

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
ELECTRONIC MEETING VIA ZOOM AND PHONE CALL-IN
MONDAY, JULY 13, 2020

Present:

Trustees: Scott Meyer, Brian Raulinaitis, Gordon Smith, Bob Sweetser, Phil Wilson

Others: Meredith Dolan, Rosemary Audibert, Troy Dolan, Dan Copp, Elizabeth Perry, Steve Hatfield, Etta Parker, Athena Parke, Jena Gould-Hopkins, Liam Murphy, Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Shayne Spence, Will Jennison, Jon Gregg, Kyle Nuse, Diane Lehouillier, Louise Cross, Margo Warden, Shannon Lemley-Willis, Peggy Williams. Rick Aupperlee, Jackie Stanton, Cal Stanton, Kate Donnally, 3 other community members

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Gordy called the meeting to order at 6:00.

2. Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. Review and Approve Minutes of Trustee Meetings

Bob moved to approve the minutes of June 8 and July 6, 2020 and the motion was seconded and passed.

4. Village Green Food Truck Follow-up

Troy and Meredith met with Pam Mudgett and her son, the owners of the food truck that will be using the village green. They discussed where the food truck will go and selected a location that will allow them to access power and not block traffic or parking. There is a meter at the village green but it is tied to the streetlight. We need to install a second meter. Troy thought the work could be done in-house. Materials will cost about \$300. Installing the second meter will allow us to follow our own tariff if someone else in the future wants to operate a meter separate from the street light. She wants to make sure the trustees are okay with spending the money for it.

Scott asked, post COVID-19 if another food truck wants to use the village green, can we get two services there so we can split the electric cost? Meredith said currently there wouldn't be room for another truck. Troy said it could be done with some upgrades that are a little more extensive than what we are talking about now. Meredith said the other food truck that had asked about using the village green but then declined had a generator they were going to use. That is an option if they have one that is reasonably quiet.

Phil asked, is our plan to charge them for power or is that included in their fee? Meredith said we have to charge them as a customer for power.

Meredith said they asked if they could leave the food truck overnight there all the time. She thinks it is probably better for the green if the truck is not being moved around, but it is important for the trustees to specifically give permission. Scott said he would support that. It is fantastic to have this activity in downtown Johnson. Bob asked, they would only be leaving it there in the summer, not in the winter, right? Meredith said that is right. Our

current policy allows food trucks to operate through the end of October. The trustees could revisit that if they want to use the site beyond October.

Phil asked how many food trucks we could accommodate at the village green. Meredith said we have said there would be a maximum of two.

Walter Pomeroy said he hopes the village will have a discussion with neighbors before approving use of a generator at the village green, because of the noise it would make. Meredith said that seems reasonable. We will do that.

The board agreed to spend the money to put in the other meter and to allow the food truck to remain on site.

5. Review and Approve Bills and Warrants

Scott moved to authorize Gordy to sign orders on behalf of the board, Bob seconded and the motion was passed. (*Brian joined the meeting at 6:12.*)

Scott asked if we are gaining any ground on encouraging people to start paying their bills. Meredith said Marla has been making phone calls telling people we expect the moratorium on disconnection for non-payment to be lifted at the end of the month so we expect to start disconnections. She wouldn't say it has been a huge success. Scott asked, what about water and sewer? Meredith said we are still a little behind and those payments. If we compare June 2019 to June 2020, there has been a 58% increase in unpaid balances.

6. Interviews with Interim Trustee Applicants

Each of the six candidates for the open trustee positions was asked to give a quick synopsis of why they are interested in serving as a trustee.

Steve Hatfield said he and his wife retired here about three years ago. They really love the village. Their primary motivation for moving was to be closer to their daughter who went to Johnson State College as a non-traditional student and has worked in the area since. He has grandkids in the area and a son-in-law who grew up in North Hyde Park. He and his wife moved here from a small town in upstate New York where he was mainly a remodeling contractor. He was a member of the fire department there and was on the board of fire commissioners, which had the responsibility to establish budgets and audit expenses. He spent five years working for the Department of Social Services as a caseworker for kids in foster care in Otsego County. He is aware that the village is such a great place to live because so many people have contributed over the years and he would like to do his part.

Gordy said sometimes the trustees meet once a month and sometimes there are three meetings a month. It can be time-consuming. He wants to make sure each candidate has time to participate. Steve said he is retired and doesn't have many commitments. He could commit to those meetings.

Liam Murphy said he first came to Johnson about nine years ago when he was looking at schools. He was a part-time resident for about two years when he was a student and he has been renting here for about 6 years. He loves the people in the community. The way people tend to come together to try to lift up a tiny town is inspirational. He is from suburbia in

Connecticut. This is a community he wants to be a part of. He volunteers at the pizza oven and he is a Justice of the Peace. For the past four years he has been a maintenance worker at Vermont Studio Center, which involves budgeting and working with interconnected systems that are connected with the town. That has given him experience with how and where things fail and what needs to get updated. Serving on the board would be a learning experience for him. He was just temporarily furloughed from the Studio Center so time is not an issue. He has been here during a couple of floods and seen the emergency response. That is where he would like to be helpful.

Scott said he has two questions that he would like to ask both Liam and Steve. When he became a village trustee he thought he would change the shape of the community and he found out that 80 or 90% of his time as a trustee involve dealing with the budget, viewing reports, etc. There are opportunities to move the community forward but that is not the bulk of what we do. The trustee board provides administrative checks and balances. He wants that to be clear to people.

Because this is such a small community a lot of people on the board are involved in other aspects of the town and village such as Laraway, the Studio Center, or the fire department. Sometimes the trustees have to take votes on issues affecting those organizations. He wants to know the candidates' comfort level on owning up to it when they see a possible conflict of interest and saying they can't comment or vote.

Liam said he is not sure how well he could check himself but he would take other board members' word if they thought there was a conflict of interest. He thinks he has a pretty good understanding that the work is mostly budgeting, but his thought that is that infrastructure is the best way to improve the quality of life in town.

Steve said he realizes there is not a lot of glamour to this job. He understands his initial appointment would be a trial and he could decline running for election. He had experience doing similar work when he was a fire commissioner. As to the other question, he realizes you have to bring an open mind and there may be times you have to excuse yourself from a vote and be honest about it.

Scott said Gordy always says that sometimes the board discusses hot topics but when the trustees leave the building they are all still friends and part of the community and try not to carry grudges.

Athena Parke said she has lived here about three and a half years. She recently graduated from college with a BA in interdisciplinary studies. She came here for college and ended up staying for the town. She loves this town and the people. She has many stories about connecting with people. She is from inner city Chicago. She thinks she would bring a different perspective. She has also lived in Australia. Something about this town makes her never want to leave it. She thinks she brings appreciation for varying perspectives and the importance of listening to those perspectives. Actively listening is an ability she feels she cultivated at NVU. They promote appreciating different perspectives. Along with that she thinks it is important to have someone on the board who has connections to the college and is

aware of what is happening there and how the college and village can work together. She has limited professional experience in terms of looking at budgets, but she was an active member of a club on campus that had a limited budget so she got experience with prioritizing. She likes to think that she is self-aware and could say that she needs to step back or that she has a conflict of interest. She doesn't have a lot of professional experience with the nuts and bolts of what the trustees do but she feels very motivated to learn about it and get into the nitty-gritty of it.

Scott said the village has a lot of oversight through state and federal rules. The trustees have to make sure the village is following state rules, EPA guidelines, ANR wastewater permits, etc. He would love to hear if anyone has issues with following the rules we have to follow.

Athena said she has no issue with that. She respects rules protecting the environment.

Gordy said it takes at least a year of reading to start to get a grasp on utilities. That is why we have a village manager. She guides the board. Being on the board is a good learning experience.

Ellis O'Hear said he used to be on the trustee board. He has been in the village a long time and has served in the fire department. He loves the village. He understands budgets, VPPSA and all the rules and regulations the village has to follow. He was asked to be a candidate. He has more time now than he used to. He is unemployed right now and probably will retire soon. *(Ellis left the meeting at 6:37.)*

Will Jennison said he has been a Johnson resident all his life. He moved to the village in 1990. He has been involved with the fire department and water rescue for 25 years. He doesn't take sides on an issue until he has all the facts. He doesn't like to waste time or money. He is interested in service to the community, not power. He is familiar with the time it takes to be on the trustee board. Obviously, following statutes and rules is paramount. If there were a conflict of interest he would recuse himself. He doesn't think he is likely to have any conflict of interest other than the fire department.

Jena Gould-Hopkins said she is a JSC graduate. She graduated in 1998 and has lived here ever since because the town appealed to her so much. Her family owns a home here and she works for Laraway. She feels she can vote and be unbiased. If at any point there was any question she would definitely communicate that. She sees the connectedness between the town and college as paramount. She is very interested in promoting the college in the area. She has so many good examples of how the town has conducted itself, such as the COVID-19 meetings, the Irene response and the response after a bomb threat many years ago. The town has amazing outreach. She had COVID-19 and VOSHA training for work, which may or may not be applicable.

Scott said those are very much needed. We are very involved with COVID-19. The team we have put together has done amazing work. Our rates are low. Having people who are educated through trainings or a background in the sciences is an attribute in times like this.

Jena said one thing that has been on her mind is having masks be mandatory in public spaces. We can see examples of other places in the country where things are off track with COVID-19. She is wondering if there would be further conversations on mandatory masking and how we would communicate and educate on that. Perhaps there needs to be some incentive to get people to be more compliant. She feels everyone's health is of utmost importance.

Scott said a few days ago he sent out a study recently published in a scientific journal on masking and other methods of protecting against COVID-19 spread. What the study found is that communities that started making mask use more or less mandatory saw a drastic reduction in caseload. If anyone wants a copy they can email him.

Meredith said an executive session is planned for the end of the meeting for discussion on which candidates the board wants to select. If the board is ready for a decision on selecting candidates it will be made in open session but people other than the board will have to leave the meeting during the executive session. She will let people know tomorrow which candidates were selected.

Meredith explained that people often use “town” and “village” interchangeably but this position oversees the duties and priorities of the village. There are four village budgets. The general department budget is the only one that uses money from property tax revenue. There are three enterprise funds – electric, water and sewer. All have separate revenue streams and budgets. There are specific rules and regulations for each of them that guide most of our work. There is limited funding, probably around \$10,000 a year, that can be used for projects chosen to benefit the community. The bulk of funds are used for running utilities.

Scott asked the rough budget amounts for each department. Meredith said the general department budget is about \$540,000. That includes the fire department. The water department budget is about \$450,000. The sewer department budget is about \$600,000 and the electric department budget is about \$3 million. A large part of the village’s time and effort is directed toward the electric department.

Meredith said she will follow up with each candidate and let them know if a decision is made. Ideally the board would like to appoint two people to start in early August.

7. Treasurer’s Report / Review and Approve Bills and Warrants / Budget Status

Rosemary said we have gotten notice from the state that PILOT will be fully funded this year. We will see no reduction in PILOT funds.

Meredith said we are a little over budget for salaries and benefits. She needs to look at how she has allocated her time. That may be part of what is driving it over budget. Scott said he wonders if all Meredith and Rosemary have been doing related to COVID-19 has been pushing their general department hours higher. Meredith said she would say yes, but she doesn't think we can collect for that from FEMA because the work was not overtime. She probably recorded a lot of hours to general department but the work encompassed all departments. She will see if she needs to rework that.

Meredith said if we don't do the full siding project that was originally planned for this year we may come in under budget on municipal building repairs.

Scott asked about legal fees. That seemed high. Meredith said most of the amount probably has to do with union negotiations. That is done, so the amount should not grow anymore.

Meredith said merchandising and jobbing for the electric department may come in over budget. She just compared sales numbers through June to numbers from the same time last year and she thinks they are down about 6%. Residential sales are above last year but commercial sales are down and the college is way down. We have lower sales and also unpaid balances.

Gordy asked if purchased power expenses are down by about the same amount as revenue. Meredith said she would have to check on that. We were oversubscribed so it is there is not a one-to-one correspondence. She will follow up and get a better answer. Gordy asked, if we have extra power, can we sell it at market price? Meredith said she thinks we have not been getting all our money back on selling it. She will look at the latest power bill and let the board know in an email.

Rosemary noted that vacation, holiday and sick time from when staff were not coming in due to COVID-19 was all coded to the electric department and it will be broken out into different departments.

Meredith said water sales are about 47% of budget. There will be cost associated with the water leak at the end of June. There was overtime for that.

Scott said, regarding the water main break, there was conversation about it not being installed as per the contract. Is that documented and can we get any kind of cash back on that mess-up or an explanation of why it happened? Meredith said she doesn't know if the contract specified what the contractors should have backfilled with. She thinks it would be very difficult to go back 14 years and prove that was the cause of the break. It seems likely that to us that incorrect backfilling was the cause but she doesn't think we can prove it.

Scott asked if the general department is usually on hand to inspect work that is going on. Meredith said she doesn't know what the practice was 14 years ago. When we have work like that going on we like to have staff check in on it. She doesn't know if there was a designated person to oversee that work or if the village hired an outside person to oversee it. Gordy said we should have had a contracted engineer to oversee the work, not our village employees. There apparently weren't enough inspections being done.

Meredith said the amount billed for sewer (not necessarily what people paid) is about 48% of budget. We will be encouraging people to pay. She thinks we will put a newsletter in the bills in early August and encouragement to pay bills will be part of it. There also will be a push to get people to sign up for VT-ALERT. We found that was the best way to get timely information out during the water main break.

Scott said some schools have the ability to do reverse calls. Would that be possible for us? He is worried about rental properties where the landowner may get a text and those renting may not. He is wondering if we should add reverse calling in addition to VT-ALERT. Meredith said she can look into that. Regarding tenants, Eric suggested that we do a mailing to people with rental properties asking them to encourage their tenants to sign up for VT-ALERT. When people sign up for service we may add a suggestion that they sign up for VT-ALERT. Phil said the problem with a reverse dialer is that so many people these days are without landlines.

Meredith noted that chemicals are over budget and asked if that is because we put in a big order. Dan said yes. They increased the quantity for us to get a decent price. The amount we ordered will last longer and we saved hundreds of dollars by ordering a larger amount.

Rosemary said the new grand list is \$61,633,697. The budget passed by the voters was \$111,889. That equates to a rate of .1816 on the dollar. That is a reduction of less than a penny from last year's rate.

Scott moved and Brian seconded to set a tax rate of .1816 to raise the amount of \$111,889 and the motion was passed.

Meredith said as part of the audit this year and last year our accountants, Pace & Hawley, made some suggestions. One had to do with the way we do our inventory and another had to do with capital assets. She reached out to them for advice on inventory. Rosemary could use guidance on how they would like to see capital assets set up. We asked them for a proposal for those services and they estimated it would cost \$900 to \$1,500. The expense will be allocated mainly to the electric department. Rosemary said she thinks it will be well worth it to get a clean audit. The past two years for the electric department audit we really haven't gotten a clean audit for those two reasons. **Scott moved to move forward with additional assistance from Pace & Hawley at an estimated cost of \$900 to \$1,500, Brian seconded and the motion was passed.**

8. *Water/Wastewater Report and Action Items*

Dan said all samples met state requirements. The E-DMR and Wr-43 were submitted for review. There were no callouts for the water plant. Coliform results were negative. Nate brought some dirt to the WWTF to fill in a spot under the fence that had washed out during the flood last year. Belts on the belt press were pressure washed as well as the concrete around all of the tanks that had moss and dirt built up. The UV room was cleaned and organized. Racks were made for storage of the UV bulbs while cleaning the channels. QualCal calibrated and certified all of the lab equipment that we use for state mandated testing.

There was one callout for the water main break. Coliform results at the water plant were negative. We started collecting lead and copper samples from village residents per the sampling plan. We removed the cap on the wellhead at the water plant for the state to inspect as part of the sanitary survey.

We got the final results of the sanitary survey. We must move the sampling point at Katy-Win. A plumbing company has to move it to a safer spot. Dan would guess the cost for that would be a couple hundred dollars. More important is that they want us to come up with a plan to address the dirt floors at all three pump houses. We know we own Pump Houses #1 and #2 and Meredith is looking into ownership of Pump House #3. He thinks we can do the work to pour concrete so rodents can't get in and the floors can be swept and kept clean. The main pump house needs some structural work. Utility Partners is willing to do that work so we only have the cost of materials. We only need to come up with a plan by August 25th. We don't have to do the work this year. If we take some of the money that was set aside for the well pump we might be able to do it within this year's budget.

Scott said we had spoken about replacing the pump houses rather than fixing them. Is Dan recommending a band-aid approach or is it worth replacing them? Dan said it would be expensive to redo them all. The person who conducted the sanitary survey was not so concerned with the structures, just the dirt floors. It may be to our advantage to do some re-plumbing in Pump House #1 but the state is not requiring it. There is no evidence of rodents in the pump houses but that is one of their concerns. Meredith said ownership of Pump House #3 is not clear to her. She needs to do more research.

Dan said Utility Partners assisted the village on water line repair and because there was a possibility of infiltration the entire village was put on a boil water notice which was able to be lifted after the required water samples were taken. He and Tim responded at Troy's request. There will be no charge for that.

Water loss was 6%. That included hydrant flushing so the actual loss was less than that.

Scott said because so many people are viewing tonight he would like Dan to let people know about our sampling for PFOA and PFOS – that we have sampled and found none and what our schedule for sampling is. Dan said we sampled both wells last year in September and both were negative for all the chemicals we tested for. They are asking us to sample again this year between September and December. If results come back negative again we will go onto a three-year cycle of testing. It costs about \$900 to test both wells.

Scott thanked Dan for helping us out with the water line break.

Meredith said a resident has requested to install a garbage disposal. Our ordinance says installation of a garbage disposal needs to be approved by the trustees. The customer indicated that with the new requirement for not putting food scraps in garbage she is interested in a garbage disposal. If use of garbage disposals for food scraps became common we would have some concerns. Meredith's recommendation is to let the customer know she is free to install a garbage disposal, but it is for incidental disposal only, not regular daily disposal of food scraps.

Dan said his only issue is that if many people install garbage disposals loading could get high at the plant. If it is just for minimal residential use that is not a problem. If she is using it instead of composting, he has a problem with that.

Phil asked if Meredith warned the customer that the material is not being composted once it gets to the wastewater plant. Dan said it goes to the landfill from there. Meredith said the customer's concern was that she was not in a position to compost or haul food scraps around. She was looking for a solution, but that is not really a solution. It is just passing the material on.

Brian said with no monitoring there is no way he could get on board with that. That is just passing the food scraps on. The requirements are changing for a good reason. Dan said once you say yes, there is no way you can know what goes down the drain. Scott agreed with Brian. He thinks this needs better discussion and further investigation. He thinks we should come up with some kind of policy. Phil said there is no way to prevent people from installing garbage disposals. You can go to the hardware store and buy one.

Scott suggested maybe we should find someone who is willing to help out financially disadvantaged people who are in need of food scrap disposal. Meredith said she can reach out to Susan Alexander of Lamoille Regional Solid Waste Management District. Phil said the solid waste district sells composting bins that seal and they take food scraps at the transfer station. They have been doing a lot of outreach. He doesn't know if there has been any around garbage disposals. Scott suggested that in our newsletter we could talk about the ethics, costs and alternatives. Meredith agreed that would be a great topic. She said we can try to link people up with the solid waste district. She will let the customer know that the answer on the garbage disposal is a no and the reasons why and where to go for other assistance.

Meredith said in order to become eligible for a loan from the Clean Water State Revolving Fund for the River Road ump station we need engineering assistance. We issued an RFP for engineers and will be interviewing the five we got responses from tomorrow. Once we pick the top candidate we will negotiate with them for engineering services and submit an application to the state to get funding for a design. Hopefully that will turn into funding for construction.

9. *Foreman Report and Action Items*

Troy said on June 15 an MSI truck carrying an excavator tore down the overhead service feeding 25 Foote Brook Road. This affected one customer. All repairs were made in about an hour.

The green Main Street light pole near Maplefields that was knocked down by a car this winter was repaired and re-installed.

The crew has been doing pole transfers in the right of way on Gould Hill Road. We have also been doing ROW cutting throughout the system and at the substation.

During the week of June 22, Jeff and Chan attended daily online NEPPA training classes as part of their last year of the apprenticeship program.

The crew also completed monthly meter reading, high/low checks, and Dig Safes.

On the night of June 26, we had a water leak on the 12" water main near 60 Railroad Street. The cause was a broken saddle where the house service line makes its connection to the main. The call came in around 10:00 PM and the crew worked throughout the night. All customers along Railroad Street between River Road West and Route 15 lost water service during this time. Water service was restored around 7:00 AM. Tim and Dan from Utility Partners assisted us and we were very thankful for their help.

Water at the skate park was turned off due to a leak on the customer (town) side of the meter.

We assisted with a wet tap water connection that will serve the Studio Center building at 24 Clay Hill Road.

All hydrant flushing was completed.

We were notified by Harvey's that they would be paving on Park Street and West Highland Drive about a week before they intended to start the project. The village crew located and raised all the sewer manholes, water curb stops and valve covers in that area prior to the paving.

Troy created an invoice for the damage at 25 Foote Brook Road and it was sent to MSI's attorney. Out total invoice to repair the damage was around \$1,325. Troy completed an estimate for Travis Hill for an underground line extension off Clay Hill that will serve four properties. The estimated cost is \$18,760. He has also been working with Travis Hill's contractor for the water and sewer connections that are needed to serve these properties. Troy created an underground line extension estimate for Shane Smith for a property on Foote Brook Road. The cost estimate is roughly \$6,500.

The contract with Unifirst for uniforms has been signed. Troy reached out to Cintas to end service with them. This will be a significant savings in our uniform budget line item.

Troy said he would like to purchase a bladder-type water pump. During the water line break a lot of water was coming into the hole where people were working and the first pumps tried did not work. We had an old bladder-type pump that did work but it is very old. He would like to buy a new one so we don't run into that problem again. Dan would use it again if there was flooding. It would cost about \$1,800 from Johnson Hardware & Rental.

Scott said he is in favor of the purchase because it is a life safety issue but he is wondering if we have looked around for other vendors. Troy said no. He reached out to Johnson Hardware & Rental because they are the closest and their repair service is top quality. They would help in the middle of the night if it was needed. He also thought it would be good to keep our money local. Scott said he supports keeping the money local but he is wondering if that is a good price. Dan said he believes it is.

Scott asked if we ever sought reimbursement for the pole that was knocked over. Troy said no. He went to Maplefields and watched the camera footage of the incident but was not able

to read the license plate. The car involved was a common type. He thinks the repair cost was about \$500, not including time, compared to a replacement cost of about \$7,000.

Brian said he thinks the pump will get used quite a bit. He is in favor of keeping the money local and making sure we have service from a nearby business. Gordy said there should be a policy about the pump being for village use only. Troy said if the town needed it we would work out an arrangement, but it would not be for the general public.

10. Revision to Planned 2020 Municipal Building Projects

Meredith said initially we planned to complete the municipal building siding project this year. We were hoping to get the tower done. But COVID-19 set us back. That work won't happen this year. We had some other projects in mind. One is repairing and putting in proper sidewalk out to Route 15. The existing sidewalk is a tripping hazard. Also, the wood floors upstairs have never been refinished. There is no public use of that space now so it is a good time to get that done. We are proposing to spend some of the money we would have spent on the siding project, maybe not the full amount, on those things. She will come back later with a more definite proposal.

Gordy asked if the selectboard has already approved this. Meredith said she knows they have had conversation about it but she doesn't think there has been approval of specific projects, just of the general concept.

Gordy said if the Beautification Committee has Andrea Blaisdell planting flowers we should make sure that any work that is done does not interfere with that.

Meredith said she is not sure how feasible it will be to find someone to pour the concrete this year. Construction companies are having a hard time finding people. But we will see if we can find someone.

Phil asked if there would be cost savings from lumping that working with the Pearl Street sidewalk project. Meredith said she suspects there would be. If we had gone to construction for the Pearl Street project this year we had talked about having the contractor do the municipal building sidewalk at the same time. Maybe we can wrap the two projects together if we can't get the municipal building worked on this year, but the sidewalk is a tripping hazard so we wanted to get it done soon.

Phil asked, what about repaving Railroad Street where the sidewalk was dug up. Meredith said we do need to repair the sidewalk where two sections had to be taken out due to the water line leak. That works should definitely be bundled with the municipal building work.

11. COVID-19 Response Check-In and Utility Update

Meredith said we have been monitoring our unpaid balances. We have to send information on them to the Department of Public Service. There has been a 90% increase in unpaid balances compared to 2019. The same thing is happening to utilities across the state. There was a 58% increase in unpaid balances for water compared to this time last year. We are trying to reach out to people and remind them that they need to make payment plans. The disconnection moratorium is planned to end at the end of this month. We haven't heard that it will be extended again. We had to put together a plan for the state on how we will reinstitute

disconnections. Meredith thinks there will be extra regulations related to when we can disconnect people. We will probably need to give them extra time to pay their bills. The state did pass a bill to provide about 8 million dollars to utilities for unpaid balances or arrearages. But that is not enough to cover all the unpaid balances in the state. That money will also go to some water systems. The department of public service is supposed to be putting together a program to get the money to utilities.

Scott said the decrease in revenues could be horribly detrimental to small municipal utilities compared to large corporations that could take the hit better. Is there any guidance from the state on who has priority? Meredith said VPPSA members talked about it and the point was brought up that GMP and Vermont Electric Coop were eligible to apply for PPP funds and small municipal utilities were not. She is not sure but she guesses that all utilities will have some access to these funds. Each may just get a proportional share. She doesn't think we will be successful in saying we should get more but VPPSA is advocating that we get as much as possible for municipal utilities. She thinks we will have more guidance next week about reinstating disconnections.

Scott said if a landlord has not paid their utility bill because they didn't get enough money from rent and the power bill is to the landlord, if the property is disconnected some of the tenants may have been paying correctly. How are we working this issue out? Is there guidance on that? Meredith said there isn't clear guidance. She has encouraged people to reach out to legislators so they can think about these situations. There are other funds being made available to homeowners and landlords. There is a question of how we are going to equitably distribute money we are getting for unpaid balances. She doesn't want our employees to decide who is most deserving. She thinks we would apply the money proportionately to all unpaid balances. Scott asked if she thinks VPPSA will try to come up with a way to distribute the funds. Meredith said there have been discussions at the VPPSA level about encouraging the Department of Public Service to make the system as straightforward as possible to get the money to utilities as quickly as possible. We want to be able to give a percentage across the board rather than having to pick people to receive the funds. It is up to the state to develop a program to use these funds. Phil asked, the money won't come through VPPSA? Meredith said she is not sure. What we are advocating for is for each utility to get its share directly.

12. Request to Fly a Black Lives Matter Flag at the Municipal Building

Meredith said we got an email request from residents to fly a Black Lives Matter flag at the municipal building. She also got a letter from the Johnson Fire Department expressing some concerns. She read the letter from the fire chief:

It has been brought to our attention there may be a request to display a politically-motivated symbol at the Fire Department facility. As with any sensitive situation, there are often people in the community that have strong views on both sides of the isle.

The Johnson Fire Department is Political Neutral. It is imperative to our operations, and the safety of our firefighters that we make no indication of political statement or preference. We are here to serve the community and we answer all 911 emergency calls

without prejudice or opinion. We must not become caught between any two groups or beliefs.

Display of any political symbols outside the firehouse must not happen. That would immediately result in an unsafe environment for our firefighters by exposing them to criticism, anger, or aggression from citizens with opposite beliefs. Further, any representation other than Political Neutral would put into jeopardy our working relationship with other emergency response agencies - police, EMS, air ambulance, utilities, haz-mat response – to name a few.

Additionally, I fear this condition would ultimately lead to reduced staffing of your volunteers. Some members have expressed concern when becoming forced to choose their safety (or that of their families) over responding into a politically unstable environment; others have said they will not associate with the department during a political movement where it appears (whether our belief or not) the department is choosing one political direction over another.

As with any socially controversial issue we must remain neutral and be confident that we can provide a service to the community without further label, expectation, or confrontation.

Gordy said all of us care about our community but he has a different opinion. He has known many of the others participating for many years and respects them. He described the procedure for discussion and voting on this agenda item. He explained the history of the flag monument. It was an Eagle Scout project in 1995. All materials and labor were donated. It is completely on village property. He read a statement:

Municipal property should remain neutral on all political movements regardless of what the flag represents. I support all people should be treated equally. I would support a motion strongly condemning what happened in Minneapolis. The Black Lives Matter flag is seen in different ways at the national level. It is very divisive, depending on your point of view of who is looking at it. I'm afraid if people keep pushing their points of view on this matter, someone in our community could snap and bad things could happen. If the vote is to fly this flag on public property, I suggest the trustees who vote yes should take care of installing it. We should not ask our employees to participate in such a divisive polarizing issue. Our downtown is decaying on a downward swing. Parker & Stearns, Manchester Lumber, Subway, Wings, and almost lost Northern Vermont University. Instead of dividing our community, let's focus our energy to work together to bring in business and jobs and lessen our property taxes. I wish we would not have to vote on such a national controversial issue. We should concentrate on water, sewer, electric and sidewalks. If it is decided to fly these flags on joint owned property the selectboard will also have to agree. Also, we will need our attorney to give a legal opinion on this. This may open up a can of worms that other organizations will want to fly theirs. Eric is planning to bring up a motion at his next selectboard meeting to form a town racial task force. Let's see where this takes us.

Brian asked if the letters asking us to put up the flag could be read as well as those asking us not to put it up.

Phil said he got the letter from the fire department and the email with the request to fly the flag at the same time. What was the timeline? It seems we were quick to get a letter from the fire department. Meredith said she talked with Gordy when she got the initial email making the request. They discussed putting it on the next agenda. Then she decided to send both letters to the board together.

Brian said it would have been more appropriate to read the letter with the request before the rebuttal.

Meredith read the letter from Jackie Stanton and several other members of Be-Longing for Justice:

As proactive citizens of Johnson who have led on issues of racial justice and anti-racism in our community, we are requesting, in solidarity with the local, state, national, and global movement, that the Black Lives Matter flag be flown at the Johnson Town Hall. We request that the Village Trustees consider and vote on this proposal at their next meeting.

The village also received a letter from Eric Coe asking, "Please raise a Black Lives Matter flag in front of our Municipal Building.

Bob moved to drop this request. He said the trustees have no power whatsoever to get into anything political. He thinks we should remain neutral and keep the village together. The trustees are asked to keep the village running and maintained. He thinks the best thing to do is drop this. This is a personal item. If you want to fly a flag, that is up to you but you cannot put it on village property and be fair to the village people.

Brian said we are voted into our seats so we are inherently in a political position. We are put here to make decisions and often there are two sides. We are here to make decisions for the village. He has a lot of issues with the letter from the fire department. As soon as possible he would like to have a meeting between the trustees and the fire department. The flag brings out issues that we don't talk about. Whether the flag is flown or not, we have already discovered issues we need to address. He thinks flying the flag is a way to move the town forward. He is in favor of it. There is no way he could not be. Not to be in favor of it is to be wrong. He apologizes for not being more involved with the fire department. He has done little to nothing with the fire department other than to look at the truck they were buying. He would like to learn more about the fire department. The letter from the chief says flying a Black Lives Matter flag will lead to reduced staffing. He didn't know that.

Phil said he was equally surprised by the tone of the letter. He is also concerned with the things the letter says about firefighters potentially not going into work if the board takes an action. He was aware we had flag poles and assumed maybe they were on the fire department property. He was surprised to see them clearly on municipal building property. Meredith said

she believes they are actually on the parcel that includes the fire department. Phil said he would be in support of flying the flag.

Scott said he is in support of flying the flag for the people of color he has known. He does not want to do something that will tear our community in two and put us on different sides. He doesn't want to divide the town when we need everyone to do something about this issue. He was driving through Jericho the other day and saw that a Black Lives Matter mural below their firehouse had been bombed with white paint and had skid marks over it. He would rather not have us look like Jericho Center. He suggests that we could step away from the idea of using the existing flagpole. We could put a bracket on the clock tower. He will pay for it. We could make it noticeable by lighting it up at night. It will be more visible there. A second option would be to use the flag posts on Main Street that have American flags. We could make every other one or every third one a Black Lives Matter flag so that if you are a person of color you would know this community has your back. We want new people coming to town and putting life into what we have. What better way to welcome the people we want to have live here and spend their money here? Let's not call each other names or put each other in divisions. We need everyone involved. He hopes his two suggested options heal the fire department issues. He is not quite understanding of their position yet. He is curious about it.

Bob said we do not judge people by the color of their skin but he doesn't believe this is a matter for the village. We don't want this to divide us.

Jon Gregg said there are 24 people on this call, including the trustees, the village manager and four or five people who stand out on Tuesdays and strongly express their feelings. He likes what Scott has said about the idea of bringing the town together. He feels odd about the idea of 18 or 19 people on this call making this decision. He wishes there was a way it was could be not centered on the idea of the flagpole but on the issue of expressing support for the implicit racism we have all been raised with, whether we knew it or not. It is great that it is being talked about. We don't want this to be something to tear the town apart. He is in favor of supporting the concept of addressing systemic racism. He likes some of the ideas Scott mentioned. If there is a flashpoint around the flagpole, would it be possible to let that lie and address the issue in the same way the inclusivity statement was addressed, trying to find a way to express the support everyone feels toward the idea of kindness and not dismissing people because of the color of their skin. Can we agree to work on that? Do we have to make a fight out of this or can we make a growth opportunity out of it? For people who want to fly the flag maybe we can continue with Scott's idea. Maybe we can fly multiple flags without starting an unnecessary battle but working towards cooperation and supporting inclusivity and kindness.

Gordy said he likes what Jon said. We need to work together. Perhaps the proposed town racial task force is a good way to get a discussion going. He would like to give the selectboard a chance to get a task force together to see if we can all work together.

Diane Lehouillier said the Black Lives Matter flag should not be a divisive thing. When you see it, you should think kindness, fairness, equality and respect. It's like the masks. We ask

people to wear masks because it helps other people. That is what the Black Lives Matter flag is. It's not about white people. It shouldn't even cause a divide in this town. When people of color who drive through town or live in town see that flag, it shows that when something happens the selectboard, trustees and sheriff have their backs just like they have ours. She wants people to know that we do have their backs.

Jackie Stanton said she has a lot of faith in this community. She heard people saying it will tear us apart and be divisive. We have been through hard times before and come through it and remain friends. She feels we will be all right despite these difficult conversations. She is glad we began these conversations a couple of years back. The request is just an extension of the statement the town and village adopted on town meeting day with a clear directive included in it that says we reject racism, bigotry, discrimination, violence and hatred in all its forms. It is simply a tangible extension of that, a way to communicate more broadly and deeply than a statement can to those who are driving through. She thinks Scott's ideas are good and she would support them. She echoes Brian's and Phil's comments about the fire department letter. She was floored by that. It was very dramatic.

Kate Donnally said she is not a resident of Johnson. She is not here to speak in support of or against the flag. That is a choice for the village to make. She cares passionately about anti-racism. She wants to comment on some things that come to mind about how conversations go when navigating discussion of race. There is a POW flag above the Hyde Park post office. She wonders how the discussion went when that flag was put up. Were there discussions about politicizing? She imagines maybe that conversation sounded different. It is important to keep in mind that we are talking about race. It is a complex issue that cannot be summarized as just talking about politics. We are trying to center in our minds the most vulnerable and marginalized people in our communities. She appreciates the candor of the fire department letter. It shows how intimidating it can be to take a stand on Black Lives Matter. If firefighters are so concerned about taking a stand on affirming the value of Black lives, think how it must feel to live in a Black skin. The idea that talking about it could create division implies that there is not already a division between Black people and others. She hears questions about why we are talking about Black Lives Matter when downtown Johnson is suffering. She is thinking about the idea of what our future looks like if we don't find ways to ensure our communities are safe for everyone. She works on the Racial Equity Alliance of Lamoille. She has had people come to her saying that engaging with people doing anti-racism work in the community was the first thing that made them feel safe in the community. It is important to keep this in mind as we are talking about economic development. We need to create safe spaces so people will want to come here and grow the economy.

Kyle Nuse said she thinks there is a lot of growth in the friction. There is growing diversity in our town. The Studio Center is the largest international art residency in the world. Fifty to seventy-five people come to the Studio Center each month from all over the globe and many of them are people of color. Johnson is also home to a state university with students and professors from all over the country and the world. It is home to Laraway and Johnson Elementary School, where there are far more people of color than when she was in school. There has been an increase from even 10 years ago. Our diversity is growing, especially in our schools. These kids of color most likely won't read our inclusivity statement or the anti-

racism commitment statement but they will see this flag and read the three powerful words and understand that it supports them. That is what it is about. It is not about the comfort and needs of white people. Systemic racism has ensured that. For people of color the Black Lives Matter flag says, "We see you. Your life matters." To white children, she hopes it provokes conversations about why Black lives matter and why they often haven't. To her the flag doesn't divide the town; it unifies it and makes it stronger and more inclusive.

Jon Gregg asked, what is the possibility of some form of action coming out of this discussion? He thinks everyone has said good things. Where do we go from here? There are 24 people on this phone call who care about this issue. How do we spread it out? He thinks we should come out of this with something and not just all hang up. It would be nice if we could say this call led to a desire to express a commitment to be more inclusive. It is not just Black Lives Matter. There are also people of color who are not Black. He would like to know how people feel we could move this forward. Even before we come up with ideas, can we get agreement that we want to express our solidarity?

Scott said he thinks hopefully we are not too far away from something that will be pretty solid.

Diane Lehouillier asked, who will the flag help and who will it hurt? It will help all people but especially people of color. It will hurt nobody, so why not fly it?

Rick Aupperlee said a neighbor of his chose to fly a Confederate flag and the selectboard had a meeting to discuss flying the Confederate flag. His other neighbor across the street is a person of color who volunteers at the elementary school. Rick supports the Black Lives Matter flag because he would like to see his volunteer neighbor being supported equally as the person who chose to fly the Confederate flag.

Kim Dunkley said she would like to understand why people feel it wouldn't be a good idea to fly the flag. Could someone enlighten her about what doesn't feel good about it? She doesn't understand why there isn't public understanding of how it helps other people to wear masks. And she would like to understand why anyone doesn't want the flag flown.

Bob said there are not two sides here. The whole question is where to put the flag. None of us are against it. It's a question of where to locate it. We felt as village trustees we shouldn't be the ones to select where the flag should be.

Will Jennison said he can explain his personal position but does not speak on behalf of the fire department. As Bob and Gordy stated, it's not an issue of being racist. He doesn't know anyone in the fire department with any racist tendencies. The issue is taking a political position, which the department has never done. There are two very divided sides to this. He doesn't want as a firefighter to be associated with any political party. It's not that he supports or doesn't support this statement. It's about remaining neutral. He wants the department to remain neutral for their safety. There are departments that are having issues with taking a political stand. He doesn't think it is right for trustees to take the volunteer firefighters and put them in a position of being on one side or the other.

Jon said he is getting the sense that there are two issues – the philosophical issue of flying a flag in support of other humans and the issue of where the flag goes. If a sufficient number of voters wanted to put a flagpole on the village green and put a Black Lives Matter flag on that, is that a problem? He thinks we are getting distracted by the location. What is at issue – the philosophy or the physicality? Meredith said she believes the fire department is clear that they are speaking with respect to a flag on the fire department parcel and not a flag in other places. Jon asked if the people who requested that a flag be put up are committed to that location or is their goal to have the flag fly in a prominent place?

Jackie Stanton said the original request was to fly the flag at the town hall. It is where we congregate. She is still not clear on who owns the parcel and the pole. It is very confusing. Scott had some ideas. She is open to conversations about other locations. She asked if Meredith could clarify. Is the problem the fire department has that the pole is on their property? Meredith said the flagpoles are part of the fire department parcel. Jackie said the fire department may know that but she doesn't think it's common knowledge, so she would doubt that people would make assumptions that it was the fire department putting up the flag.

Scott said the idea he leans on a little more is the idea of having every third or every other flag on the lamp posts in the village be Black Lives Matter flags. Jackie said she loves that idea. Scott said it provides higher visibility. And the fire department wouldn't have to worry about it. He would push hard for that. If there is some rule that says we can't do that or some objection, we could put a bracket on the town hall clock tower. But that would mean we would have to go back to the selectboard because we jointly own the building with them. He would recommend going with flags on Main Street. He is not sure where the flags are coming from. Another question is how long we leave the flags up.

Kim Dunkley suggested we might want to have a community fund to get the flags everywhere.

Meredith said she reached out to VLCT. Their guidance was that if the trustees vote to hang something, that is government speech. The trustees can put up what they want. There is a difference between that and saying that a particular organization can put up what they want. The trustees are choosing to do this, not giving a group permission to do it. Her recommendation is that before we put up the flag we run it by our attorney to make sure she interpreted that properly and that we are not opening up village property to any entity that wants to put up a flag.

Scott moved and Bob seconded to fly a Black Lives Matter flag on every third street light on the side of Main Street where there are currently American flags, pending legal review.

Brian said he would like to say we are going to do it, not pending anything. But no one is sure how we are going to fund it. Maybe we need to do a cost analysis. He would vote for it if we say we are going to do it pending funding.

Scott asked, if we are told we can't do it, there is no foul, right? Meredith said she doesn't think we would be told we can't do it. She wants to make sure that if we took a request to put up one flag we would not have to put up others when requested. The motion should make it clear that the village trustees are choosing to do this, not giving permission to another entity to do this. She is trying to protect the village from having to allow any entity to put up a flag.

Jon said he would like to suggest that, rather than pushing the trustees to make a decision, the trustees get together and discuss their willingness to work on inclusivity and kindness and then discuss where to do it. He thinks there should be an interim step. The trustees should be given a chance to say that philosophically they like the idea of supporting inclusivity and awareness of systemic racism and then consider a way to show it.

Scott said he appreciates those comments but we have already gone down this road with conversations on adopting a statement. The stumbling block he has seen is the fire departments concern about becoming a political hostage. He is fine moving forward with this. Gordy and Bob both have wonderful comments that should be listened to by everyone whether they agree or not. He doesn't feel he is pushing anyone into a corner.

Jon said he would like to ask that the cost of the project be shared with interested people so cost does not become a stumbling block and there is an opportunity for public contributions.

Bob said he wanted to take back his second. He said he is not against doing it this way but he is worried that we may open up a can of worms if other organizations want to put up flags. We should check with our lawyer. Meredith said the way she has interpreted it, if it is a vote of the trustees to do this, we are okay. She just would like to make sure. She can try to expedite that this week.

Phil said putting the flags on light poles is a nice idea but it seems more complicated than installing a pole at the municipal office. Meredith said from a staffing standpoint she would agree. Phil said obviously it would be much more expensive too, but he supports it. Brian said he is okay with putting some effort into this. Gordy said he will vote no. He would be against messages from any side going up on municipal property. He is not against Black Lives Matter. He just doesn't think municipal property should be taking one side or the other.

Scott withdrew his motion.

Brian moved and Scott seconded to replace every other American flag on the Main Street flag poles with a Black Lives Matter flag of the same dimensions, pending funding.

Walter Pomeroy said there is a lot of misinformation being tossed around right now. Currently the American flags are on electric poles. The lamp posts are different. About every fourth or fifth lamp post has a flag holder installed. If the village uses those we would not have to take down any American flags. There are already flag stanchions pointing away from the road that could hold flags. We should be clear whether we are referring to lamp posts pr

electrical poles. He also said that before putting Black Lives Matter flags in front of some business's property the village might want to talk to that business.

Brian said he likes the motion the way he worded it so that the flags can be seen by people driving down Main Street. He is in favor of taking down every other American flag and replacing it with a Black Lives Matter flag. He thinks it betters our community more than hanging Christmas lights and we do that, so he doesn't see why we can't do this.

The motion was passed with Gordy and Bob opposed.

Gordy thanked community members and the other trustees for expressing their opinions.

13. Policy on Political Signs on Village Property

Meredith said we are approaching election season and we have seen signs propped up on the village green. The guidance we got from VLCT is that if we allow people to put up political signs we cannot choose based on content what we allow. If we allow one we have to allow them all. She thinks it would be wise to say that other entities are not permitted to put signs on village property. If people are in general agreement she can start drafting a policy and getting legal opinions.

Scott said a lot of people have COVID-19 encouragement signs or NVU signs scattered throughout the community. Many are in the village right of way. Are we talking all signs or just those on the village green?

Meredith said she thinks she needs more guidance on that. What she read sounded like it is all or nothing. The village doesn't have road rights of way so the policy would not impact signs in front of homes. It would affect those on the municipal building property, the village green or the talc mill property. A similar policy for the town would be different because it would include their rights of way. Gordy said he was thinking of the village green. Signs there are increasing and it is taking away from the appearance of the green. He wants to see them all gone. He is not talking about signs held by protesters, only those that are left there. He wants to bring the green back to looking good.

Scott asked what the steel box is that is on the village green. Meredith said that holds electrical components. It is where we will install a second meter. It has plugs available to access power. Scott said there is a law that we are not supposed to block anything like that.

Phil asked, currently signs are only in the state right of way, right? Would it be easier to ask people to remove them rather than adopt a policy? Meredith said if we ask them to move the signs out of the state right of way they might just move them onto village property and with election season coming there could be political signs. It seemed wise to have a formal policy. But she does not need to work on that if the board doesn't want her to spend time on it. We can start by letting people know that signs are not permitted where they are now and that we would prefer that they not be put on village property. Phil suggested letting people know that we would like the signs moved and if it is not resolved in a month we can consider another approach. Scott agreed. Meredith said she will do that.

14. Executive Session Re: Appointment of a Public Officer

Scott moved to go into executive session for appointment of a public officer pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3), Bob seconded, the motion was passed and the board entered executive session at 9:30. The board came out of executive session at 10:15.

Bob announced his resignation from the board of trustees effective August 9, 2020.

Brian made a motion to accept Bob's resignation from the board, Phil seconded and the motion was passed.

Phil made a motion to appoint Jena Gould-Hopkins to fill Bob's trustee seat, effective August 10, 2020, Scott seconded and the motion was passed.

Phil announced his resignation from the board of trustees effective August 4, 2020.

Bob made a motion to accept Phil's resignation from the board, Scott seconded and the motion was passed.

Scott nominated Steven Hatfield to fill Phil's vacant seat. Gordy nominated Will Jennison to fill Phil's vacant seat. Brian nominated Athena Parke to fill Phil's vacant seat. Bob also nominated Will Jennison to fill Phil's vacant seat. Phil also nominated Athena Parke to fill his vacant seat.

Because no candidate received a majority, the board opened a discussion about their reasons for supporting the candidates.

Brian spoke about Athena being a young woman with fresh ideas, noting that there are no women on the board and that there are a lot of young people in Johnson. He believes she will bring a lot to the table in term of new viewpoints and is also a very good listener. He also noted that he anticipates leaving the board later this fall and believes Athena would help make the right decision when it comes to filling his vacant seat.

Bob spoke about Will and his experience, indicating that he believes the board needs folks with experience.

Phil spoke about his support for Athena. Her activity at NVU would be very helpful on the board and he also believes that the board should be representative of the community, which includes having women on the board. He feels Steve Hatfield is a great candidate and appreciates his experience and would like to extend an invitation to Steven Hatfield to apply for Brian's position later this year.

Brian also noted that Athena's story is very similar to his and that she has stayed in Johnson after NVU for a reason. He appreciates Will's experience, but Brian is not looking for experience at this time, but rather his interest is representation of the community.

Gordy spoke in favor of Will, noting that he is a landlord, business owner, and large village taxpayer with lots of experience and is very direct.

Scott thanked Phil for all his work for Johnson, including serving on the board of trustees and the Planning Commission. Scott spoke in favor of Steve, noting that he likes his values and his background. He also noted that he has known Will for some time now and he is a great individual with a great business mind and is very direct. He is an asset to the community. Scott said he is trying to balance the needs of the community and based on what he has heard tonight from the younger members of the board, he would be willing to go along with Athena. He feels both Steve and Will should be commended for their service to the community. Scott would like both Steve and Will to have a conversation with the board about their goals regarding filling the anticipated vacancy when Brian leaves the board.

Gordy thanked everyone for offering their comments. He asked for a vote on appointing Athena. **Brian made a motion to appoint Athena as the interim trustee to fill Phil's vacancy effective August 5th and Phil seconded. Scott, Brian and Phil voted in favor and the motion passed.**

Gordy thanked everyone for working through these difficult discussions. Bob commended Phil for his service on the Board.

15. Adjourn

Bob moved to, Phil seconded, the motion was passed and the meeting was adjourned at 10:36.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths and Meredith Dolan