBLIC HEARING – VCDP HOUSING GRANT** – Joel Schwartz and Ed Stretch (formerly with Gilman Housing) presented some statistics that were gathered for needed housing, starting in 2006. Joel reported that the current vacancy rate is about 6%. Surveys indicated approximately 10% in 2006 from perusing the newspaper rental ads. Most of the rental housing available is pre-1930, with continued need for upgrading rental properties and providing new, low income housing. Even though rents are comparatively low in this area, they still take up 30%+ of many local peoples’ income. Joel also reported that because of the high demand for Section 8 vouchers, the agency has closed its waiting list causing more difficulties for low income families.

Joel reported that homes for sale in the St. Johnsbury area has increased dramatically over the past two years, but of the 72 homes currently for sale, only 8 are affordable to low income buyers (considered at \$106,000 or less), and many of them are in bad repair. There is also a need for assisted living combined with apartments. The Study showed a need for upwards of

100 units combined housing in the region. Other special needs would be to assist homeless to transition into rental units, such as Brattleboro has in place. With higher fuel expenses, suggest encouraging people who live outside the area and work in St. Johnsbury to move into town.

The data needs to be updated every few years, not just during a census year, as changes happen more quickly than every ten years. Ed Stretch said he would be able to keep the figures more up to date than census years. Further discussion centered on the possibility of a “Senior” mobile home park. Joel said the new mapping of water and sewer service available will assist in pinpointing areas more easily developed. Joel showed a map that identified areas of town that are not currently developed as a starting point.

**ZONING BYLAW AMENDMENT** – Priscilla Messier reported that in the new zoning bylaws, the 35’ height level from Section A was inadvertently left out of the printing though it had been previously approved and should be included. Also under #2 – the #301.6 should be corrected to read 301.5. This was just a matter of “housekeeping” that Priscilla asked the Board to approve.

Rene Roy voiced his objections to the 35’ height rule for communications towers, and was told by Priscilla Messier that provisions are written into the by-laws for exceptions and he should bring any questions to the Development Review Board (DRB). The 35’ applies to all structures and there is flexibility built in according to structure and location. The same rules apply to a triangle base as opposed to a single pole structure. Priscilla also said the DRB will be reviewing the tower section of the by-laws soon. On a motion by Gary Reis, seconded by Daniel Kimbell, the Board voted (5-0) to approve the correction by adding the 35’ height limitation, but to table the correction of #301.6 until a review of the by-laws has been completed to check for any other errors that may be discovered.

**APPOINTMENT TO PLANNING COMMISSION** – Michael Welch presented the name of people who had expressed interest in serving on the Planning Commission – Kevin Oddy and Laurie Zilbauer. Gary Reis suggested the discussion wait until Executive Session.

**TOBACCO COALITION** – Pam Smart and Kyle Proctor, manager of respiratory services at NVRH, presented a request for “No Smoking” signs in parks and other public places. They reported that the hospital will be totally smoke free as of January 1, 2009, as is the St. Johnsbury Academy. The Coalition sees this as a reduction in second hand smoke and showing role models for young people. Although they realize an absolutely “no smoking” policy on public grounds would be extremely difficult to enforce, the coalition suggested signage that would encourage people not to smoke. It was noted that smoking in the parks and on the sidewalks also causes litter in the form of cigarette butts and unsmoked portions of cigarettes. Joe Fox indicated he would like a no-smoking policy for the playground park at the corner of Winter and Main Streets because of the deep layer of wood chips on the playground, which would present a fire hazard. On a motion by Gary Reis, the Board considered putting signs in the parks to discourage smoking, and a sign in the playground to ban smoking. The motion was amended by Jean Hall Wheeler to ask the Tobacco Coalition to pay for the signs in the other parks, but the Town will pay for the No Smoking sign at the playground. The vote was seconded by Daniel Kimbell and passes (5-0).

**TOWN AND SINGLE AUDIT** - Randall Northrop of Bruce Corrette Associates reviewed the work he has completed on the Town Audit. He indicated that the general ledger system currently in effect is not really comprehensive and recommended a single general ledger. He also noted that there is a substantial amount of Accounts Receivables on the books, mostly due to the Jay Lyn Fund and other capital projects outstanding. He proposed a collection based estimate of uncollectables rather than continuing to show the large amount of receivables. Mr. Northrop indicated a few other minor points, but overall excellent books.

Town Clerk Sandy Grenier indicated she would review these and a few other items mentioned from the audit and address the Board with her and Mr. Northrop's findings.

**AUSTRALIAN BALLOT – CLAUDE DONNA** – Mr. Claude Donna addressed the Selectboard concerning the issue of Australian ballot for essential services and school budgets. Mr. Donna felt that, since the town meeting is held in the evening, the Town is discriminating against a segment of the community that is unable to attend the night time meetings. When Mike Welch explained that the Australian ballot for budget issues had been defeated in 2003 by voters, Mr. Donna claimed the vote was improperly counted. Sandy Grenier said this matter was looked at by other towns and she would communicate with other towns in the State for their opinions on how it has worked. Chairman Quatrini agreed that feed back from other towns would be useful and suggested the subject be discussed at the next meeting with more information to consider. Bruce Corrette reminded the Board that to change the School Budget vote they would have to go before the State Department of Education; a change in the voting for essential services, according to Mr. Corrette, would be a change in the charter and would have to go before the Legislature.

**LAMOILLE VALLEY TRAIL** – It was pointed out that, at some point the Town will have to decide if snowmobiles will be allowed on the trail from Mt. Vernon to the other end of town, and Bay Street.

**WATER SYSTEM** – Mike Welch presented two applications to USDA for the first two parts of the projects for water the water system – the replacement of the water tank on Underclyffe and the lining of water lines. Mike continued to explain that the USDA may have more funds from the national pool which could mean more money available to take more of the burden off the Town, perhaps as much as 75%. He reported he would know more within a few days. This would mean that the Phase II work could be completed sooner. He reported that the filter unit at the water filter plant will cost as much to clean as it would be to replace; the Higgins Hill tank also needs to be cleaned or replaced. Mike Welch told the Board that Ed Zuccaro issued his opinion that the Board had the authority from the voters to go forward with the water/sewer renovations up to a certain amount of money, but the Board might want to review all of the work that could be done at this point with the same amount of money and take it back to the voters in a special town meeting. Chairman Quatrini and Jean Hall-Wheeler indicated they would prefer getting a second vote from the Town. Furthermore, Mike Welch reported that the project so far has gone as planned, and much of the water loss previously reported was actually through a meter problem at the plant, and not as much loss of water as thought.

**COMMUNITY CENTER** – Joe Fox had met with representatives of the school system to try to work something out for the Recreation Department for the winter of 2008-2009. The school said they were very willing to let the Rec. Department use the school facilities for planned activities as long as they did not interfere with school projects and activities. Joe said that they indicated there may be space for his office at the school also. It appears heating costs will make it prohibitive to use the Community Center this winter for any activities. Joe Fox indicated he would like to at least maintain the status quo on programs, if not increase the offering. He also indicated they could reach out to other surrounding towns to help defray some of the costs incurred by St. Johnsbury for children in surrounding towns.

**HANDICAP PARKING ON PEARL STREET** – On a motion by Gary Reis and seconded by Daniel Kimbell, the Board voted (5-0) to try one handicap parking spot on the north end of Pearl Street.

**DOG WARRANT** – Animal Control Officer Josephine Guertin requested the Board authorize her to enforce the dog warrant on the many dogs in town known to be unlicensed and the many more dogs she knew had never been licensed. On a motion by Gary Reis and seconded by Jean Hall Wheeler, the Board approved (5-0) and signed the dog warrant.

**MANAGER'S REPORT** – Manager Mike Welch reminder the Board that a presentation to the DRB is scheduled for July 22 on the proposed Fire Station on the Murphy site. A permit must be in place from the DRB before going forward. There will be a meeting on 7/21 to review and finalize the plans and subdivision application.

Reminder of the dedication of the Elwin Cross bridge in St. Johnsbury Center on Monday 7/21 at 11:00am.

Mr. Welch reported that Assessor Peter Whitney had lodged the Grand List for 2008. The final will be set after the appeals process has been completed.

It was moved by Gary Reis and seconded by Daniel Kimbell and unanimously voted to move to Executive Session at 9:20 to discuss an appointment to the Planning Commission. It was moved by Gary Reis, seconded by Jean Wheeler and unanimously voted to return to regular session at approximately 9:30pm.

It was moved by Gary Reis, seconded by Daniel Kimbell and unanimously voted to (5-0) to appoint Kevin Oddy to the St. Johnsbury Planning Commission.

It was moved by Daniel Kimbell seconded by Jim Rust, and unanimously voted to adjourn at 9:31pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Ida Rainville  
Executive Secretary