

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2020

**Present:**

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Doug Molde (by phone), Kyle Nuse, Eric Osgood

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Lynda Hill, Charles Gallanter, Scott Meyer, Greg Stefanski, Sue Lovering, and community members participating via Zoom, including Dan Noyes, Matt Hill, Rich Westman, and Eric Hutchins

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. *Call to Order***

Eric called the meeting to order at 7:03.

**2. *Additions, Changes to Agenda***

Brian said Michelle McCutcheon-Schour from Efficiency Vermont will not be attending.

Eric said Mark Nielsen from the school board will not be attending.

**3. *Review and Approve Minutes of Meetings Past***

Donna said the village trustees approved the change suggested by Doug to the January 27 joint meeting minutes, after the selectboard had approved the minutes without that change. She asked how the selectboard would like to handle that. She thinks it would be confusing to have two different versions of the minutes from that meeting.

**Nat moved to approve the latest revision of the minutes of March 3, 2020 and the minutes of March 4, 2020, Kyle seconded and the motion was passed.**

Eric asked Donna to send out the version of the January 27 minutes approved by the trustees for board members to see.

**4. *Treasurer's Report / Review and Approve Bills, Warrants, Licenses / Any Action Items***

Rosemary said expenses to date are at 65% of budget.

The town has received liquor license applications from Sodexo (NVU), Butternut Mountain Farm, Dollar General, Jolley, River Valley Store, R.L. Vallee, and Sterling Market. **Kyle moved to approve all the requested liquor licenses with the usual letter to be sent, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.**

**5. *Road Commissioner/Road Foreman Report and Action Items***

Brian Story said this year's mud season will probably be pretty expensive. Roads have been breaking up in spots and our employees are working on them. We are trying to keep overweight vehicles off roads when they are soft. We are managing overtime but have spent quite a bit on it. He thinks we will stay under the limit for the year but will be close to it.

Brian Krause got back yesterday from a vacation in Washington state, which has a pretty high rate of COVID-19 infection. We asked him to work from home for the rest of this week. He won't be at home for a full 2 weeks but we can't really spare him for that long after his vacation.

Kyle asked if he can be tested. Brian said tests are only available for people who are symptomatic. If we see that he has symptoms we will reevaluate before bringing him back to work. Barring any particular cause for concern, he thinks there is a manageable level of risk with a week of isolation.

Kyle asked if any of the bad spots on roads are places where we have done mud mitigation. Brian said he is not sure what mud abatement we have done in those places in previous years. Now we are just doing repairs. He thinks part of the reason this is an especially bad year is that there was a lot of rain just before the ground froze so the ground was saturated. That could also explain why there are so many frost heaves in paved sections.

**6. *Planning Commission Report***

Charles Gallanter said he was elected chair of the Planning Commission and Kim Dunkley is vice chair. They need to get a recorder so Donna can do their meeting minutes from a recording.

Charles said his understanding is that the selectboard wants them to look at sewer and water extensions, for which they need a lot of guidance. They had some other things they had thought about working on. One is marijuana retail locations. To his knowledge, the Planning Commission does not have bylaws, which are a requirement under state statute. That will be something for them to work on.

Nat said his understanding is that the town's sewer allocation runs out at a certain point. Is that correct? Brian said it is a little unclear if the town's allocation runs out or if the entire agreement about the service area runs out. It is also unclear what happens if either runs out. We have 2 years before the agreement between the town and village ends. A new service area agreement can be completed before then. Nat said he thinks it is worth having a conversation with the trustees first to ask if they are interested in extending sewer service. Eric said they brought to us that they were interested. Scott Meyer said there has been no change on that. Eric said it is a question of where we want to see expansion and growth. Wherever a sewer line goes it can stimulate growth and there may be areas where we don't want it. Scott said the village has capacity to expand and needs cash.

Charles said the Planning Commission is for the town and the village so he will also need to go to trustee meetings. Brian agreed, especially for a matter like this.

Charles asked if there is anything else the selectboard wants the Planning Commission to work on. Eric said as of now the direction the board has is to look at the townwide sewer district.

Charles asked if sewer comes with water or is separate. Scott said water doesn't have to come with sewer. Rosemary said we don't have any water districts. Eric asked, there are places where water goes beyond village limits, right? Rosemary said no.

Doug asked what the ability of the village is to extend sewer service wherever they might choose if there is no town service area. Eric said they would need town approval to go outside their own jurisdiction. Doug said he wonders what they have in their charter about

this. Eric said the charter would only extend to the village borders. Brian said he thinks he recalls that there is a provision that allows the village to work on village property outside village limits without our approval but he doesn't think they could make new extensions without approval.

Charles suggested he should talk to the village trustees about this before taking it to the Planning Commission. Brian said he can get together with Charles and give him the information we have.

**7. *VASA Land Use Expansion and Johnson ATV Ordinance***

Eric said there was going to be a request from the ATV group on having access to the village but because of the constraint on meetings with more than 10 people and his fear that there would be more than 10 with the ATV group members, he asked them not to come tonight and he is asking the board to suspend discussion on this until a future meeting. **Mike moved to suspend discussion on VASA land use expansion and the Johnson ATV ordinance until a future meeting, Kyle seconded and the motion was passed.**

The ATV club has asked to continue their use of the Jewett property. **Mike moved to authorize the ATV club to use the Jewett property under an agreement the same as the existing agreement, seconded by Nat.**

Kyle asked if there were any complaints or damage to our property last year. Brian said none that he knows of. We have had a couple of complaints about ATV's running late or being loud occasionally on Hoag Road, but that is on a Class 4 road.

Lynda Hill asked if they have trails on the Jewett property. Eric said they went around the perimeter of the property. Nat said they built a trail.

**The motion was passed.**

**8. *COVID-19 Response and Planning***

Eric said he had set up a core team that met to look at ways to minimize exposure of employees to the virus. The team consists of Gordy, Nat, Brian, Meredith, Eric and Scott Meyer, who offered his assistance. He worked for the state health department and has a background in this. We want employees who are not feeling well not to come in and we don't want to penalize them. We are looking at doing modified schedules to reduce the number of people here at the same time. We have mutual aid agreements for highway, electric and fire departments, but if our crew is taken out others will probably be having the same struggles. The staff at the municipal building office have the most face time with the public and the biggest opportunity to catch the virus. They have done some mitigation. They closed the window. They have the door shut so only authorized people can come in. Eric said Rosemary has gotten word that Cambridge and Fletcher have both closed their town offices. Rosemary said many more towns have as well. Eric said our municipal offices will also be closing to the public effective tomorrow. The office will be taking phone calls and emails. Rosemary said researchers can come in by appointment only.

Eric said all meetings of all groups that meet in this building will be cancelled. There are thoughts of directing all committees, boards, etc. that don't have an imminent need to meet to

suspend meetings for one or two months. The TNL committee might need to meet to plan for summer. Maybe teleconferencing can be used to minimize contact.

Eric would like the board to consider declaring a state of emergency. That gives him a level of authorization as far as the emergency management director position and opens up \$1000 from the emergency management reserve fund if is required for any reason, which he doesn't anticipate.

He thinks this board would suspend working meetings and take up only must-dos at regular meetings, not things that can wait. (*Greg Stefanski arrived at 7:35.*)

**Nat moved to waive any late fees for dog licenses until May 1, seconded by Mike.**  
Rosemary said several rabies clinics have been postponed. **The motion was passed.**

Nat said he wants to mirror the decision made by the village trustees to make sure employees feel no pressure to come in if they are ill. The trustee board minutes don't show an actual motion but the idea is that village employees can take sick time without depleting their CTO. Scott agreed. The employees would be paid.

**Nat moved that any employee feeling flu-like symptoms or having a household member with flu-like symptoms be able to take paid sick time without depleting their CTO bank until the end of April.**

Kyle asked if we are encouraging employees to work remotely if they can. Brian said yes, if they can, but not many can do much remotely. Brian K. can do a certain amount from home. He has paperwork, etc. he can do for a week or so. Lisa Crews is doing a good job of being able to work from home. Brian S. can do some work remotely. He will modify his schedule to do some work from home. Meredith and he will both do that and will work opposite schedules.

Mike asked if the motion should specify the symptoms that are most typical of COVID-19. Scott said the CDC has good guidance on this topic. We shouldn't muddle up what they have created. Management will need to put thoughtfulness into it. If a family member is self-isolating, we really need to know that.

**Kyle seconded the motion.**

Doug said he would rather have people be wrong and err on the side of not coming in. He doesn't see it being abused. Eric agreed employees would not abuse it.

Scott said those who are feeling symptomatic should call their primary physician, especially for potential testing.

**The motion was passed.**

Nat asked if Brian Krause is included in this. (*Sue Lovering arrived at 7:47.*) Eric said he is salaried. Brian asked, but is he drawing down his CTO time? Eric said he would take the answer to be no, based on the motion.

Eric said we are looking at asking Rosemary and department heads to be creative on how employee time could be split up. Maybe instead of 8 hour shifts employees might work 10 hour shifts, but not at the same time, so if one person gets sick it takes out only half the crew and not the whole crew. When working these adjusted schedules employees may not always get in 40 hours a week. He suggests a motion to make sure they are paid like salaried employees no matter how many hours they work. Brian S. said we think we have a need to adjust schedules to reduce the risk of spreading the virus but if we are going to do that it could be hard for everyone to get 40 hours a week. We don't have a proposal yet of what the schedule would look like. It would most likely mean making up for a few hours less than 40, not having employees working only 20 hours.

Charlie Gallanter asked if any employees are covered by a collective bargaining agreement at this time. Eric said no.

Charlie asked, why not make everyone salaried until the May 1? Scott said that ruins their overtime. Nat said there are conditions for employees to be made exempt. Charlie said they would be salaried but non-exempt and could still get overtime. To be non-exempt they have to make \$40K per year. Nat said that is one of the requirements.

Lynda said it could be that they will have to work some overtime in an emergency. If they just keep track of their hours it probably will all wash out. Eric said he believes that will be the case for the highway department.

Charlie said he is talking about office staff. He would make them salaried until the end of April. Overtime will not be an issue for them, just getting up to 40 hours. Eric said he is not sure of the ramifications of declaring someone salaried.

**Kyle moved to suspend meetings of town committees, boards and commissions until further notice, with exceptions possible upon request to Rosemary or Brian Story for those who have time-sensitive business, seconded by Doug.**

Greg Stefanski asked if the intent is just to suspend in-person meetings. Maybe groups could get together virtually. Brian said there are no exemptions to open meeting law, which requires a designated physical space where people can participate. We would essentially have to open the municipal building for the meeting. You can attend a meeting remotely, but there has to be a space for the public to go to.

**The motion was passed.**

**Nat moved to authorize Brian Story, Brian Krause and Rosemary to create work schedules to meet the needs of the town while mitigating the risk of virus spreading and,**

**should that require restricted hours beyond an employee's control, to compensate the employee for 40 hours per week, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.**

**Mike moved to declare a state of emergency for the Town of Johnson, Nat seconded and the motion was passed.**

Eric noted that there is a page on the town website dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nat asked to keep Zoom as an option for participating in meetings for as long as we are dealing with this. Brian said we can get feedback and see how helpful it was. He expects we will continue to use Zoom or something like it.

Greg asked what the implications are of the town declaring a state of emergency. Eric said it gives him a certain level of authority as emergency management director. He has selectboard backing and he can have access to \$1000 from the emergency management fund, though he doesn't anticipate needing it.

Nat said a lot of people will be asking about volunteering, helping out neighbors, and food security for children and elders. The governor has mandated that school districts take the lead in continuing to provide food service for school children. We will try to reach out to Capstone and other organizations to help us coordinate volunteer energy. For the time being those interested in volunteering can email Brian at [tojadministrator@townofjohnson.com](mailto:tojadministrator@townofjohnson.com).

Greg Stefanski said Capstone and other organizations are going through the process of figuring out how to continue to provide essential services and mitigate virus transmission. Organizations are locking their doors and converting to phone communication, limiting physical contact. Capstone focuses on fuel assistance and housing supports. They are trying to make sure people still have access to those resources and looking at how they can help those not already connected to their programs. They are focusing on housing now, especially for those who are homeless. The shelter in Hyde Park is concerned about an outbreak there. There are conversations about finding alternate sites, not necessarily for those who have the virus. Capstone's initial focus is to make sure families already connected with Capstone have food. They are preparing to expand and connect with other partners. There is a commercial kitchen at Capstone. The faith community has stepped up with offers of money, food and people power. He will be talking to RSVP. Capstone is offering to be a resource at the county level for coordinating volunteers and needs. Faith partners offered to create a fund that would provide some resources for people who experience loss of income with work shutdowns or slowdowns. The question is figuring out how to coordinate with towns and the county.

Brian said he doesn't see any way the town can really put people to work but we can put people in touch with each other. We can help coordinate. He thinks our role is just to make connections. Greg said he can work with Brian on getting resources connected.

Kyle said she is thinking about outreach so people know where to go, particularly people who are not online. How can we get the word out?

Greg said fortunately there are already coalitions in the community dealing with hunger, housing and homelessness. Conversations have begun with those coalitions. They have also been figuring out how to get the word out. There has been discussion of using radio and newspapers.

Lynda asked about help for people who need child care. Eric said the governor was looking into that.

Kyle said she is hoping Dan Noyes can brief us on help available to small businesses and people losing income.

Dan said Meals on Wheels is trying to coordinate deliveries and telephone calls. He can connect to Brian and Greg about that. In terms of small business, there was a meeting today and they put out a press release. He put links out on Facebook and can make sure Brian gets them. He, Matt Hill and Rich Westman are available if people have needs or concerns about how the state is dealing with this.

Matt Hill said the legislature is trying to make sure employees will get unemployment insurance benefits and employers are not penalized. The federal government has been making moves to make sure people are made whole. If your business is seeing decreased income, do not be afraid of the unemployment insurance penalty. Let employees go and they can collect unemployment insurance. The Vermont Economic Development Authority is trying to line up more benefits for people facing hardships. They are trying hard to make sure people are not going bankrupt. He hopes we can all spend money locally and make sure our neighbors are well taken care of.

Scott said he feels it is best for people to volunteer through organizations. We don't have the ability to vet everyone's infectious disease knowledge. We don't want people spreading disease. He worries that we may have volunteers trying to do the right thing but creating higher risk.

Kyle said she had sent board members a link to a volunteer form some other towns have used. Can we get that on the website for people to fill in so Brian can figure out where to send people? Greg asked if Kyle could send him a copy. Brian said he thinks we can put up something like that.

Scott said the CDC has recommendations for the workforce that can also be applied to volunteers.

Kyle said Johnson Elementary School is keeping their kitchen open. They are continuing to make meals and buses will drop food off at people's driveways along the bus routes. Scott asked, what about houses that weren't getting bus service? Kyle said she hasn't heard how they are going to solve that. Eric said he believes schools were ordered by the governor to continue food service.

Kyle said she is thinking about the same thing for elders and others on the edge. Eric said we don't have the resources to do these things. Nonprofits do. Probably our biggest role is to provide a list of volunteers to nonprofits. Kyle said Downtown Pizzeria has a lot of produce they can't use. They were looking for places to bring food to. Greg said the community meals at the United Church are provided through a partnership. Food is made at NVU and brought down. We might be able to do something similar to what the school is doing. Maybe meals can be made and set outside for people to pick up or delivered.

Lynda asked what is happening with the food shelf. Is it staying open or closing? Eric said that is something we have to follow up on. Most of the volunteers could belong to vulnerable populations.

Eric said he got an email from Vermont Emergency Management saying that major grocery stores are all well stocked and they don't have any concerns about supporting the community's needs but the state is looking into being prepared if there is ever a need. Greg said he was told that Sterling Market is expecting only 2/3 of what they ordered in their delivery tomorrow. Price Chopper was supposed to get a delivery of meat but it went to Shelburne, so their meat section is nearly empty now. Maybe grocery stores are looking good statewide, but there seem to be issues here. Eric said he will feed that back.

Kyle brought up mental health. She doesn't know what we can do to help with that. Lynda said she thinks people need to be told they can go outside and their kids can go outside to play. She thinks some people don't realize that. Greg said there is personal stress, especially if people's income levels are affected. The global crisis will be frightening. Raising awareness of mental health is important. Lamoille County Mental Health and Behavioral Health are making sure telemedicine options and medication are available. They have support and resources but they are asking people to phone first. There may be extra steps such as asking questions about health. Mike said they are encouraging people in Massachusetts to get outside.

Kyle said getting as much information as we can on our site and blasted out will be important. That is one of the biggest ways we can help as a board. Nat said we can post on Front Porch Forum and tell people to check the COVID-19 page on the website. Eric said he thinks we should keep that information up there for a while. Lynda said she would post it daily for a week. But many don't know Front Porch Forum exists or don't have a computer. Eric said we can use Vermont Alert. It would probably be worth sending out one message referring to the web page.

Lynda said one broadband company is offering free hot spots. Kyle said that is Xfinity. Charlie said Verizon and AT&T are also offering them. Kyle said there is wifi in the parking lot of the library. Brian said it is available in the parking lot of the municipal building also.

Charlie asked if the library is open. Brian said it is closing. Eric said Jeanne Engel is in contact with the superintendent and principal about using the library for school purposes.

Greg expressed his appreciation for the implicit and explicit bias training the board sponsored. It was wonderful to see the turnout. It was one of the highlights of his time in Johnson. He appreciates the board making that a priority for the community. One of the pieces of his work is sharing restorative practices. He would be happy to provide training on restorative practices if the board thought that would be helpful. *(Greg left at 8:36.)*

Scott asked if the exact wording of the motions made tonight could be shared with him, Gordy and Meredith so the village can mirror them. Donna said she would send them out.

Kyle said she hopes we as a board want to continue these trainings. She thinks we should continue having these conversations as they are important and very helpful.

Brian said he thinks everything else that was on the agenda can wait.

The board agreed to suspend working meetings and address only must-do items at regular meetings for the next month or so.

Several people using Zoom thanked the town for setting it up.

**9. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*