

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD
ANNUAL VILLAGE MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
TUESDAY, APRIL 2, 2019

Present:

Trustees: Gordon Smith, Walter Pomroy, Scott Meyer, Bob Sweetser, Phil Wilson

Others: Eric Osgood, Rosemary Audibert, Meredith Birkett, about 25 members of the public

Eric Osgood called the meeting to order at 7:31. He read the warning. He asked those who were not registered voters in the village to sit in a back corner. Rosemary Audibert said 38 people voted by Australian ballot and everyone running for village office won.

Article 2. Will the Village vote to adopt the Annual Report of the Auditors for the year ending December 31, 2018 as printed?

Rick Aupperlee moved to adopt the annual report of the auditors, Kim Dunkley seconded and the motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 3. Will the Village authorize its Trustees to appoint a Water and Light Commissioner? If not, to elect a Water & Light Commissioner for one year.

Kyle Nuse moved to authorize the trustees to appoint a Water & Light Commissioner and the motion was seconded. A voter asked who is currently the Water & Light Commissioner. Walter said it is Meredith Birkett. A voter asked if she gets a salary for being Water & Light Commissioner. Board members said no. The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 4. Will the Village vote to set the rate of compensation of its Officers and Employees? If not, to authorize its Trustees to set such salaries and wages.

It was moved and seconded to authorize the trustees to set the rate of compensation of its Officers and Employees.

Kim Dunkley asked that the village do its best when considering compensation and how it affects taxes. She thanked the board for level funding in the past.

Linda Hill asked if joint town/village employees can get different raises from the town and from the village. Gordy Smith said the selectboard and the trustees have a joint meeting where they decide together on a pay rate for joint employees.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 5. Will the Village vote a budget to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Village?

Gordy Smith moved to authorize a budget of \$512,592 to meet the expenses and liabilities of the Village and the motion was seconded.

Gordy said one reason the budget went up is that it includes about \$107,000 for a sidewalk project on Pearl Street. About \$45,000 in grant funds will help to pay for that project and money will be taken from the sidewalk reserve fund. The budget also includes \$7,500 for holiday decorations. The current decorations are getting old. The budget includes \$2,500 for beautification. It includes \$500 for the tree board and \$250 to spruce up the welcome signs. There is no increase in taxes with this budget.

Kim Dunkley said she understands that the board has been doing all it can to level fund but that is getting harder. She asks the board do its best.

A voter asked if holiday decorations are part of the line item for parades, events and celebrations. Gordy said yes.

Eric asked if there is any objection to the village manager, who is not a village resident, speaking. There was no objection.

Kim Dunkley said she has heard that the old powerhouse building is in great need of being dealt with. It seems like the people who were in power in the village in the past could have dealt with it. Could asking them to take responsibility be pursued so the village does not face so much cost next year? Gordy suggested discussing that under Article 7.

Meredith said the powerhouse removal project will not impact taxes. That is under the electric department budget, not the general department budget. The electric department has a fund balance that will probably cover the cost.

Kyle Nuse said in the past couple of years the budget has included \$15,000 to be put into the sidewalk fund. This year it includes nothing for the sidewalk fund. Gordy said rather than put money into the sidewalk fund this year and then take it out, money is being put into the Pearl Street project planned for this year. Walter explained that the village has been saving money for a sidewalk project and this year we will spend the money that has been saved.

Kyle asked, going forward is the village going to continue to put \$15,000 a year into the sidewalk fund? Gordy said the board will decide about that.

A voter asked if sidewalk is being added or just being renovated. Walter said it is just being renovated. No new sidewalk is being added.

A voter asked where the \$57,000 in reserve fund revenue is coming from. Meredith said that is the money that is coming from the sidewalk reserve fund.

Kim Dunkley asked about stormwater projects. Nothing is budgeted for that. Is that all the town? Meredith said the town and the village share responsibility for that. We are working with an organization to develop a stormwater master plan.

Kim asked, there is no money to fix problems people are having with stormwater? Meredith said not this year.

The motion was passed by a voice vote.

Article 6. Shall the Village of Johnson adopt an inclusivity statement that reads:

The people of Johnson embrace inclusiveness and together we will build bridges to understanding, ensuring that all who live, work and visit our town feel welcome and safe. We reject racism, bigotry, discrimination, violence and hatred in all its forms. Together we commit to growing a cooperative, sustainable, and thriving community.

Kim Dunkley moved that the Village of Johnson adopt the inclusivity statement as printed in the warning and the motion was seconded.

Kyle Nuse moved to amend the motion to change the statement to the one adopted at town meeting, which reads:

The people of Johnson embrace inclusiveness and together we will build bridges to understanding, ensuring that all who live, work and visit our town feel welcome and safe. We reject racism, bigotry, discrimination, violence and hatred in all its forms. The things we embrace are kindness, gentleness, understanding, neighborliness, peace, tolerance and respect for and toward all. Together we can have a cooperative, sustainable and thriving community where everyone is honored and valued.

The motion to amend was seconded and passed

The amended motion was passed.

Article 7. To do such other business as may properly be brought before this meeting.

Gordy read a statement. Last year the village voters voted to pay half the cost of a merger study up to \$4,000. The town and village got three proposals. They were more expensive than \$8,000. The trustees and the selectboard will discuss the proposals. The trustees are committed to spending no more than \$4,000 on the study.

The village did environmental testing at the powerhouse building. Asbestos, PCB's and lead were found. It is important to keep that building out of the river. The initial estimate to remove it was \$200,000 to \$250,000. But that cost will probably be increased because of the levels of contamination present. Money to pay for the removal of the building will come out of electric department cash on hand. No electric rate increase or tax increase will be needed. Gordy thanked Meredith for the work she has done on this and thanked Scott Meyer for his expertise in this area, which has been helpful. He said that whoever generates hazardous waste is responsible for it from cradle to grave. The village in the past was responsible for this building and is responsible for its disposal.

Gordy shared what he had learned about the Route 15 paving schedule. The section from Underhill to Cambridge is scheduled to be paved in 2020, the section from Cambridge to

Johnson is scheduled to be paved in 2022, and the section from Johnson to Morrisville is scheduled to be paved in 2021. There is nothing we can do about that schedule except to put pressure on our representatives. When the paving is done the village wants to replace crosswalks on Main Street.

Pam Aupperlee asked about the time frame for powerhouse removal. Is there a risk that the building will fall into the river soon?

Meredith said the village has been trying to get funding but that takes a long time and we can't wait to remove the building. A loan is one possibility for funding but the village would have to pay interest and there are regulatory hoops to jump through in order to get the money. If the village pays for removal of the building with cash on hand the project can be done sooner and no interest will need to be paid. An engineer who looked at the building said it could last for another year or it could fall down tomorrow. Contractors who will do the removal are not willing to do it when the river is high. The plan is to do the removal this summer or fall.

Kim Dunkley said she feels the past manager should have dealt with this. Is there nothing that can be done about that? Meredith said no.

Kim Dunkley said she would like support from the trustees on follow-up to the inclusivity statement. Kyle Nuse said some organizations have lectures and workshops to educate people about racism, sexism, etc. The selectboard is trying to organize one in Johnson. Kim said she hopes the village will support such efforts.

Linda Hill asked if Meredith is saying that the village has \$200-250K on hand to pay for the powerhouse building removal. Walter said the electric department has three quarters of a million dollars. Linda asked if it is normal to have that amount of cash on hand. Meredith said that is very normal. It is comparable to our peers. It is recommended to have enough to cover 150 days of expenses. Gordy said over the past 20 years we have had cash on hand as high as \$1.3 million or as low as \$200,000. Since it was voted to keep our electric department the village has been trying to be proactive. We have five linemen. We replaced the old digger truck and purchased a second bucket truck. We have been investing some money. Through VPPSA we have gotten some good purchased power deals. But people are trying to conserve energy so we have less revenue coming in.

Linda asked, rates are not going up? Gordy said there is no intent to raise electric rates in the near future. We may have to adjust rates for water and sewer.

Linda asked how our rates are compared to those in other communities. Gordy said he thinks we are about in the middle and we have good quality of service. Power is restored soon after outages.

Linda asked if there is an answering service that answers after hours calls about power outages. Gordy said yes.

Meredith gave some information about how our rates compare to other nearby electric utilities. Ours are lower than some other utilities, such as Washington Electric Coop or Hyde Park.

A voter asked about dealing with hazardous waste at the site after the powerhouse building is removed. Meredith said we will have to test the soil where the building was and decide how to deal with any remaining contamination, maybe by capping it. We are liable for contamination so we have to pay to deal with it.

There was a standing ovation for Walter Pomroy, who is retiring from the trustee board after 16 years.

Gordy thanked all those who came to the meeting

It was moved and seconded to adjourn at 8:15 and the motion was passed

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths

UNAPPROVED