

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
REMOTE PARTICIPATION VIA ZOOM TELECONFERENCING
MONDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2020

Present:

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Doug Molde, Kyle Nuse, Eric Osgood
Others: Brian Story, Rosemary Audibert, Rick Aupperlee, Scott Meyer, Kim Dunkley, Margo Warden, Paul Warden, Eric Hutchins, Jackie Stanton, Cal Stanton, Brian Raulinaitis, Mark Nielsen, Portia Foss

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

Meeting recorded by Green Mountain Access Television. GMATV info: <https://greenmountainaccess.tv/>; PO Box 581, Hyde Park, 05655; info@greenmountainaccess.tv or 802-851-1592

1. Call to Order

Eric called the meeting to order at 6:05.

2. Additions, Changes to Agenda

No changes were needed.

3. Review Volunteers for Racial Justice Committee

Each candidate was invited to speak for 2 or 3 minutes about why they would be a good candidate for the committee.

Cal Stanton said he is already doing this work. This is an experiment and he is willing to give it a try. He has an authentic nature and at least he knows where to look for information. He won't claim to be the most knowledgeable on any subject. If this is going to be an educational piece, he would like to be part of that. It remains to be seen how it will work and who will be part of it. It is important that the group have good chemistry and that everyone have racial and social justice as their agenda. We have to be wary of people who have different agendas. He thinks this committee is much needed. There is much work to be done. He can do it in other sectors, but he is willing to do this.

Eric Hutchins said he is a social studies teacher at Lamoille Union High School. He was born and raised in Montpelier and he got a degree from UVM. He taught in New York City for about 12 years before moving to Johnson. As a history teacher he knows that systemic racism is a real thing that we need to address in our society. Through his work in education he has tried to advance that work. He has organized educational opportunities for staff and students at his school. He has dealt with racial justice issues with the children of our community for many years so he is aware of the wide range of perspectives on these issues and ways to constructively address everybody's perspectives. One reason he applied is that he was concerned there wouldn't be people willing to get into this controversial arena, but he sees a lot of qualified people. He doesn't see himself being any more qualified than anyone else here. One thing we have to do in Johnson is build consensus that this work will be good for everyone in our community. But we won't convince every single person that it is a good idea and we don't need to. He thinks a lot of the things he has seen our community wanting to do are good things and we should move forward with them. Racial and social justice is a moral imperative for us to show an example for our children and set an example in our community and also, in these trying

economic times in rural Vermont, it is a common good. It is valuable to show that this town is open and welcoming to people from all walks of life, and all beliefs and sexual orientations, people of color, etc. A lot of language on this committee was about educational opportunities, which he thinks is very important, but that is really only the first step. Vermont is the second whitest state in the union. If we are not actively incentivizing people of color to visit or move here we won't make progress. Vermont is seen as a very friendly place for LGBTQ people and that has been not just good for the cultural diversity of our state but for our economy. He thinks we need to also attract people of color. We also need educational outreach to build consensus in our community. We won't convince everyone but this is a democratic organization and we can vote to do things for our community.

Jackie Stanton said she would welcome the opportunity to be on this committee. She thinks it is a great idea. She welcomes the opportunity because she loves Johnson. This is her home. She came here as a teenager in 1983 and she has stayed and raised her family here. She thinks we are in a decent place to have a committee like this. We have done preliminary work over the last few years. Regardless of whether she is appointed to the committee or not, she will continue this work and help. She is committed. She hopes that is true for everyone. It will make this successful if we all stick together and support the work whether appointed or not. This began as a grassroots effort with people of this town. When the college was threatened to be shut down, people gathered together, demonstrated and organized and if not for that the college would be closed. That is what we need to do. She is experienced with community service in this town – at TNL, as a library trustee, as a founder of the PTA, etc. This is a great town but we aren't exceptional in our greatness or our racism, which does exist. There is no shame in saying that. As Eric Hutchins said, there are so many benefits to this work. We will all come out the better for it. She thanked the board for proposing this experiment.

Brian Raulinaitis said he was at the beginning of this conversation as a village trustee and now he has moved out of the village. When the committee was first being discussed he voted for the town and village each to have three members but it seems we needed much more for the town. There is a lot he wishes he could have done when he could have as a trustee. He would like to stay involved. He is happy to see many far more qualified people here than himself. He feels passionate about this. He owns a business in Johnson and does a lot of business with people of all walks of life. He has a lot of conversations with people across the state. He and his business partner are on very different sides of the political table but this is not a political issue. They have been able to have conversations and realize that. He is committed to this cause. He is not the most knowledgeable on history but he has a backbone and a good sense of what he feels is right. He has been working on listening. He thinks that is important. A lot of people here have seen him at trustee meetings. He is not very proud of those meetings. At a lot of them he was caught off guard and couldn't respond as much as he should or could have. He and his wife are staying in Johnson and will be committed to it. This is one way he would like to stay in the conversation.

Mark Nielsen said he has been a resident in Johnson for over 20 years. He went to Johnson State College. He can work with nearly everyone. He has some rather conservative values towards the whole process. When he first heard about this he really wanted to become involved. He wrote several papers on the issue in his college days. He is looking at this as a 2-pronged approach.

One is short term – getting people to work together understand the issues and be able to solve them in the short term. He is on the school board and he would like to be part of the conduit that moves information from the town to the school board. There is a team at Lamoille Union with students coming up with ways they can bring this topic to the table and get information out. The board is also looking at curriculum changes. He thinks it is a great idea to be involved in something like this so we can have systemic change to affect generations to come. Just because he has a conservative background doesn't mean he will bring that totally to the table. He wants to understand the other side of the story. He looks at both sides of the fence to see what is going on.

Margo Warden said she has been part of this community for over 30 years. She loves this town, loves her family and wants the best for both. She has worked at the college for 30 years. Over the last decade the college has created a center for diversity and inclusivity programming on campus with classes, book groups and events. Probably the most challenging thing, but also the most rewarding, is bringing small groups of students, faculty and staff together in conversation around these issues. Before jumping into the issues they start with how they will frame the conversation, what agreements they can have, how they can express themselves so others can listen and how they can listen and learn. She thinks doing that foundational work is important for this committee. We can start building relationships in the small group and then expand it and bring the whole town in. The older she gets, the more she knows she doesn't know. She has learned to bring humility to her work on this. She is committed to continuing to learn and engage and increase her awareness and education. Hopefully that is the goal for the group – awareness, education, and community. She is happy the committee is getting started. It is well past time.

Portia Foss said she has been a Vermont resident for about 14 years now and a Johnson resident for about 12. She was born and raised in southern California. She has been married for almost 10 years now and has 2 little girls. She hasn't been very active in the town. She is a stay at home mom. She has little to no expertise but she is very passionate about human rights, justice and what is right. When she saw the committee was being put together she thought that was great and thought she would really like to be a part of it. She is a woman of color. Her husband is white and their kids are biracial. The area in California where she grew up was very diverse. What she brings to the table is a very wide range perspective. She can see from all points. She feels she is pretty unbiased. She is very passionate and feels she could bring a lot to the table.

Brian said Bari Gladstone, Lynn Lehouillier, Norka Chamorro, and Offie Wortham had all applied but none are here.

Kyle asked all the candidates if they are familiar with the town and village inclusivity statement and our town's anti-racism statement and if they stand with them. All candidates said yes.

Jackie asked, because this is a joint town/village committee, when the committee comes up with recommendations do those need to be approved by both boards in order for something to move forward? Eric said depending on what the recommendation is it might require both town and village approval or it could be something that would affect only the town or only the village and

would only need to go to one. But the whole committee would come out with the recommendation.

Eric thanked all the candidates for applying. He said it will be a difficult choice. He anticipates the board will make a choice tonight and will notify everyone that they were or were not selected.

Rick Aupperlee said he was appointed by the village and withdrew from consideration by the town. He would like to see some consistency between the boards. He would like language about the committee to be congruent between town and village and he would like it to be a proud statement about the unity within our community, like the inclusivity statement.

4. ***Executive Session to Deliberate on Appointment of Public Committee Members***

Nat moved to enter executive session to deliberate on appointment of public committee members as allowed by 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3), Mike seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 6:41. The board came out of executive session at 8:48.

Nat moved to appoint Eric Hutchins, Mark Nielsen and Portia Foss to the Racial Justice Committee, Doug seconded and the motion was passed.

Rick said there was discussion at the last selectboard meeting about possible alternates. The trustees didn't even have 3 candidates. He doesn't know if they will consider alternates in the next round. He is wondering what the board's thoughts are about alternates. Eric said the board discussed it and opted not to select alternates at this time. It is not a practice we typically do for any standing committees, so for consistency the board opted not to.

Brian noted that Margo Warden withdrew her application. She said she is confident in the remaining candidates to serve in the best interest of the board.

Jackie said she, Kyle, Brian and Bor Yang had been working on an educational piece. Will that be transferred to the committee? Brian said if the trustees are ready to make appointments and move forward soon it would be great for the work to move to the committee. If it doesn't look like that will happen soon he will work on it as soon as he has time. He would welcome assistance from Jackie. Rick said Brian should feel free to reach out to him as well. He is willing to help in any way he can.

5. ***Adjourn***

The meeting was adjourned at 8:53.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths