

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2017

Present:

Trustees: Gordon Smith, Walter Pomroy, Scott Meyer, David Goddette, Bob Sweetser

Others: Meredith Birkett, Rosemary Audibert, Troy Dolan, Tom Elwood, Arjay West

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call to Order*

Gordy called the meeting to order at 6:00.

2. *Trustee Swearing-In and Election of Board Chair and Vice Chair*

Rosemary swore Scott in to his new 2-year term as trustee.

Walter moved and Bob seconded to nominate Gordy as the board chair. Gordy was elected as board chair.

Dave joined the meeting. Rosemary swore Dave in to his new 3-year term as trustee.

Scott nominated Walter as vice chair and Bob seconded. Walter was elected vice chair.

3. *Joint Meeting with the Johnson Selectboard*

Walter made a motion to suspend the trustee meeting for a joint meeting with the selectboard, Scott seconded and the motion was passed.

At 7:42, Walter moved to resume the trustee meeting, Dave seconded and the motion was passed.

4. *Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda*

Because of the late hour, Walter suggested changing the order of items on the agenda to allow visitors to leave earlier.

5. *Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings*

Walter moved to approve the minutes of March 13, 2017, Dave seconded and the motion was passed.

6. *Treasurer's Report & Review and Approve Bills and Warrants*

Rosemary distributed copies of the notice of tax sale, listing the properties up for sale. It will be May 12 at 10:00 am.

Walter moved to authorize Gordy to sign a release of lien for 54 VT Route 100C, Dave seconded and the motion was passed.

Walter moved to authorize Gordy to place a water and sewer lien on 75 Park St. for \$121.53, Scott seconded and the motion was passed.

Rosemary said an employee has requested that the village include children up to age 26 on the dental plan. Currently the plan only covers children up to age 18 or until they finish college. Delta Dental will allow us to make this change. There is no additional cost, as the employee making the request already has a family plan. Walter said this change would result in a family staying on the

family plan longer rather than on a couple plan. He asked, shouldn't this be a joint board decision? Dave asked if the employee who made the request is a joint employee. Rosemary said no. Walter asked, isn't the insurance policy joint? Rosemary said no.

Rosemary gave the costs for a 2-person plan compared to a family plan. Walter said the additional cost for a family plan is about \$50 a month, so the additional cost per year is about \$600. We would be paying that cost for 8 more years for children who are not going to college. Rosemary said the law requires children up to age 26 to be covered on health insurance plans, but there is not the same requirement for dental insurance.

Scott said prevention can save money down the road. Troy said the employee offered to pay for this. Bob said the question is how many employees' children would be affected. He is not one to go against something to help someone's health. Scott said dental health is important for health. This could save us money on health insurance.

Dave asked what the employee pays in. Rosemary said the employee pays nothing. Dave asked if we could request that the employee pay half. Rosemary said it won't cost us any more until the employee's youngest child passes the age of 18. Scott said he doesn't like it that families with kids going to college get an additional perk. Bob said the ones who can't afford to go to college need the money more. Dave said we expect employees to pay a certain portion of health insurance. Should we ask the employee to pay a portion of dental insurance? Scott said he would agree to that but we would have to make a policy change. Walter said we are already covering the family plan in full. If we wanted to ask certain employees to pay something for the additional cost of having children covered for longer, it would require a complicated exception policy. He feels we should either make the change or not make it, but not try to get the employee to pay for it. Scott said he would like to take out the disparity between coverage for kids in college and those not in college. He doesn't think that is fair. Maybe changes could be done through the personnel committee.

7. *Bunker Gear for Fire Department*

Arjay said the fire department needs to purchase 3 sets of bunker gear in 2017. This is an expense item to be paid for by their small tools fund. They budgeted \$5,065 for bunker gear and the cost of 3 sets is \$6,105. He feels the small tools fund is very capable of accepting this expense. The balance is ahead of projections and would still be ahead of projections after purchasing 3 sets of bunker gear.

Walter moved to authorize the fire department to order 3 sets of bunker gear, Bob seconded and the motion was passed. (Arjay left at 8:08.)

8. *WWTF Chief Operator Report and Action Items*

Tom said all wastewater samples were good this time. He passed around a copy of the first Electronic Discharge Monitoring Report (EMDR) and a copy of the WR-43 Gordy signs every month. There were no callouts at the wastewater plant. A leaking water line downstairs was repaired by a plumber. There was a callout for a siphon on Main Street due to meltoff and rain. The siphon barrel was cleaned.

At the water plant all water samples were good. There were no callouts. Water service was restored to a customer. We are at 35% water loss. Last month it was 15%. We have been looking for a leak. JSC water usage was up a lot in the first quarter. Tom is still trying to figure out who to contact there now that Woody Dionne is gone.

Tom met with someone about replacing the 10 highest use meters. He was told the meters we have are good for 20 years so we shouldn't have any problems with them. They are only 10 years old. There are different ways to replace the top 10 meters. We could upgrade the heads with special heads that can detect leaks. We could have 10 meters tested for about \$500. He is looking at the best approach and will have something to present at a future meeting.

The Cabin Cove leak has gotten worse. Manosh is going to dig it this week. It is the owner's responsibility and they are paying for it. It is a shared line that affects two other homeowners. Scott asked if it is possible to fix the shared situation. Tom said the lines are not ours.

Walter asked if we have been seeing infiltration. Tom said yes, quite a bit.

Board members asked about the cause of the water on Route 15 near the 100C intersection. Tom said according to someone from the state there is a culvert that is plugged that goes into a state storm drain. He assumes the state is responsible for it. Meredith said she will call VTrans about it. Tom said the water doesn't have chlorine, so it's not ours. *(Tom left at 8:18.)*

9. Foreman Report and Action Items

Troy said on March 10 a car broke a pole on 100C. Our crew set a new pole and made repairs. The driver has insurance. Troy was notified on March 28 of a broken pole on Hunter Road. A plow vehicle broke it. It has been replaced. There was a 45-minute outage for 1 customer. We plan to cover the entire cost of that replacement. He assumes the damage was caused by a town plow. New services were completed for Dan Bradley's new garage and Studio Center property on Pearl St.

The crew did a lot of plowing and sanding in March. They came in early to deal with snow on 4 occasions. The JES janitor requested help removing large icicles. The crew dug 8-foot test holes for the new sewer line. No obstructions were found.

Walter asked if it would be possible to do a quick sweep of downtown streets. Troy said the state will be having Main Street cleaned soon, maybe this week.

Both the new digger truck and the bucket truck passed annual electric stress testing.

Meredith and Troy worked with the electrical engineer developing a proposal for the cost of an electrical system study. He will also estimate the cost of a new switch for switching to GMP power. Troy created an invoice for the 100C car-pole accident and sold the old digger truck for \$3500.

10. Village Manager's Report and Action Items

Walter moved to appoint Meredith Birkett as Water & Light Commissioner, Dave seconded and the motion was passed.

Walter moved to appoint Rosemary Audibert as Tax Collector, Dave seconded and the motion was passed.

Walter moved to set the level of compensation for employees as presented in the budget, Dave seconded and the motion was passed.

Walter moved to set compensation at \$1200 per year for the trustee board chair and \$1000 per year for the other trustees, split equally between the general fund and the electric department fund, Dave seconded and the motion was passed.

Meredith said there is an electric customer that currently uses a generator for a lot of their operations and is considering switching to all grid power. If we incentivize that conversion that is the type of project we can get Tier 3 credits for. The process of getting the Tier 3 credit takes several months but the customer needs to make a decision now. Should she move forward to come up with a reasonable incentive in order for the village to get a bigger customer and get Tier 3 credit?

Dave asked what an incentive would be. Meredith said it would be financial. It could be a credit on their bill. She thinks that makes more sense than cutting a check. In the board packet she illustrated the calculations that would be done to come up with a Tier 3 credit amount. She thinks it would make sense to incentivize the conversion even without Tier 3 credits, but the potential for Tier 3 credits gives us even more reason. She can't guarantee that the Public Service Board will approve our Tier 3 program, but it seems to meet the goals. We would have to offer the incentive in advance of getting PSB approval.

The board agreed Meredith should work with the customer to offer an incentive to switch to all grid power. Meredith said she will communicate via email about development of the incentive number.

Walter asked what we would do if a year later the customer decided to cut back on grid power again. Dave said that could be easily solved with a contract. Meredith said if the incentive was a bill credit and they stopped being a customer the credit would go away. She said there is a lot of pushback in the legislature about the Tier 3 requirement, but if the requirement is reduced we can bank the credit and use it in future years.

Gordy suggested nominating the Tree Board for a Jim Marvin award and the rest of the board agreed.

It was agreed to move the May meeting to May 9 because of the special school board meeting on May 8.

Meredith showed an example of the updated utility bills Susan has been working on. Meredith feels they are more user friendly and modern. They include two new features – payment history and a usage graph.

Scott asked if water and electric bills could be sent in a single envelope. Rosemary said that would mean manually stuffing each envelope instead of having a machine do it. Meredith said we believe this is the first step toward e-billing, where people could opt not to get a paper bill. Scott asked how security of financial information is handled with e-billing. Rosemary said people would not be paying online, they would just receive a PDF of their bill by email.

Board members agreed they like the updated utility bill. Meredith said the new bills will go out starting in July.

Meredith said she learned in December that the backup service agreement with GMP was never finalized. It has become clear that there are technical and financial hurdles to making that happen. Before we go far with spending money on a switch for GMP power we need to get the agreement with GMP figured out. They are willing to work with us but they are not going to spend any money because they see no benefit to their customers. They had concerns about fusing between our system and the sub. Troy said they had no protection in the past on the line feeding our sub. If we had an issue it could affect the grid. They would need some form of protection. It would be hard to coordinate. Meredith said there is also the question of metering. Troy said the metering they used to have outside our sub is not functional and would need to be upgraded. Meredith said the draft agreement said temporary backup service would be provided for free. They got legal advice that if they made that agreement with us then they would have to offer free service to any other utility, so they won't agree to that. They are working up what their cost to us would be. That is a big unknown. We are working with them to come up with the full potential cost and we have to decide how much we are willing to spend to have this backup system available.

Vermont Studio Center is going to move some valves and curb stops as part of the Church Studio renovation. They are not planning changes to the sewer line. The Church Studio shares a sewer line with a neighboring VSC building. The line passes through another neighbor's land with no existing easement. If they don't touch it VSC hopes the state will grandfather it without requiring an easement. They want to make sure we won't force them to create two separate service lines. She doesn't see an avenue where we could require that, as they are not changing the service. Walter agreed we have no power to require it. Gordy suggested that Meredith write down the board's reasoning and she agreed.

Meredith signed a contract with Dirt Tech for the sewer extension project because the bore testing results were good. Dirt Tech gave some property owners estimates of the cost to connect and Meredith gave them information on getting a loan.

Meredith distributed copies of a VSBA model policy on social media. She said she dealt with press releases and media at her previous job. It was very time consuming so she would encourage caution in developing a media/messaging strategy. If we are going to use social media we don't want to let things get stale. Dave agreed. He said he thinks we can do a better job of getting information out about what we do. He thinks press releases are warranted for big events – for example if we are awarded a grant – but not for small events.

Walter asked if we would open up a social media page to the public or restrict usage. Dave said he thinks it would be similar to the Town of Johnson Facebook page, which has only been posted to a few times. He recommends having a few administrators of the page. He thinks there is a real need for the community to see what we are doing.

Gordy said he thinks using social media is a good idea. Most people don't know all the village and our employees are doing.

Dave said he can work with Meredith on messaging. Meredith said one of the most important parts of the draft policy is what you can and can't stop people from posting. What we can take off is pretty limited if it is a public forum. We also need to limit the number of board members posting

because of open meeting law. Dave said he thinks board members just can't have a conversation about a post.

Walter said this would be a village silo. Does a village Facebook page fit with working together with other groups? Dave said social media is designed to ask for engagement. If Johnson Works has a Facebook page they could share our post or we could share theirs. He can see our Facebook page being a promotion tool for all the great things happening in our community – for instance, something happening at Johnson State.

Gordy asked how it fits in with the town website. Dave said they are two different animals. He sees this as a benefit to Johnson, a way of promoting what we are doing. Walter asked if Dave sees it being used by the village for messages like what not to flush down our pipes. Dave said yes.

Meredith said she thinks we have to post at least once a week but not too often. We don't want to fill people's feeds with things they might not find interesting.

Scott said we couldn't post anything soliciting business for stores. Dave said he thinks we could post that a new business had opened. Meredith said she thinks we can make people aware of businesses, just not suggest that they go there. Dave said we can't endorse a business, but we can say that Johnson welcomes new business. Sometimes we could share other people's content.

Gordy asked if once or twice a year we could have a hard copy flyer mailed out. Dave said he thinks we should have a direct mail strategy. We should have an overall marketing strategy for the trustees. The Town of Johnson web page doesn't have much. That is another bridge to cross.

Dave said the only cost for using social media is time. Dave and Meredith have to discuss how to post and who is posting. Scott said as long as we have a strong policy that keeps us legal he is for a social media presence. Walter said he doesn't want it to be all-consuming. Gordy said he is in favor as long as it doesn't take up too much of Meredith's time. Dave said he thinks he will be the one doing most of the work. The most work will be setting the page up. Walter asked if the trustees have to set up Facebook pages. Dave said no.

Dave said we need to come up with a Village of Johnson social media policy. Meredith said she will send out VLCT's suggested policy electronically.

Meredith will send a letter of interest in the Northern Borders Grant by the end of April. Applications are due the beginning of June. We had discussed whether we would apply to do the River Road pump station or a solar project at the wastewater plant. She feels there are more other sources of funding for the River Road pump station but grants for solar are more limited, so she recommends applying for the solar project. She sees it as a village-owned array that would be a load reducer and would count toward our Tier 3 requirement. She could see the electric department paying the sewer department for a lease so it would help the electric utility meet the renewable energy standards and the sewer department could get extra revenue. She reached out to VPPSA for assistance with the technical aspects of preparing a grant application. She is leaving the door open as to whether we would include some battery storage. She is hearing that will be increasingly important.

Scott said he thinks we need to find out whether the fire department is equipped to fight a fire involving a battery. Meredith said she will get information on that before submitting an application.

Meredith said we would have to pay a 50% match. She will come back to the board in May with more information. We would have to document how we would pay the 50%.

If we need to adopt the Hazard Mitigation Plan Meredith will bring it to the meeting on April 18. Staff have only identified one additional project to add as an action item to the plan – establishing protocols/agreements and installing equipment to allow Johnson to receive backup transmission service.

The power bill summary shows we are continuing to have load pretty far below projections. TJ Poor indicated other utilities are seeing this but not to the same extent. He will look at load forecasting.

Gordy said at the annual village meeting when there are elections for village officers he thinks discussion should be allowed only by village residents on the checklist. Discussion by others hasn't usually been allowed in the past. Walter said under Robert's Rules it is up to the body. There is not much we can do unless we say we won't follow Robert's Rules. Meredith said she thinks it is true that it is allowed if a majority of voters present allows it. She is not sure if we can set ground rules at the beginning. Gordy said he would like Meredith to look into it. He does think those who aren't village residents should be allowed to speak on other business. Walter said he feels democracy is the best system and he will do nothing to make it harder. Dave said if someone wants to speak and the body is okay with it he doesn't mind. He sees Gordy's point, but he doesn't have a problem with someone speaking their mind. It's up to the body. They can choose. It's no longer okay if it becomes out of control.

Dave asked about the statute regarding running for trustee. To run for the selectboard you have to get a signed petition and let people know publicly well in advance that you are running rather than just show up and be nominated without even a chance for the incumbent to put together comments beforehand. Walter said it is controlled by the village bylaws. He and Bob pointed out that those not on the official ballot can run a write-in campaign for a selectboard position. The village doesn't have an official ballot. Rosemary said we could vote to elect officers by Australian ballot. Dave asked, to make it fair for all parties running shouldn't each person know who they are running against and have an opportunity to debate and have a conversation about it? Walter said he feels we just have to accept it as it is. Gordy said he feels it is a courtesy for someone to let people know they plan to run. Walter said he agrees but we can't require it unless we rewrite the bylaws. Meredith said there are other things in the bylaws that we might want to look at.

Gordy said we had one complaint that the village report wasn't done early enough. Rosemary, Gordy and Meredith met and came up with a plan. Rosemary has information on a binding machine we could buy for about \$1000 that would allow us to do the printing in-house and send the reports earlier. Walter asked, if waiting for the auditor's report is slowing down the process, why does the auditor's report need to be in the village report? We could remove it and remove the problem. Rosemary said we can put anything we want in the report. Dave suggested we could send out a letter saying a digital version is available online and make physical copies available at the annual meeting. Meredith said some people prefer not to get a digital report. But the letter could

say we will print one off for anyone who wants it. There is some statutory requirement to mail the report out. Rosemary said we can do away with that. Some towns have. All agreed the report should be sent out sooner. Walter suggested taking out the outside auditor's report if that is the stumbling block. Dave said he thinks a combination of print and digital reports would solve the problem. We could make a PDF of the report available on the website.

Gordy said he and Meredith had discussed the possibility of inviting the public to be involved at the start of the budgeting process. Dave said trustee meetings are open meetings. If people are concerned they can come. Bob said he is not sure about people coming in when the board is trying to do the budget. Meredith said her suggestion is to have a meeting before budget development really starts, to get people's thoughts and concerns. Dave said he can put together a promotional campaign for it. Walter said the meeting when the public is invited would be the meeting to present budget priorities.

Gordy said he had asked Meredith to look into how someone serving on both the selectboard and the trustee board would need to abstain on some things. Meredith said there is a question as to whether something could be put in the village bylaws to prevent someone serving on both boards. Walter said he wouldn't want to do that but he thinks we should probably adopt a good conflict of interest policy.

Gordy asked if Meredith could find out more about the procedure for determining who is allowed to speak at the annual meeting.

Scott said he got negative comments about how quickly that meeting ended. There were people who wanted to say things.

11. Adjourn

Walter moved and Dave seconded to adjourn at 9:47 and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths