

Village Trustee Minutes
April 29, 2015
Johnson Municipal Offices

6:00 p.m.

Present: Gordon Smith, Chair, David Godette, Bob Sweetser, Scott Meyer.
Troy Dolan, Cliff Hill, Nate Brigham, Duncan Hastings.

Gordy opened the meeting at 6:05 p.m. He stated the purpose of the first part of the meeting was to get the feedback of the employees about whether or not to contract outside line work services to Morrisville Water & Light. He wanted the tone of the meeting to be cordial and productive. He then opened the meeting to comments.

For approximately one hour there was wide ranging discussion of the pros and cons of contracting and what would be needed in order to keep the work in house. The employees were of the opinion that they could handle the work but acknowledged the need for some level of additional assistance with safety program management and general administrative help. Troy acknowledged the importance of keeping up on proper safety protocols and trainings and stated that most larger utilities have a separate safety officer that deals with these issues, but he recognized we were too small for that.

The trustees posed numerous questions to the employees such as the adequacy of a workforce of three qualified linemen, ability to continue and maintain a safe work environment and keep up with safety training and documentation requirements, ability to hire or train and then retain qualified line-workers at the rates of pay now being offered, pending retirements, on call and call out schedules and demands.

There was a brief discussion of the pros and cons of hiring a Public works Superintendent that could oversee town and village functions. Employees saw some benefits of having the administrative and safety functions. Troy Dolan stated a concern that any such person would have to have detailed knowledge of the specific requirements of electric work, or he would have a real problem taking directives with a lack of such knowledge.

At 7:00 Craig Myotte General Manager of Morrisville Water and Light and Trustees Peter Bourne and Wally Reeves entered the meeting to discuss MW&L proposal for services. Craig started with an overview of what had been proposed and what MW&L could offer. He stated his belief that it was only a matter of time before all Vermont municipal utilities would either be forced to sell or would have to band together to figure out new ways of doing more with less. MW&L had discussions with Stowe and Hyde Park and were looking a model that would essentially create a separate entity that would perform all line-work functions for a group of participating municipals. This model could significantly lower costs over time, yet allow the survival of small municipals. Duncan stated a strong belief that Craig was correct and the day was coming sooner than later when we would all be facing this situation.

Numerous questions were asked about MW&L proposals and if there were opportunities for more of a hybrid model where VOJ could retain its employees yet receive fee for service from MW&L for things like administration and safety. Craig thought this could be looked at but stated MW&L is operating at minimum staff levels now and their plan for contracting to VOJ was to hire another line-worker. That would not happen under a hybrid approach, so MW&L availability could not be guaranteed. MW&L had

initially provided the services of Jim Fontaine to VOJ right after Steve Towne left to fill the gap and could do the same now. Craig was asked if VOJ could make their own arrangements with Jim and Craig said yes.

Duncan stated one of his biggest concerns with VOJ continuing to do the work is keeping up with the required safety trainings and the necessary documentation of same. He suggested that one way to deal with this might be to hire a safety officer to be shared by several municipalities. Lamoille County was unique in that we have 4 municipalities and one right across the line in Hardwick. If we could all share a safety officer this could be a great benefit to all of us.

Wally Reeves supported the idea and stated this should be brought to the VPPSA group to see if they would take it on and provide these services to all the members. Duncan and Craig said they would take this to the VPPSA Board and GM.

Duncan stated another area of concern of his was on call coverage for VOJ and suggested another area of cooperation we might be able to work on with MW&L would be coordinating an on call schedule between the utilities.

Gordy asked VOJ employees if they were open to that concept and there was general agreement it should be looked at. MW&L was also receptive to the idea.

It was generally agreed that VOJW&L and MW&L should continue to look at some form of hybrid model for services to VOJ, pursue options for a shared safety officer and pursue some form of shared on call pooling of resources.

VOJ Trustees thanks Craig, Peter and Wally for coming and being open to ideas. They left the meeting at 8:10.

Additional discussion with employees ensued until 8:20 p.m. when David moved to enter Executive Session to discuss contract with MW&L and Personnel matters, seconded by Scott, unanimous.

At 9:50 David moved to exit Executive Session, seconded by Scott, unanimous in favor.

Gordy moved to retain Electric Department employees and equipment, contingent upon and agreement with MW&L, VPPSA or some other entity to provide administrative and safety support and services to Electric Department, seconded by Scott, unanimous in favor.

The Board asked Duncan to contact Jim Fontaine and see if he was interested in working a few hours per week to assist with safety documentation and administrative duties.

Scott moved to appoint Walter and David to the Manager search committee, seconded by Bob, unanimous in favor.

The Board deferred further consideration of a shared Public Works Superintendent until their next meeting, but there was not much interest at this time.

Motion to adjourn by David at 10:02 p.m., seconded by Scott unanimous in favor

Submitted by Duncan Hastings, Manager, 4/30/15