

**REGULAR SELECTBOARD MEETING
MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2002
7:00 PM -- MUNICIPAL BUILDING**

A regular meeting of the St. Johnsbury Selectboard was held Monday, September 9 at the Municipal Building at 7:00 PM. Present were Chairman Reg Wakeham, members Elwin Cross, Bryon Quatrini, Dale Urie and Gabriel Handy. Also present were Town Manager Michael Welch, Secretary Ida Rainville, Police Chief Paul Devenger and Economic Development Director Joel Schwartz. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 by Chairman Wakeham, who led the assembly in the pledge of allegiance. Approval of the minutes of the August 12 meeting was postponed to the next meeting.

Also present for the discussion were Steve Watson, Valerie Coolidge, Sam and Alice Silverman, Rod Copeland, VT Dept. of Health, Paul Bengtson, NVRH, Bonnie Bassett, Jeannie Ayer, Michelle Fay, Dana Gray, Bruce Corrette, Paul Amell, Jeff Owen, Amy Livingston, Kendall Farrell, Vermont CARES, Tom Lovett, John Limberakis and Jamie Ryan from St.J.Academy, Al Sleep, Bernier Mayo, James Ryan, Senator Rob Ide, Glen Elder, Louis LaCroix, Kim Leonard, Clara and Andy Fisher, Mitchell Gordon of NEKCA, Bruce Burk, Valerie Cates, Penni Cleverley, Denise Connally, and Bill Vermeulen.

Resolution - Clara and Andy Fisher

In recognition of their outstanding contributions to the Town of St. Johnsbury, Clara and Andy Fisher have been selected as the co-recipients of the 2002 Vermont League of Cities and Towns - Town Citizenship Award for 2002. A resolution recognizing this award was read by Gib Handy and presented to the Fishers.

Al Sleep - Wild Man Auto Daredevil

Al Sleep presented his idea for an auto thrill show and barbecue he intends to hold at the so-called Blue Moon Drive-in property, donations to benefit Cystic Fibrosis, September 22. Concerns of the Board were for safety and traffic control. Gib Handy moved to accept the project, providing law enforcement agencies are present and insurance is approved. Seconded by Bryon Quatrini, and passed unanimously.

Needle Exchange Discussion

Selectman Dale Urie opened the discussion with his concerns - 1) The program had not been exposed to the public or the local government before it was implemented; 2) Concern over the mixed message the program sends to our youth; 3) Will the effect of this program be to attract new business and improve the local economy?.

Kendall Farrell gave a summary of the intent of the program, to reduce the risk of the spread of AIDS. VT CARES has been in place since 1996 and the needle exchange program has been approved through the VT Dept. of Health since August, 2002.

People who participated in the discussion included: Dr. Alice Silverman and Dr. Sam Silverman, Bill Vermeulen, Jamie Ryan, Dana Gray, Rod Copeland, John Liberakis, Jeff Owen, Joel Schwartz, Paul Bengtson, Kendall Farrell, Mitch Gordon, Greg MacDonald, Tom Lovett, Amy Livingston,

Steve Watson, Valerie Coolige, Penny Cleverly, Bernier Mayo and Paul Devenger, along with all members of the Selectboard. Questions from various members of the Selectboard and the audience covered the following points:

- How did the application process involve the public at large and local government? Mr. Welch said he had not received personal notification of meetings or invitation to participate. Ms. Farrell said a group of involved citizens made up the Board for VT CARES, including police chief Paul Devenger.
- Does the group exchange needle for needle? No. They have taken in approximately 50 needles, while giving out 80, divided among four people.
- While this particular program does not have drug counselors, they do encourage drug users to seek rehab. Specific numbers were unavailable of people who had sought treatment after receiving needles through this program.
- There are two other exchange programs in the state - Brattleboro and Colchester. No conclusive figures available supporting the decline in the spreading of AIDS, or for anyone seeking treatment after taking advantage of the program.
- General feeling of the board was that a one-for-one exchange should be looked at, and if the Board had been kept informed from the beginning, the process would have been smoother.
- Point was made that needles can be purchased through a pharmacy without a prescription. Needles from the program are also available to diabetics or anyone who requires a needle for injections not associated with illegal drug use.
- Rod Copeland noted that State Health Dept. is working community by community, not state wide. They were under the impression the program was developed with community approval and the permit was granted accordingly. Asked about the mobile unit delivering needles, Mr. Copeland reported the State is not in favor of this aspect.
- Dale Urie repeated his concern that providing needles would encourage drug use and send a mixed message to our children, and that ultimately it would be encouraging an illegal act.
- Ms. Farrell emphasized the program is to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is not currently set up to be a treatment facility for drug addicts. She stated the reason Caledonia County was chosen was there is a higher per capita ratio of AIDS patients in this area.
- Joel Schwartz questioned who specifically was on the board and advisory committee. Mr. Mayo stated he felt the advisory committee was stacked with hand-picked people and the program slipped past the Selectboard and the public.
- Dr. Sam Silverman said he does not feel that the free needle exchange will encourage drug abuse, but is specifically to help stop the spread of AIDS. He encouraged more people to get

involved and find out more specifics of the project.

- Mitch Gordon suggested this should be looked at strictly as a health issue, not a substance abuse control issue, and that it is not considered put in place to encourage substance abuse.
- Paul Bengtson suggested forming a Community Health Advisory Panel as had been suggested in the previous Town Plans, and volunteered to serve on the panel.
- Paul Devenger stated that he had attended 2 or 3 advisory board meetings with only 3 or 4 people present and it did not seem to reflect a broad cross section. He was not aware that the program had been approved by the State, and only heard about it through the article in the Caledonian Record.
- Overall consensus of the Board of Selectmen was that the town was not properly apprised of the situation and kept informed, or included in the process.

On a motion by Dale Urie and seconded by Bryon Quatrini, the Board voted unanimously to contact the Vermont Department of Health, in writing, to request that the permit for the needle exchange program operated by VT CARES, in St. Johnsbury, be rescinded until such time as a Community Health Advisory Panel can be formed to examine the program and give an opinion. Mr. Welch was directed to write the letter on behalf of the Board.

Ms. Farrell questioned if this would override a state law which allows them to operate the needle exchange program.

After a 3-minute recess, the meeting continued.

Downtown Coordinator Office

Mike Welch reported that Banknorth has offered space for the Downtown Coordinator's office at their facility on Railroad Street. The Board unanimously approved going forward with the lease agreement (Quatrini/Handy).

2003 Budget

A suggested to form a budget committee was tabled to the next meeting.

Manager's Report

1) A meeting time was set up for property review of parcels owned by the Town that could be liquidated. 2) The permit that had previously been approved by the Board, was signed authorizing the new driveway from St. Johnsbury Academy onto South Main Street. 3) Water tanks need periodic evaluation. Dufresne Henry bid \$3,398 to study the Airport tank. Exterior looks sound and they hoped to find a way to clean and upgrade interior without taking off line. Motion was passed to accept the Dufresne Henry bid (Handy/Urie).

Mr. Welch reminded everyone of the "Ribs" sale available through September 20 to help support the cost of operating the Skate Park. Mike Johnson reported through Mr. Welch that he would have a supervisor at the skate park each night until 9:00 pm or until dark, whichever came first, until

November 1 when the park will be closed for the season.

The Town received the final designs supplied by Earth Tech on the E. St. Johnsbury sewer project, and it has been submitted to the State.

The Recreation Department will need a new director the first of the year, and the search is open. Mr. Welch announced the Town would be looking for applicants.

Also noted that, since the Recreation Board has a local student member, perhaps a student could be asked to serve on the Selectboard in an advisory capacity. This was tabled for future consideration.

A reminder that the Town would hold a memorial service in front of the fire station on Wednesday, September 11, to honor the fallen heroes of September 11, 2001. All are invited.

Bryon Quatrini asked if a traffic study could be done on the speed limit on Breezy Hill - perhaps increase the limit to 35 from 30 MPH between Donna Drive and Hospital Drive.

On a motion by Gib Handy and seconded by Elwin Cross, the Board voted unanimously to go into executive session at 9:25 PM to evaluate a public officer and discuss a possible land transaction.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:45 PM with no further business transacted.

Respectfully, _____, Ida W. Rainville, Executive Secretary