

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD AND VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD  
JOINT MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GYMNASIUM AND LIBRARY  
MONDAY, JANUARY 27, 2020

**Present:**

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Doug Molde, Kyle Nuse, Eric Osgood

Village Trustees: Brian Raulinaitis, Gordon Smith, Phil Wilson

Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Meredith Dolan, Kent Gardner, about 28 community members

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

**1. Call to Order**

Eric called the selectboard meeting to order at 6:07. He noted that the trustees did not yet have a quorum.

**2. Additions, Changes to Agenda**

Eric made two changes to the selectboard agenda. He added a second personnel issue and discussion of ten cents on the grand list.

**3. Public Information Forum**

Kent Gardner began a public hearing to solicit comments regarding a potential merger of the Town and Village of Johnson. He said he spent about 20 hours on Thursday and Friday talking to people in the community. He works for the Center for Governmental Research, a non-profit organization. They have worked extensively in New York and also have done this type of work in a number of other states. They have done work like this in at least 75 communities.

Kent said this community has tremendous strength. Most people don't think of the town and village separately but think of it as a single community. There are a number of things that are already shared between the town and village. There is not a lot of duplication and redundancy.

Kent said in his experience the answer to the question of whether to merge usually rests on one of two things. If there is a situation where there is substantial redundancy and therefore a lot of money to be saved, that is a good reason to merge. In small communities where the pool of people willing to volunteer for local government, planning and zoning boards, etc. is small, people may end up serving for a long time on these boards, which is not necessarily healthy. If there is not active, engaged leadership, leaders may get weary and make mistakes.

Kent showed some data on Johnson. About 2,000 people live in the Town of Johnson outside the village. There is a higher share of poverty in both the village and the town than the state average. The share of owner-occupied housing is much lower than the state average in both, but particularly in the town. Village tax parcels make up roughly a quarter of the total assessed value for the town. The village population is about 43% of the town. The municipal tax rate in the village is 0.1189. The town-wide tax rate is 0.7187. The total municipal property tax on a median valued home for a village resident is \$1,554. The municipal tax on

a median valued home in the town outside the village is \$1,230. The education tax is larger than either of those.

The village and town have a lot of shared services already, far more than he sees in most communities. They have a shared municipal building and clerk-treasurer. There is separation of responsibilities so two governments are not doing the same things. The village principally oversees utilities. The town oversees roadways. Snow removal is shared. The village takes care of fire protection and the town contracts for police protection and EMS. (*Brian Raulinaitis arrived.*)

Kent showed the budget costs for services provided by the town in the areas of public safety, public works, recreation, library and Historical Society. (*Phil Wilson arrived at 6:27.*) Kent reviewed the budget and responsibilities of the village. The village provides fire protection. The expense of \$185,000 is split among village and town taxpayers plus Belvidere and Waterville. Water department expenses of \$304,000 are shared among ratepayers. Wastewater expenses of \$504,000 are shared among ratepayers. The ratepayers are mostly village residents but the footprints of the village and the utilities are not exactly the same. Electric department expenses of \$2,347,000 are shared among ratepayers. Electric department employees also do other work. They maintain sidewalks and storm sewers and they support the needs of the water and wastewater departments. The village plows sidewalks and clears storm drains. The estimated \$130,000 cost of that is shared with the town, which makes a \$59K payment. (These figures are based on 2018 actuals.) Total expenses for the village general department are \$170,000. If the entire village tax levy were moved to the town, which would not need to happen, that would increase the town tax rate from 0.78 to 0.83. It would be a small difference.

In Vermont it is possible for a village to vote itself out of existence but that is not common. Kent feels it would be kind of crazy for the village to dissolve without the cooperation of the town. In Vermont mergers have typically been negotiated between a village and a town. Kent recommends looking at the Essex merger study. In Essex they have been talking about a merger for a long time. They haven't chosen to move forward but they have created a massive paper trail. Their website is a good place to learn about mergers in Vermont. What Kent suggests is not having the village go away and having the town take over. In every example he has looked at in Vermont, something new emerges. The process of transition creates a new government. In some cases it is a phased process.

Kent said most of the village's assets are effectively owned by the ratepayers even if they are technically owned by the village.

Kent said because the town and village have such distinct functions in Johnson, the cost savings of a merger would be quite modest. That doesn't mean it is a bad idea. There are a lot of good reasons to consider a merger. If it is being done principally to cut costs we need to look at the village budget and figure out what would happen to pieces of it if a merger occurred. Office staff are jointly supervised and cross-trained. A merger would eliminate one of the two tax levies, reducing the clerical burden, but it would not enable elimination of a

position. There is no evidence that the village manager and town administrator positions overlap significantly. With a merger the positions would be restructured but not eliminated.

Kent talked about how a merger plan might address functions of the village. The fees that are charged by the fire department are now set by negotiation rather than by reference to formula. An oversight board of users could replace the village board and provide oversight for the fire department. If the village board is eliminated then some board is still needed to look out for the interests of ratepayers. Water, wastewater and electrical utilities are already managed as enterprise functions. A merger wouldn't eliminate them but may result in them being overseen differently. Each utility could be overseen by a group of ratepayers that is either elected or appointed.

The PILOT payment from the state for the state college to the village is \$52,000. In a merger that money is at risk. The state makes PILOT payments to both the village and the town. In both cases the payment is determined by tax on assessed value. It is not clear that the \$52,000 payment would go away but there are some preliminary indications that it might. It is within the power of the state to continue this payment if the state is willing to.

Electric department staff supports electric distribution and also performs general public works tasks. The village charter gives the village responsibility for sidewalks and storm drains. And the town contributes ten cents off the grand list toward that service. The electric department not only performs its core function of maintaining the distribution system but also plays a role in maintaining and constructing sidewalks and storm drains. The electric department staff also supports maintenance and repair needs of the water and wastewater utilities. We have specialized individuals who are highly paid because of their skills working for the electric department, but a good bit of their time is devoted to general public works functions that are typically compensated at a lower level. We can't expect to hire people qualified to be lineworkers and pay them less for part of their work. If we were able to reshuffle responsibilities so we did not have lineworkers with specialized skills doing general work there would probably be cost savings. Arguably, pushing all public works functions to the town would better match the community's needs to labor skills. That would require negotiation between the town and village. Now the town is sending money to the village to pay for some public works services but they are not sending enough to cover the cost. An arrangement could be negotiated. Conceivably the payment from the town to the village could be eliminated and instead money could flow from the village to the town and the town would handle public works responsibilities. That would require negotiation between the town and village.

Kent said jurisdictional disputes between the village and the town seem to have created a fair bit of rancor. There are some bad feelings in the community. If there isn't a clear articulation of who is supposed to do what and pay for what that can create friction. That friction is contrary to the best interests of the community. A merger is one way to fix the problem of conflict over who does what. But it is a fairly extreme solution to a problem that probably could be handled with negotiation and more dialogue.

Kent asked for comments or questions. A community member asked if there is any reason we couldn't just get rid of the village electric department by selling it to the Coop. Kent said the Village of Johnson electric utility is very small. It is one of the smallest in Vermont. One option would be to sell it. Another option is to contract the line work. Johnson could contract with Morrisville, for example. Morrisville would do the specialized piece and Johnson would retain ownership and management. Johnson's electric rates are relatively low. He showed a comparison to other utilities in the region. Johnson rates are low, but not the lowest in the region. He thinks the question of how the electric department is managed is above his pay grade. Some feel it should be managed differently. He thinks the fact that rates are low is good. It is a very complex service in a complex regulatory environment. There may come a point where the regulatory burden on the small utility may force Johnson to join with someone larger. At the moment there are those who point to the current low rates and reliability. A point was made to Kent that commercial rates were exceptionally high but his preliminary analysis indicates that is not the case. There will always be the option to get rid of the utility but for now there is no burning need to.

Beth Foy asked what reasons there are for mergers to occur other than financial reasons or people not getting along. Kent said most of the time he sees lack of volunteer manpower being the reason. He gave the example of a small municipality that merged several years ago because of mounting worker's comp bills resulting from a mistaken choice to be self-insured. Another community dissolved a couple of years ago because they were forced to get rid of their surface water source so they did a \$4.4 million dollar renovation to the water system and saddled their taxpayers with a 40-year bond. Beth said those two examples are both financial. Kent said in a small community with too shallow a pool of volunteers to draw from it is easier for community leaders to make mistakes like that. Another community decided to dissolve because only half the village board is filled.

Tommy Gardner asked how Kent would qualify intangibles such as pride and identity of being a volunteer or resident in the village or town. Kent said that figures in very strongly. He gave the example of a community in New York called Brockport that if it dissolved would become part of the town of Sweden. In this case, both the village and the town are called Johnson so it is not quite as much of a problem but being part of the Village of Johnson means something. He understands the concern about identity. For some, community is really important. When names change it is really important.

Daryl West said he is glad Kent noticed that there are no big things that are duplicated and no big efficiencies that can be gained by a merger. He is completely against a merger. He thinks the question was brought up due to personal vendettas and he thinks it is time to move on. What do we need to do to move on as citizens?

Kent said he understands that neither the village nor the town could put a question about a merger to the voters without preparing a plan. He assumes either could put a question to the voters of whether to continue considering a merger.

Jen Burton said she thinks it is important for the town and village to merge if only because they can't agree. It is not about saving money. She thinks there is a lot of fear around losing

control. She personally sees it as dissolving both boards and creating a new board that would work together as one without consideration of who controls sidewalks, etc. When she moved to the area she had to navigate both town and village and it was not a pleasant experience. It would have been easier if there was only one group to deal with and not two.

Gordy called the trustee board meeting to order at 6:59. He said two items needed to be added to the agenda – discussion of ten cents on the grand list and another personnel issue for executive session.

Gordy said Meredith had sent an email to the state asking about the impact of a merger on PILOT money received by Johnson. The response from the state was that if the village and the town were to merge there would be one municipal rate and only one payment would be made. That means that about \$52,000, about half the village's operating budget, would go away.

Howard Romero said that response indicated they would be writing one check. It didn't say how big it would be. Gordy said it would be based on the tax rate. We would be losing about \$52,000. Beth Foy said the total of the check would be higher than the one the town is receiving now because village taxes would be added. Meredith said the town tax rate would go up slightly but not enough to make up the full \$52,000. She highly doubts it would be anywhere close. Kent said if the town and village worked out a merger plan they would work out issues like this.

Beth said, in response to Tommy's question about identity, she doesn't hear people saying that they are from Johnson Village. She lives in the town outside the village but she talks about the village – how pretty it is, etc. She feels if we can get over personal emotion such as pride, control and ownership between the selectboard and trustees it doesn't matter if we merge or not.

A community member said he doesn't know what big issues everyone is talking about regarding control. He asked if Eric Osgood could enlighten him on the issue of control. Eric said he is not sure exactly what is behind that. There are definitely times when there is conflict between the trustees and the select board. He asked if Gordy had any thoughts. Gordy said there have been a few issues in the past. He does not think it is worth bringing these up.

Jen Burton asked how long it took for this process to hire a consultant to do the merger study. Several people said it took two years. Eric said we had to negotiate. Jen Burton said this is a prime example of the issue. Because the town and village had to negotiate it took two years to hire a consultant. People are asking for a unified board so we can avoid things like this. Another community member said that is just one example in decades of the town and village working together.

Mike said it did take a while to have someone do this study. There was nothing sinister behind it. We were all trying to look for the best deal for the buck. He thinks we got the best individual for the least amount of money. He thinks all will be accomplished by town

meeting this year as far as the study. There will be plenty of information by town meeting. Two years is not really that bad. He doesn't see a real problem.

Anne Mullings said she thinks a lot of this was brought on by people who had bad feelings towards certain people in town. She thinks one of those people started all the problems between the town and the village. As far as town employees talking about village employees and vice versa, what do you expect when you see the same thing on the boards? She is totally against a merger. She thinks it took two years because no one really wanted to do it. There were people who thought money could be saved by contracting out the work of the electric department but when people found out about that idea they didn't want it. It comes down to the people you elect who do the budget. Start with who you elect and what they are spending money on. Two trustees at town meeting proposed cutting \$30,000 from the town budget. And you wonder why there is friction in the town? We won't solve it by having a merger.

Shayne Spence asked about how long the negotiation process would take if we did proceed with a merger. Eric said the way he envisions it we would get data back from the consultant. He personally doesn't think there will be a smoking gun that says yes or no. It will come down to the will of the people, not financial reasons. He thinks we will take the results and let the voters decide. He is not sure if the vote will come with a recommendation. He doesn't think the selectboard will have a strong position either way. If the voters want to scrap the idea we will be done. If they want to explore it, then the town and village will enter into negotiations. The village will take the same steps with their voters. Either entity can stop the process. If both town and village voters want to explore a merger then we will go into negotiations. He would anticipate that would be quite a process.

Kent said in New York, where CGR has most of their experience, the law makes it specific that there is not a lot of choice about the amount of time it can take. In Vermont, he would point to Essex, where negotiations have been going on for at least 12 years. There is no logical endpoint in Vermont, which is why he thinks not a lot of mergers have occurred here. If there is interest he would suggest setting a deadline. If a committee is not able to come up with a plan both boards approve of within 6 months, which is the amount of time they have in New York, then he would suggest walking away.

Gordy said he keeps hearing from village residents that it is not just dollars they are concerned with but quality of service. The village has five people working on clearing snow and the town only has two.

Beth Foy asked, why do that? That is the problem. Gordy said the five employees the village has provide high-quality service. The village has not cut back on the number of people working, while the selectboard has cut back. Lynda Hill asked if the five employees mentioned are all the village employees. Gordy said when there is a lot of snow they bring in a sixth person. Jen Burton asked, how is this an argument for not merging?

Lynda said she remembers village residents asking why they have to pay both town and village taxes and what they get from the town. She thinks comments from village residents about why they pay two taxes was where the question of merging first came up.

Lynda asked, why not have one board? Gordy said service would suffer. Mike said we studied this about 20 years ago. At that point the trustees came to the conclusion that merging would be more advantageous for the village than for the town and they decided there was no sense in pursuing it because each side would have a vote so it couldn't happen even if the village voted yes.

Kent said special districts can and should be created to provide special services that village residents are receiving now. A merger agreement could be structured so that no one lost. It is common to think they will be a winner and a loser but both can be winners.

Lynda said she doesn't think we would lose employees. We would still have the same number of people.

Anne said if we merge the town would not pay more than \$30 an hour for someone to work on sidewalks.

Mark Woodward said he thinks the logical conclusion is to bring this to a vote. He thinks it would be the will of both the village and the town to get the results of this study, put out non-biased information and let people make a decision.

A community member said she remembers the annual village meeting where the electric department was discussed. It seems as if the village never wants to get rid of the electric department. It runs really well. It seems like we are getting a good deal for the money. She doesn't know if it would work to keep the village electric department but have everything else become one board. Maybe that is a good solution – not a total merger but having an electric board and have everything else run by the town.

Kent said individual water, electric and fire department boards could be created. They would all have to be independent.

Meredith said her opinion is that we would lose some efficiencies. Now the village electric department has five people. If the electric department was broken off separately we would have to restaff those positions. We couldn't hire part-time people to handle the water sewer and general department responsibilities. In many ways, even though we are paying a higher rate for the electric department employees, the current structure is very efficient.

A community member asked how many linemen spend time working on snow removal. Meredith said all of them do it.

Mark Woodward asked if the ratepayers subsidize sidewalk work with our electric rates. Meredith said no; there are separate budgets for the electric department and the other work.

Jen Burton said linemen are getting lineman wages while plowing sidewalks, right? Meredith said the village spends about \$130,000 maintaining sidewalks. If the town had to do it they would have to hire two additional people to do it. It is not that the village is paying a high

amount for sidewalk maintenance. They do it with five people. The town would have to hire two people to do the same amount of work and it would take much longer.

Rick Aupperlee said one point that was brought up was that in some communities where mergers take place boards find it difficult to find volunteers. Do either the trustees or the selectboard see a problem with people volunteering their time for boards? Gordy said two years ago two village trustees ran for re-election and there were two more qualified candidates also running. He thought there was a good pool of candidates. Both those candidates are now on the board and doing a good job after other board members moved on. Eric said last year he doesn't believe there was one contested election on the town meeting ballot. We don't necessarily have problems filling the selectboard but there can be problems filling committees and town offices. Anne pointed out that there was one contested election last year.

Rick Aupperlee said Kent had mentioned that with a merger the electric department, fire department or water and sewer could be monitored by an oversight board. Then we would be creating two new boards to oversee the work overseen by one board now.

Kent said it is a common structure to have users help manage a utility. If we went to town level oversight, the town is much broader than the water, sewer or electric utility service areas. We would need to engage users or lose democratic control if non-users were exercising oversight.

Rick said in the past we have had issues because village sewer lines can't be extended beyond the village limits without an agreement of some kind, so unifying could eliminate some of that problem. But on the other hand, the plant is only designed for a certain capacity. Expanding could create a problem because we would have to provide capacity to expand. Kent said sewer and water are important components of a community development agenda. Those are important management questions. They are not easy. Jen Burton said sewer does extend beyond the village. Howard said so does electric.

Lynda asked Gordy if the water and sewer utility is profitable or runs a deficit. Gordy said there was a rate increase for water and sewer in 2013 and again in 2016 when he thinks it went up 2%. As costs increase the board has to decide on rate increases. The electric department has not had a rate increase since 2010. Lynda asked, the village doesn't lose money on electric? Gordy said they are not supposed to make money or lose much. Kent said enterprise operations like the electric department are intended to be self-contained.

Howard said the East Johnson sewer extension happened in the 1970's. The sewer line was extended and the customers all paid for the extension.

Doug asked if the village electric department has a surplus. Gordy said no; they just spent a lot of money taking down the powerhouse building. They spent \$320,000 and they are not done cleaning up yet. Doug asked if their balance is down to zero. Do they have a fund balance? Meredith said yes, they do.

Gordy asked Kent when he expects to send out his report. Kent said he estimates in about two weeks. There is some additional background data he wants to collect and interpret.

Mark Woodward asked if it is the sense of the trustees and the selectboard that they will bring this to a vote. Kent said he thinks the boards need an opportunity to discuss that after they read the report.

Kent adjourned the public hearing at 7:34

**4. Discussion of Ten Cents on the Grand List**

The boards moved to the library.

Eric said the town is building its budget. We will not know the real number of the grand list until May and then there can be tax appeals so it could be later in the summer before we know the definite number. In the past the two boards have agreed on a number. He asked what we budgeted based on the current grand list. Brian said 10% of the grand list for 2019, rounded up to the nearest dollar, is \$59,468.

Gordy said in the past the village has accepted whatever the grand list is and then wherever the grand list ends up there would be an increase after that. It is up to the trustee board if they want to have the increase retroactive. The 10% has been level-funded and our expenses have gone up.

Meredith asked, if the grand list increases, would there be a true-up in the current fiscal year? Eric said in the next fiscal year we would use the real number. He thinks the end result will not be a huge change. Last time there was a reappraisal he thinks there was a big increase for the village because a lot of single homes were under assessed. They are probably fairly closely assessed now. The village may experience the opposite now because there are many mobile homes and they are typically assessed high initially and then go down.

Gordy said in the past he thinks changes to the ten cents on the grand list have been phased in over one to three years.

Gordy asked if the trustees are willing to accept the number Brian just gave. The other trustees said yes.

**Brian Raulinaitis moved to accept \$59,468 as the ten cents on the grand list payment from the town for the village's 2020 budget and the town's FYI 21 budget, Phil seconded and the motion was passed.**

**5. Executive Session – Personnel Matters**

**Doug moved to enter executive session for a personal matter pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3), inviting Brian Story, Rosemary, Meredith and the trustees, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.**

**Phil moved to enter executive session for a personal matter pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3), inviting Brian Story, Rosemary, Meredith and the selectboard, Brian R. seconded and the motion was passed. The boards entered executive session at 7:49.**

Both boards consented out of executive session at 7:55.

**Mike moved to make the Assistant Town Clerk & Treasurer position \$24 per hour, Doug seconded, and the motion was passed.**

**Phil moved to make the Assistant Town Clerk & Treasurer position \$24 per hour, Brian R. seconded, and the motion was passed.**

**Kyle moved to enter executive session for a personal matter pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3), inviting Brian Story, Rosemary, Meredith and the trustees, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.**

**Brian R. moved to enter executive session for a personal matter pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3), inviting Brian Story, Rosemary, Meredith and the selectboard, Phil seconded and the motion was passed. The boards entered executive session at 7:49.**

The boards consented out of executive session at 8:01 with no action taken.

The village trustees adjourned.

**6. *Review and Approve Draft Budget***

Brian talked about changes he made to the current budget draft in relation to Walter Pomroy's question about how to handle cash on hand. We had taken cash on hand from 2018-19 and put it into a couple of reserve funds. Walter raises the point of whether people understand that and whether it is as clear and transparent as we want. The current draft budget accepts all the cash on hand and returns it to the taxpayers, with increases to the budget in how much we put into those two reserve funds. The budget raises the reserve funds by the amount the board had wanted to raise them by adding the cash on hand. Brian said this budget draft also takes out the appropriation for the Lamoille Family Center. There will be an article on the town meeting warning for their appropriation. The amount to be raised from taxes is now slightly below last year (less than half a penny.)

Mike asked where the \$116K the board had previously decided to put into the reserve funds from cash on hand is in this budget. Brian said it shows up on two line items – lines 392 and 200. The unallocated fund balance is returned to the taxpayers and we are saying we want to use it to increase these 2 line items in order to increase these 2 reserve funds. It accomplishes the same thing as the board's previous action. Eric said it will be a one-time contribution and next year the line items will go back down.

Mike said it was alleged that the motion we made regarding the cash on hand was illegal. Eric said we haven't gotten an opinion from our attorney on that yet. Brian said the board should undo the previous motion but we don't have to agree that the motion was illegal. We could decide to listen to the concerns raised by a voter but not admit to any wrongdoing.

**Mike moved to rescind the motion made at the September 19, 2019 meeting to allocate uncommitted cash on hand to two reserve funds, Doug seconded and the motion was passed.**

Eric said the budget amount we are asking for this year requires \$4-5K less in property tax.

Brian said some of the decrease comes from the fact that we asked the voters for \$45K for the recreation coordinator positions and they gave it to us, but we don't need to spend all \$45K. We didn't need to spend as much on benefits as we might have needed to. Eric asked if what we didn't spend is part of our anticipated cash on hand. Brian said yes; it is being returned to the voters.

Kyle said she promised Nat she would bring up his concern that we haven't allocated money to dealing with emerald ash borer. Brian said in this draft he allocated \$5K to invasive species management in the summer roads program.

Eric asked if the \$40K for flood damage is in the budget or if we need to pull it out of reserve. Brian said we don't currently need to pull it out of reserve. It's in the budget. Our full reconstruction project is in the budget. He has a meeting on Wednesday where we get on the list.

The \$37,500 we will receive from the Historical Society is in the budget. Doug asked, what about the other \$37,500? Brian said we will show that as income the following year, in FY22. We will want the first payment on July 1, 2020 and the next one July 1, 2021. Eric said we are already showing reduced taxes this year. If we put the \$37,500 in there we would have to make up that difference another year. The taxpayers would love us one year and hate us another year.

Brian said the estimated surplus cash on hand we will have at the end of 2019-20 is \$131,735.12. That will be returned to the voters. We intend to use about \$15K of it to reduce taxes. About \$100K is being put into one reserve fund and about \$16K is being put into the buildings and grounds reserve fund. Doug asked, the justification for putting the \$116K into the reserve funds was that we had anticipated expenses we needed it for? Brian said yes.

Kyle asked what the Mill Park grant is. Rosemary said it is for redoing the fields. None of the money has been spent yet. Brian said it is committed for that purpose.

Eric said he and Brian had talked about putting the little balance we have left into the tax anticipation reserve fund. We have many bills that come in the first quarter before taxes are due. Brian said the tax anticipation reserve fund is limited to 10% of our total expenditure. The funding method voted on by the voters for that reserve fund is that the board can allocate whatever money it wants to the fund at the end of the year. Eric said the tax anticipation reserve fund has helped us not have to borrow. We haven't had to borrow in anticipation of taxes in a very long time. Rosemary said she thinks not since she became treasurer.

Rosemary said the legislature is considering a bill that says no town can send out a tax bill before August 1 because the state needs more time to figure taxes.

Brian said another bill would dramatically increase the power of the tree warden and reduce our ability to manage our rights of way. Eric said he doesn't think that bill will go anywhere.

Brian said he is not anticipating any major changes to the budget. Susan and he haven't been able to coordinate on a time to work on it. Eric said typically we approve the budget and allow any minor insignificant changes Susan may find. Brian said Walter often catches errors and he had the opportunity to go through it. Brian made corrections Walter let him know about.

**Doug moved to approve the 4<sup>th</sup> revision of the FY21 budget as presented to the selectboard on January 27, 2020, with a total budget of \$3,047,961.25, Mike seconded and the motion was passed.**

**7. *Review and Approve Town Meeting Warning***

Brian handed out a draft warning.

Eric asked if we want to add an article related to a possible merger. He doesn't know if we will be prepared. We could make it non-binding. It will be a long-drawn-out discussion. Brian said someone had suggested a question along the lines of "Do you want us to keep going?" But voters will go way into the weeds on Kent Gardner's report. Mike said the motion to do a merger study and come back to the voters was made 2 years ago. He thinks we should come back this year.

Doug asked, are we going to print Kent's report in the town report? Rosemary said we can't; we would need it by Friday. Brian said we could send it out as a supplement.

Eric said his only concern is that the selectboard might not have had an opportunity to absorb the information in the report yet. But maybe we won't take a position. Mike said the village was very adamant that no position be given by the person who did the study. We don't have a definite answer to give anyone. They will have to read it themselves and draw conclusions. This is not the end of the process.

Eric said maybe the article should just be to hear the report and ask if the voters want the selectboard to enter into continuing discussions with the trustees. Doug said he thinks it should be to review the report. Eric asked, do we want direction from the voters? Mike said they could give direction from the floor. Doug would just say review of the report and let what comes out of it come out of it. Kyle said she is in favor of an article to review the report. It was agreed to add an article to review the report of CGR on the town/village merger question.

Mike said one side or the other can veto the whole thing. Brian said yes. At the annual village meeting if they decide they don't want to continue, that is it. Doug said under certain circumstances he wouldn't be interested in a merger. Mike agreed. It could be a cause of

more troubles if everything is not worked out properly. Doug said he thinks having the discussion would help us take the temperature of the voters.

Mike asked, are we going to include Kent's report with the town report? Brian said we can't do that. Kent's report will be online and we can have copies available in the office. We can put information out on Facebook and Front Porch Forum and let people know they can come by if they want a physical copy.

Doug asked what it would cost to mail it. Kyle said for one thin flyer she is sending out the cost was \$277. Eric asked what it used to cost to mail out the town report. Rosemary said she would say \$500. Doug said he thinks it is worth sending it out to everyone. Then it gets to the village and the town.

Eric asked who would be hired to do the printing. Kyle asked, the same people who do the town report? Brian and Rosemary said they will be busy this time of year. Brian said we could print it ourselves if it was short enough but we wouldn't want to do it if it was more than 10 pages.

Mike said a merger would have more impact on the village than on the town. Brian said the people who are most concerned seem to be village residents. The town residents he has talked to are curious, but don't have as much concern. Village residents are concerned about what might happen to the utilities and services. Doug said the threats are more observable to those working in and living in the village.

Rosemary pointed out that an incorrect date for town meeting was in several places on the warning. She asked if there is going to be an article about the rail trail resolution. Brian said he missed that. It was agreed to add that as Article 12 and move the others down. We will use the language proposed to us for the rail trail resolution article. The merger report article will be added as Article 16. Brian suggested "Shall the voters review the report of the Center for Governmental Research on the question of merging the town and village?"

Kyle asked where the article related to Jenna's Promise came from. Eric said it is mainly to give Greg Tatro an opportunity to talk about his plans because what he is doing will have an impact on the community. He suggested it. He didn't want it to be like when the Studio Center started and there was a lot of resentment that they were buying buildings and taking them over. Eric thinks it will be good if Greg explains what he is doing and why.

Kyle asked about the budget advisory committee. Brian said the article about that uses the language the board voted on. Brian mentioned that there had been some discussion that this language might give too broad an authority to the budget advisory committee. Doug said he is opposed to this language. He wants to read Duncan Hastings' revised language. Brian said this is the language the board voted to include. The board agreed to change to the revised language Duncan had suggested.

Brian said we need to talk about the dates in Article 10 for when tax installments are paid. There is a bit of an issue. Since we are getting the reappraisal the first installment will

probably come before the reappraisal. Rosemary said the state takes longer to do the school tax because of the reappraisal. Brian said his thought is to leave the dates in as they are and deal with it if we have to roll them back because of the reappraisal. The question is whether we want to knowingly delay the first installment because we probably won't be able to get it out by that date. Rosemary said she thinks we should leave it as normal and when it comes time we will know when we can send it out. Brian said he thinks that is best. We need to collect taxes as soon as possible so we can pay our bills. The board agreed to that.

**Mike moved to approve the 2020 town meeting warning with the changes that had been agreed upon, Kyle seconded and the motion was passed with Doug not voting as he was temporarily out of the room and all other board members voting in favor.**

Kyle said she got confirmation from the Historical Society that they will have pie at town meeting. She thinks Gary and Roland will be back to play violin. The school board and volunteer boards will set up tables. She is working on babysitters. Brian said the Family Center got in touch with him about having a table. He told them they can have space if they bring a table. Kyle said she is waiting to hear back from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade fundraising families if they are going to host lunch as a fundraiser. Mark Woodward will make pizzas.

The board discussed what should be on the cover of the town report and agreed that pictures of Old Mill Park seemed like a good idea.

8. *Review and Approve Town Meeting Warning*

**Kyle moved to enter executive session for a personal matter pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3), inviting Brian Story and Rosemary, Mike seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 9:08.** The board consented out of executive session at 9:34.

9. *Adjourn*

The meeting was adjourned at 9:34.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*