

MINUTES
ST. JOHNSBURY SELECTBOARD
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2009

The St. Johnsbury SelectBoard held their regularly scheduled SelectBoard meeting on Monday, February 9, 2009 beginning at 7p.m. in the Board Room of the Municipal Building.

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

Others Present: Sandra Grenier, Bruce Corrette, Albert Dunn, Gary Lunderville, Bernie Timson, Russ Hutchins, Jon Beck, Diane Beck, Raymond LaBounty, Cathy Demers, David Brown, Taylor Reed, Gordon George, Joe Fox, Joel Schwartz, Nat Tripp, Steven Smith, Mary Smith, Werner Heidemann, KATV-7, LSC News-7, and Town Manager Mike Welch.

Chairperson Quatrini called the meeting to order with the Pledge at approximately 7:00p.m.

PUBLIC COMMENT – Chairperson Quatrini asked those present if there was any public comment on items that did not appear on the agenda. There was no public comment.

MINUTES – It was moved by Jean Hall Wheeler, seconded by Daniel Kimbell, and voted (5-0) to approve the Minutes from the February 2, 2009 SelectBoard Meeting as printed.

PUBLIC HEARING – PROPOSED CHARTER AMENDMENT RELATED TO AUSTRALIAN BALLOT VOTING FOR TOWN ESSENTIAL SERVICE BUDGET, SCHOOL BUDGET, PUBLIC QUESTIONS, AND SPECIAL

APPROPRIATIONS – Chairperson Quatrini opened the Public Hearing and asked for comments related to the proposed Charter Amendment.

Werner Heidemann said that this proposal represents a fundamental change in the way St. Johnsbury residents participate in local government. Werner said that we have a responsibility as citizens, and removing the discussion and ability to make decisions at a Town Meeting will be taking away something that historically is very important.

Bernie Timson asked about members of the SelectBoard and the School Board meeting on the same evenings, which may prevent residents from participating in the discussions in preparing the budgets. Bruce Corrette said that normally the Boards meet on opposite Mondays but, during the Budget season – both Boards do meet almost every Monday.

Peter Crosby said he supports the traditional Town meeting. Mr. Crosby said that with Australian Ballot you can only vote “yes” or “no” - there is not an opportunity for

discussion, or amendment to the proposed budget. Mr. Crosby said that Town Meeting is where many people get their information about the Budget.

Mary Smith said that people have a right to vote regardless of how well informed they are, and more people would be able to cast ballots with Australian Ballot.

Bruce Corrette said that once the Board adopts a budget, the Australian Ballot provides no way to adjust that budget – it is up or down.

Diane Beck said that she is in favor of the Australian Ballot as the most democratic way to conduct business. Mrs. Beck said she would like to know whether or not the Town Meeting would still be held, as she felt that it is an important step in providing input. Sandy Grenier said that there would probably still be a meeting but that no changes could be made in Budget amounts on the Australian Ballot.

Jean Hall Wheeler asked about the deliberative Town Meeting format used in Littleton – where a deliberative meeting is held that finalizes the amounts for voting on the Australian Ballot.

David Brown said that he is in favor of the traditional Town Meeting. Mr. Brown said that when people come together at Town Meeting they are a citizen legislature – and they can deliberate, discuss, amend, and vote all at the same meeting. Mr. Brown said that some of the objections to the traditional Town Meeting have been addressed to make it easier for people to participate – such as the ease of secret ballot voting using the tokens. The moderators have also had better control of meetings to discourage applause and booing. Mr. Brown suggested that the rekindling of the Taxpayers Association may help to accomplish what proponents of the Australian Ballot want to achieve. Mr. Brown said that you have to balance the shortcomings of the Town Meeting with the benefits of having the opportunity to debate and decide. Mr. Brown said that his review of Town records indicates that a very small number of people have actually gotten absentee ballots for the Tuesday Australian Ballot voting.

Russ Hutchins said that for the last several years people have gotten away from the Town Meeting. Mr. Hutchins said that there are 4,000 registered voters, and only 300 participate in Town Meeting. Mr. Hutchins said that he would like more than 300 of the 4000 people to participate in local government. Mr. Hutchins said that with Australian Ballot voting people can vote up to 30 days ahead of time, or they can vote at the polls (anytime the polls are open), they can vote during the day, they can leave work for a short time and return. Mr. Hutchins said that many people do not like to go out at night. Mr. Hutchins said that he can not remember the last time that anything was changed at a Town Meeting.

Steve Smith said that there is an opportunity to debate. Steve said we are debating here now. Mr. Smith said he would prefer to see 20-30% of the registered voters deciding on the Town and School Budgets and not 7%. Mr. Smith said that this is about people being overwhelmed with taxes. Mr. Smith said he didn't even know what the tokens were for at

Town Meeting until last week. Mr. Smith said that the Australian Ballot is important, and that informational sessions can still be held to provide feedback to the Boards preparing the budgets.

Russ Hutchins said that if budgets are turned down, then voters are saying it is too high. Russ Hutchins said that Australian Balloting is not more expensive, as you still have expenses associated with holding a Town Meeting – and unless there is a revote, there is already Australian Ballot voting. Russ Hutchins said that voters are being informed about the budget proposal through the Caledonian Record, Channel 7, and there are other means to get information out to the public in advance of voting.

David Brown said that this country has fought, and is fighting, to be a free society. Mr. Brown said that voters have an obligation to participate. Everyone doesn't have to speak at a Town Meeting – but at least they have an opportunity to listen.

SelectBoard Member Daniel Kimbell said that he has lived in different Vermont Communities with different types of systems including Milton and Brattleboro. Mr. Kimbell said that the constant denial of the School Budget in Milton put many people in the community at odds with each other. Mr. Kimbell said that there is no direction provided with the Australian Ballot – do you cut sports, music, arts? SelectBoard member Kimbell said that he supports the traditional Town Meeting and feels that it works well in St. Johnsbury.

Bruce Corrette asked how the rest of the SelectBoard members felt. Bryon Quatrini said that he feels that it is up to the voters to decide. SelectBoard member Gary Reis said he supports the Town Meeting. SelectBoard Member Jim Rust said that he thinks that every citizen should have the right to vote, and the only means to provide the best access to the voter is through the Australian Ballot. Jim Rust said that in terms of voters being better informed, most people have not even looked at the information until they get to the Town Meeting. Mr. Rust said that he supports the Australian Ballot. SelectBoard member Jean Wheeler said that she would stay with the Town Meeting format in hope that we could look at other models that may meet some of the concerns about the traditional Town Meeting format.

Russ Hutchins said that the Australian Ballot has always been about allowing more people to vote in the most convenient way. Mr. Hutchins said that right now \$18,000,000 in School and Town Budgets are decided by 300 people, and many others are excluded from participating.

David Brown said that he would like every voter who wants to vote to be able to. However, he said that the vast majority of people can come to Town Meeting, but they choose not to.

Steve Smith asked how long we have to wait before something is actually done – we owe it to the people who can not get out for Town Meeting.

Chairperson Bryon Quatrini asked if there were any other comments for the Public Hearing. Hearing none, Chairperson Quatrini closed the public hearing.

WELCOME CENTER AGREEMENT – Nat Tripp, Chairperson of the Welcome Center Advisory Committee, was present to review the revised Welcome Center Operating Agreement with the members of the SelectBoard. Mr. Tripp stated that the Manager and he had met with Town Attorney Edward Zuccaro to try to incorporate the comments made by the SelectBoard relative to the Committee composition, and advisory role. Mr. Tripp said that Attorney Zuccaro has restated the document as more of a contract clearly defining the role of each of the partners. SelectBoard member Daniel Kimbell pointed out that Connecticut was not spelled correctly. Nat Tripp stated that the document should also be amended to require minimum \$1,000,000 for insurance limits, per VLCT, instead of \$2,000,000. Following discussion, it was moved by Gary Reis, seconded by Daniel Kimbell and voted (4-1 Jim Rust opposed) to approve the Welcome Center Operating Agreement, as amended for correction in spelling and insurance minimum, and authorize the Town Manager to sign the document.

COIN DROPS – The Manager provided members of the Board with information about Coin Drops in Lyndonville, and a copy of the State Law regarding solicitation from a highway. The Manager provided copies of comments from two police officers and a dispatcher. Jean Hall Wheeler asked about agencies who may be interested. The Manager said that he has not heard from many recently, as the policy of the Board has been not to allow coin drops – the Recreation Department, the Fire Department, and other local non-profits engaged in fund-raising may be interested. Jim Rust recommended that the Town get feedback from the Downtown Commission before making any decisions. Joe Fox said that he could definitely see an opportunity for the Recreation program for a coin drop – and he thought the Lyndonville system was well organized. Joe Fox said that signs would be very important. Albert Dunn said that the baseball program used to do a coin drop – but it was usually when teams were going to the regional competitions. Bruce Corrette said that the Rotary Club used to do a coin drop. Chairperson Bryon Quatrini stated that he would like to try to get more information from organizations that may be interested, and recommendations on locations. Bernie Timson asked about liability insurance. The Manager said that the organization holding the coin drop would need to provide evidence of liability insurance. Chairperson Quatrini recommended that this item be put back on the agenda for the first meeting in March for further discussion.

MANAGER'S REPORT – *Grant Agreement Resolution*, 07110-IG-II-2007-St. Johnsbury-0048 – The Manager advised the Board that the Town Attorney has recommended that the actual signed resolution be incorporated as part of the SelectBoard Minutes of the January 26, 2009 meeting. It was moved by Jim Rust, seconded by Gary Reis, and voted (5-0) to incorporate the signed grant agreement resolution as part of the Minutes of the January 26, 2009 SelectBoard meeting.

Resolution to Designate a Public Agency – It was moved by Gary Reis, seconded by Jean Hall Wheeler, and voted (5-0) to approve and sign the Resolution to Designate a

Public Agency – Gilman Housing Trust – for Grant # 07110-IG-II-2007. A signed copy of this Resolution is included with these Minutes and incorporated by this reference.

Municipal Budget – The Manager informed the Board that he had made an error on one of the summary documents prepared relating to the Municipal Budget, by not adjusting the amount of the property tax required for the increase in the County Tax. The Manager said all other summary documents were correct. It was moved by Gary Reis, seconded by Daniel Kimbell, and voted (5-0) to affirm the correct budget amounts approved by the St. Johnsbury SelectBoard for Municipal Essential Services are:

	Expense Budget Approved 2008	Expense Budget Proposed 2009	Variance	%
General Fund	\$2,333,598	\$2,391,070	\$57,472	2.46%
Highway Fund	\$1,997,565	\$2,084,545	\$86,980	4.35%
Special Services	\$1,054,600	\$1,076,480	\$21,880	2.07%

The estimated Property Taxes required to fully fund these proposed budgets are:

	Approved 2008	Estimated 2009	Variance	%
General Fund	\$1,826,513	\$1,813,970	(\$ 12,543)	(0.7%)
Voted Appropriations Requested	\$ 340,752	\$ 308,966	(\$ 31,786)	(9.4%)
Highway Fund	\$1,749,420	\$1,850,545	\$101,125	5.6%
Town Tax Est.	\$3,916,685	\$3,973,481	\$ 56,796	1.45%
Special Svs.	\$ 991,532	\$1,022,280	\$ 30,748	3.1%
Town & SS Tax Est.	\$4,908,217	\$4,995,761	\$ 87,544	1.78%

Commendation – The members of the St. Johnsbury SelectBoard reviewed, approved, and signed letters of commendation for Police Sgt. Eric Hazard, and Patrol Officer Justin Hoyt following their immediate apprehension of the individual suspected of shooting out the rear window of a St. Johnsbury Police Cruiser with a shotgun on January 27, 2009.

Crosswalk Grant – The Manager provided information relative to the Municipal Planning Grant approval for Main Street Crosswalks.

Citizen of the Year – The NEK Chamber is seeking nominations for Citizen of the Year. Information was provided to members of the Board.

Community Center – The Manager reviewed the damage to the Community Center due to a leak in the membrane roof in the front of the building. The roof has been repaired. A claim has been filed with VLCT.

Liquor and Tobacco Licenses - were reviewed, approved and signed by the SelectBoard for WESCO, Coco Mart, and ABFB. Liquor License was approved for Rite Aid.

Expenditure Warrants - The SelectBoard reviewed, approved, and signed expenditure warrants as follows:

Jay-Lyn Fund	\$13,370.41	#44
Grant Fund	\$ 5,081.66	2160-2161
General Fund	\$26,949.37	61164-61204

OTHER BUSINESS - Chairman Quatrini asked for other business. There was none.

Having no further business, it was moved by Daniel Kimbell, seconded by Jean Hall Wheeler, and voted (5-0) to adjourn at approximately 8:15p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Welch
Town Manager