

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD/VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
ALL PARTICIPATION BY ZOOM TELECONFERENCING  
MONDAY, AUGUST 24, 2020

**Present:**

Selectboard Members: Mike Dunham, Nat Kinney, Doug Molde, Kyle Nuse, Eric Osgood

Village Trustees: Jena Gould-Hopkins, Scott Meyer, Athena Parke, Brian Raulinaitis, Gordon Smith

Others: Brian Story, Meredith Birkett, Rosemary Audibert, Cal Stanton, Jackie Stanton, Carrie Watson, Elizabeth Perry, Louise Cross, Shayne Spence, Lois Frey, Beth Foy, Greg Tatro, Margo Warden, Rob Rodriguez, Lisa Crews, Jessica Bickford, Diana Osborn, Diane Lehouillier, Rick Aupperlee, Alyx Sellars, Marla Emery, Walter Pomroy, Casey Romero, Linda Ramsdell, Offie Wortham, Howard Romero, Travis Smith, Lotty Roozekrans, and 3 other community members

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

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. *Call to Order***

Eric called the selectboard to order at 5:04. Gordy called the village trustees to order at 5:05.

**2. *Review of Agenda and Any Adjustments, Changes and Additions***

Scott said he would like to add discussion on moving forward with a community vote on a town/village merger. Nat suggested possible action to express sympathy to the Pomerleau family. Both items were added to the agenda.

**3. *Expression of Sympathy to Pomerleau Family***

Eric said Ernie Pomerleau's daughter died this past week of breast cancer. The Pomerleaus have been very generous to the community. A sympathy card might be appropriate. **Nat moved and Mike seconded to direct administrative staff to purchase a sympathy card for the Pomerleaus for selectboard and trustee board members to sign. Scott moved and Brian seconded to direct administrative staff to purchase a sympathy card for the Pomerleaus for selectboard and trustee board members to sign. The selectboard motion was passed. The trustee board motion was passed.**

**4. *Selection of Web Master Services***

Brian Story said Eliza Clancy of 3W Promotions sent one proposal. She has provided emergency help for us before and she works with Lamoille Economic Development Corporation. She is proposing \$340 annually for website maintenance. Additional services as needed would be \$85/hr and hosting is available for \$270 annually.

Grant Harper of Website Valley, a local resident who has done some work with the school board, is offering very similar services. He proposes \$708/year for maintenance, with a little more comprehensive maintenance plan, and \$45/hr for additional work.

Both have good community connections and good recommendations. He doesn't have a strong recommendation. With Eliza we would pay less up front but when we bring her in for specific tasks we would pay more. Grant's proposal has a little more included and a lower

rate for hourly work. He has worked with Eliza and been very satisfied. He has seen a little of what Grant has done and it looks like it will be fine too.

Meredith said she similarly doesn't have a strong recommendation. Grant has a lower hourly rate and includes an hour of content updates a month, which could be helpful if we don't have time to do it in house. That could save some money. That is one advantage she saw.

Rosemary said either is fine with her.

Mike asked how much additional work is done in a year's time. Brian said not much so far, but we were behind on updates and website maintenance. No one on staff has expertise to deal with serious problems like the one we had recently. There is a lot that could be done. Mike said, so with \$85/hour there could be a lot of money spent for additional work vs. \$45. Brian said there could be. It is hard to say in advance what won't be covered under the maintenance plan but it is true that Grant offers more for the flat rate maintenance plan. Eliza's flat rate is considerably less. We could pay for several hours of her time before it would equal the same price. In the first year we are a little more likely to need some extra hours. Meredith said in addition to critical security work that needs to be done we may want to do some aesthetic changes – updating pictures, etc. Having a little more flexibility for hours put toward that might be helpful.

Kyle asked, do we know if either of them can do website development? We have talked about updating the look of the site. Brian said he knows Eliza can. He believes both can. And Grant's proposal included an hour of content work.

Kyle asked, since Eliza has worked with us before, do you think she would be able to get off the ground running faster since she knows the system? Brian said he doesn't think our system is complicated enough for that to make a difference. He thinks anyone familiar with WordPress would not have difficulty with ours, but Eliza is already a little familiar with ours.

Mike said we need to spruce up our website. It wouldn't hurt to have more of a modern look to it.

Kyle moved to hire Eliza Clancy at 3W Promotions for web master services. The motion was not seconded.

**Mike moved and Nat seconded to hire Website Valley LLC for web master services.**

Doug said, other than the extra work Website Valley would do under basic maintenance, the break even is around 9 hours. Lamoille FiberNet is working with 3W Promotions. Because of the maintenance he thinks is necessary he would tend to go with Website Valley.

Scott said he also did some quick math and he got a little over 10 hours for break even. If we are going to be looking at website redesign there could be more than 10 hours. Ten hours is a little over a day. We have a lot of community members having a hard time paying bills. He thinks \$85/hr is excessive with what the community is facing now as far as income.

Gordy asked if anyone knows where Eliza lives, since keeping money local is good. We know one person is in Johnson. Brian said he doesn't believe she is a Johnson resident but she is a Lamoille County resident.

**Scott moved and Jena seconded to hire Website Valley LLC for web master services.**

Brian summarized some comments from chat. The Historical Society web page and the web page for the United Church of Johnson were done by Grant. Jessica Bickford said she has worked with Eliza and she is very efficient. Eliza lives in Hyde Park. There was a question about what other sites Eliza has done. She has done sites for LEDC, the Green Mountain Byway and a number of local businesses.

**The trustee board motion was passed. The selectboard motion was passed in a roll call vote with Kyle voting no and Nat, Doug and Mike voting yes.**

5. ***Memorandum of Understanding for Town and Village Office Staff***

Brian Story said he did his best to incorporate comments from both boards in the latest draft of the memorandum of understanding between the town and village regarding office staff (accounts receivable clerk Marla Emery and administrative assistant Anne Mullings.) They are each employed independently by the town or village. The MOU would set compensation rates the same as they have been. It says we will start tracking their hours and use that data the next time we sign a memorandum of understanding. We will have to write something similar for the town clerk and her assistant but that will be a little complicated and slightly different. Rosemary is paid by both the town and village but she is not a town or village employee.

Brian explained for the new trustees that at some point in past the two positions were independently employed, then they became shared employees, employed by both town and village. That makes for a complicated relationship when there are disagreements about compensation, discipline or work duties. It was decided late last year that we were going to split the two positions to be solely town and solely village but the agreement we have in principle is that they will both work on whatever tasks need to be completed, so if someone comes to the office they can deal at the window with whoever is available for either town or village business. Employees will be cross-trained for public-facing duties. This agreement just formalizes that relationship. It says town and village will each make a commitment to support their sole employee's work with the other municipal to provide continuity of services.

Meredith said the trustees reviewed the original draft of this MOU in March. To a large degree Brian incorporated most of the comments. The end date of the term (December 31, 2020) is the only thing she thinks needs to be cleaned up. Both boards will set compensation independently. The MOU gives either entity an out of the other decides to give a very large raise. With 60 days' notice the town or village can terminate the MOU and be the sole one to pay for the employee. Brian said it is 60 days from the next meeting of the board that receives the request for termination.

Gordy said both boards, when deciding on rates of compensation, look separately at what is comparable in other similar municipalities. Often the village, with its utilities, will have higher rates for employees because the competitive nature of a public utility can raise wages.

Meredith suggested having the term of the MOU run through December 31, 2021, to cover this year and next year. Doug asked if that means we would strike the remainder of the language in the Term section: "If no agreement is reached as of December 31st it may be extended for 90 days by the consent of the Town Selectboard and Village Trustees." Brian said he believes the proposal is just to change 2020 to 2021 with no other changes. Meredith said that was her proposal. We could add a clause stating that the MOU will automatically renew unless one board indicates a desire not to renew. Brian said we could also add "2021" to the second instance of December 31 so it would say that if no agreement is reached as of December 31, 2021 the MOU may be extended by 90 days.

Meredith said she thinks we could get rid of the language saying the term of this agreement is one year from the date signed and just say it is until December 31, 2021 and we could say if no agreement is reached by December 31, 2021 the MOU may be extended by 90 days.

**Mike moved and Doug seconded to approve the Memorandum of Understanding for Town and Village Office Staff with the changes proposed by Meredith.**

Nat said the MOU calls for staff to track their hours spent on town and village duties to set cost sharing. He wants to make sure the methodology for both employees is the same and he thinks we should ask supervisors to make sure this gets done weekly. It is easy for this kind of task to get pushed aside.

**Scott moved and Jena seconded to approve the Memorandum of Understanding for Town and Village Office Staff with the changes proposed by Meredith.**

**The selectboard motion was passed. The trustee board motion was passed.**

The trustees agreed that Gordy is authorized to sign the MOU on behalf of the trustees.

**6. *Discussion of Charge for the Creation of a Racial Justice Committee***

Eric said he brought the idea of a racial justice committee to the selectboard with the thought of forming something that would be able to dedicate the time to research and dig into issues we have been dealing with at the selectboard level. The selectboard isn't able to dedicate as much time as these issues deserve. The selectboard hasn't taken action yet on forming a committee.

Gordy said the trustees have approved formation of a racial justice committee but they did not go into any of the details that will be discussed tonight. The selectboard will need to vote on forming a committee. The trustees already did that but discussion on how to form the committee is needed.

Meredith suggested that the trustees may want to vote to clarify that they are forming a joint committee with the town, which was not in the previous motion.

Kyle said she proposes that we consider renaming the committee the “social justice committee” to broaden its scope of work to include race, gender and all intersecting social identities. She thinks that is important if we are committed to moving equity issues forward.

Gordy asked if there should be two motions for the trustees – one to change the name to “social justice committee” if the boards agree on that and one to make it a joint committee. Meredith said she thinks that would help clean things up.

Doug said he is a big believer in social justice. He is worried that Kyle’s suggestion opens the committee up to economic justice and the 1% movement. To him, social justice is much broader than gender and racial issues. He thinks we need to define what this is if we are going to use this term.

Kyle said intersectionality theory says that people are often repressed because of multiple identity aspects. She thinks this committee should be given the green light to think about all those different dimensions. It is impossible to talk about one without talking about the other.

Doug said foster kids are a good example of what could be included under social justice. He wants it to be defined well. Eric asked, would social justice not include foster kids? Doug said he thinks it would but he thinks no one is thinking in terms of family background.

Scott said he gets the recommendation to name it social justice committee, but he hears where Doug is coming from. Is housing disparities part of this? He is a little worried about not having some bookends. He thinks when the trustees spoke about it they were worried about racial issues. If its work includes housing and economic disparities and another dozen things he could come up with, is it going to take away from the urgency for racial justice which should be our key priority right now?

Athena said she loves the idea of broadening the committee. When she thinks about its function going forward, maybe broadening the definition will allow us to bring more things to the committee. But do we want this to be a blanket committee? Do some of those issues deserve a separate committee? She understands that we want to be thinking about future social justice movements that will happen, but if we make it a blanket committee are we potentially throwing too much at it?

Gordy asked, what brought us here? Why do we want to form a committee? What are the instances that have been brought up to make us want to get a larger group and not just board members to make decisions about issues? If we narrow the scope of this we might get something done and come to agreement. If we open it up too far we won’t come to any conclusion. We will get bogged down and not have any resolution.

Brian Raulinaitis said he likes the idea of calling it a social justice committee. Social justice doesn’t need bookends. They could still have a focus and work on an issue. A lot of the same people are going to want to be involved in other issues and we can bring more people onto

the committee. He thinks we can still move forward with guiding the agenda of the committee and set goals for it, but he thinks it is helpful to name it something open.

Kyle said she likes what Brian just said. She suggested calling it the “social justice and equity issues committee.” It can encompass some of what Doug is talking about. She knows for herself when she is learning about social justice issues, it’s not compartmentalized. You have to be able to speak about other identities. It’s a fact that more black girls are suspended from school than white girls. It is not just a gender issue or a race issue. Both things compound. It is important not to narrow too much.

Athena said she appreciates the reframing. The word equity really rings true to her. She thinks some guidance and structure would be important. Maybe that just comes in the mission statement for the committee.

Nat said he likes equity and he also wants the focus to be on inclusion. He favors starting modestly, getting modest goals into place and then potentially expanding, rather than starting very ambitiously.

Eric asked, what if we left it up to the membership to come up with a name? Scott said he thinks that is a great idea.

Mike said he wants to make a motion to form a committee, but if it doesn’t have a name, how do we go forward?

Kyle said she is wary of not giving it a name. It makes it hard to make a motion about it and also she thinks the name gives clarity on the mission, who would want to be on it and who we would want to appoint.

Kyle moved to form a social justice and equity issues committee. The motion was not seconded, but Nat had gotten disconnected so it was not known whether he might have seconded it.

Eric asked if the village had discussed the name of the committee. Meredith said she would check the minutes.

Mike said we could move to have a racial justice committee but the name could be changed by the committee. Eric said they could come back to the two boards with a proposed name change. Any decision would have to be made by the boards.

Nat rejoined the meeting. Eric told him what Kyle’s motion was and that it died for lack of a second. Nat said he doesn’t have a strong feeling about the name of the committee.

**Mike moved and Doug seconded that the town form a racial justice committee.**

Jena brought up the recent News & Citizen article about the committee. She can’t recall if there was a label for the committee in that article. She wants to make sure the name ties in

with that. Eric said any label in the article was unofficial because the committee was not officially identified yet.

Doug said his thought was that social justice is a much broader concept. He doesn't have a problem with someone proposing to address the things Kyle mentioned; he just doesn't think we should name it the social justice committee.

Kyle said the News & Citizen article was riddled with incorrect things.

Meredith said the motion the trustees made was: "to form a committee of both town and village residents to discuss placement of the Black Lives Matter flags on village property and to have a recommendation within 6 months." It does not look like they ever gave it a formal name. She thinks it would be wise for us to both adopt a similar name.

Nat asked if the motion is for a joint committee. **Mike and Doug agreed to the friendly amendment that the committee is to be a joint town and village committee.**

**Scott moved to form a joint town and village racial justice committee and the motion was seconded.**

Carrie Watson said she is strongly in support of forming this committee, whatever we call it. She thinks we can work out what we would want the committee to focus on in the mission.

Beth Foy said she is fully in support of the committee. In terms of defining a committee focus and name, it would be helpful to understand if this is to be a long running committee or a short-term committee with a very specific objective. She would be in favor of a long running committee and if it is such a committee she thinks not putting strong bookends on objectives would be important. Each board could task the committee with a very specific objective and when the board feels like something was delivered to meet the objective there could be a new objective introduced.

Greg Tatro asked if social justice would include people living in poverty. Johnson has a poverty rate around 20%. People with substance use disorder are not treated fairly either. Kyle said if we included social justice and equity issues in the name, equity definitely focuses on socioeconomic status as well as many other things. Her interpretation is that it definitely includes some if not all of that. Greg said if that is the case he would be inclined to go along with Kyle's suggested name. He thinks that is a good idea, but it does open it up pretty wide. We would need a good group and a good moderator to stay focused. But there is a lot of poverty in town and he does not know if it is addressed the way it should be.

Offie Wortham said he has been in Johnson over 10 years. He has never had or seen any problem in Johnson. He doesn't know why people even want to form this committee. There are a lot of things that are more important in this community than racial justice – social justice, homelessness, people who need food, etc. He thinks we should focus on areas where more people have trouble. He personally sees no racial problems in Johnson.

Alyx Sellars said she likes the idea of something a little broader and she agrees with what Brian said, that social justice doesn't really have bookends. She feels the committee should not be placed into too much of a box. Most of those involved are coming from a white perspective. We should make sure we check our perspectives. Going forward it would be a good idea to reach out to other organizations that specialize in this work rather than going into it blindly. Showing Up for Racial Justice is a national organization with a Burlington chapter. She would recommend reaching out the Lamoille County Racial Justice Alliance as well.

Shayne Spence said he agrees with Kyle's idea of broadening the scope of this. Just keeping it to racial justice we will never run out of work but that is a little limited and closes off other important topics. The ideas about overwhelming the committee that were brought up might be something to keep in mind. Would the committee come up with its own action items or would the selectboard or trustees hear a concern or proposal and pass it to the committee? The latter allows the boards to have input on the direction of the committee. If the committee is allowed to do what it wants to do there might be a lot of different things they want to focus on, making it difficult to get something done.

Doug said the ills in Johnson have been studied and are very clear. Housing and income of our people need a tremendous amount of attention. Part of that is the mission of the selectboard and economic development. He is in favor of a committee that looks at Johnson and who we are. It seemed to him that the direction of social justice was more limited to gender and racial issues and didn't go out as broadly. He just wanted a clear definition. Is economic disparity really where we want the committee to go? He is not opposed, but that is a completely different committee than where he thought people were going.

Offie said he didn't hear any reaction to anything he said. He doesn't see any need for a committee on racial justice. Can someone tell him why we need to spend time talking about racial justice rather than poverty, unemployment or schools? Why is someone still pushing on the racial thing? Where is it coming from?

Scott said there have been a few flare-ups. The Studio Center about a year and a half ago had people called out because of their race and there seemed to be huge amount of dialog over the past 6 months on racial disparities in the community. The incidents with Studio Center attendees are the ones he knows about and for him two incidents are too many.

Athena said she has heard of a number of aggressions – outward ones such as people being called names on the street, but also aggressions that are smaller and not necessarily violent in the moment but make people question whether they are truly safe. One of the most important parts of the committee to her is educating people not to hurt other people, intentionally or not.

Offie said he has lived in about 20 different cities. He has been called things. The way he has seen these incidents handled is that the person who made the comment is confronted and the issue is usually resolved. After it's all over, people are typically friends. A little



communication is better than freaking out because a kid called you a name. You talk to the person who called you the name or talk to their parents. A whole town meeting is not needed.

Athena said she loves the idea of that being how we resolve issues. But if she was in the middle of that situation she wouldn't necessarily know the first steps of how to start that conversation. That is where the education component can come in.

**The selectboard motion was passed in a roll call vote with Kyle and Doug voting no and Nat, Mike and Eric voting yes.**

**The trustee board motion was passed unanimously.**

Scott said if the committee wants to change their name after they are formed we should hear them out.

Nat said VLCT put together a document on municipal engagement for diversity, equity and inclusion, which he circulated to both boards. It has some suggestions on what a community can do. His recommendation for the charge to the committee is that they go through the document and prioritize the suggestions, and if they have other ideas, present those as well.

Athena said she agrees with Nat that the committee should be able to be flexible and add things and prioritize as they see fit.

Kyle asked, didn't Brian Story write a mission statement? Brian said he did. It was in the board packet. It's pretty light. He wanted the committee to do some of the work. His vision was that we would give them a very light road map but they should tell us more about what they are going to do with it. Brian shared his draft mission statement on the screen and read it.

Scott asked if it would be possible to add some bullet points regarding social justice and potentially renaming the committee. Brian suggested "racial justice" could be changed to "social justice."

Kyle said intersectionality is important to her - acknowledgement and understanding that when we are speaking about racial justice we consider anything that can marginalize people - gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical limitations, religion, etc. She is not sure how to put that in a bullet point.

Greg said his daughter applied for a job, nailed the interview and on the way out they said, "We're not going to hire her; she's a drug addict." He mentioned the poverty in town. If we can figure out a way to lift people up and give them some hope it might reduce dependence on drugs, though drugs do affect all families. When people with substance use disorder are in recovery they are no different from any of us. He thinks there is discrimination there. Old people sometimes are discriminated against.

Scott suggested saying "racial and social justice" all the way through the committee charge.

Brian said he can make some changes to the document to try to capture things that have been mentioned. The selectboard and trustees agreed.

Carrie Watson suggested that perhaps racial justice could be changed to “racial justice and equality.” She thinks that is what the committee would be trying to work toward.

Eric said typically when a joint employee has been hired we have had 2 members of each board on a selection committee. We could use the same concept for appointments to the committee. A couple of members from each board could take applications from prospective candidates and interview them.

Athena asked if the appointments would have to be approved by the whole board or by the two people. Eric said he thinks they would have to be approved by the board but he thinks they would go with the recommendations of the smaller group.

Kyle said she would be open to a smaller committee doing initial interviews. For her, if someone is applying to be on a racial justice committee it should be someone who is very committed and can prove to us they are committed to furthering racial justice. It is important that the people we appoint are working for it, not against it. The committee should be people working towards a common goal.

Scott said he has had a lot of people call his home on this topic who are really passionate about their views. A lot were nervous to speak out because they were worried about being called out. Some of them don't necessarily choose the same road for the same goal. He has been pushing for a very diverse group. If everyone is on board 100% it may not give you other ideas. He thinks people would be really surprised by some of the comments he heard. There was a lot of angst that if they didn't agree with the path they would be called racist. That is not being community. It removes those folks from the conversation. We need to walk delicately on this. Having a diverse group with many ideas and a strong moderator he thinks we will get a better outcome. If we have a committee that is all on board a lot of the community may not agree on the path they take and feel left out and angry. That is what he has gotten out of conversations with community members recently.

Kyle said she hears what Scott is saying. She would respectfully disagree on a couple things. She agrees we can have some different nuanced positions on how to achieve something but with racial justice you are either working for it or against it in her mind. You're either racist or you're not racist. If we appoint people who are all working for racial justice they might disagree on things like who to hire for a training but not on whether we are affirming Black lives or not. Therefore we wouldn't need a strong moderator because there won't be those kinds of heated debates, because those on the committee will all be working towards racial justice.

Scott said Offie just commented that he didn't think a committee was needed. That is his opinion as a person of color. Because he doesn't agree with us, does that make him a racist?

Kyle said that may be his experience and opinion. She is heartened that he hasn't experienced what many others have. The Black Lives Matter movement is the largest movement in the world. She doesn't understand why we would put people on a committee for racial justice who were not working toward racial justice.

Scott said building a community is trying to get people to see more open-mindedly. There could be people who in their heart feel that what is going on in this country is wrong but we could be cutting them out of the conversation because they don't agree on the path we are taking. We need to build the community up and the only way we will do that is to have a conversation with everyone.

Kyle said that is not what a committee is for. Scott said that is her view. Committees he has been on have included different views and come to a conclusion together. The zoning committee had those who hated the idea of zoning and those who wanted it. They worked out their differences and came up with form based code. It was a diverse committee and he has been on other committees that were the same way

Brian R. said he doesn't think this topic warrants walking on eggshells. He got a lot of those same phone calls and they all ended well. He agrees with Kyle. This committee has a plan and if people do get upset with it or if decisions are made that they might not agree with they can reach out and conversations can happen.

Gordy said we have an inclusivity statement. We are supposed to respect all views whether we agree with them or not. If we can't put people with different points of view on the committee and it is stacked with one point of view it won't be accepted by a lot of people. On the form based code committee, everyone who was for and against was able to participate and some people's minds were changed. He thinks all people should be invited. There was a comment that there shouldn't be any people of color on the committee. He disagrees. We should invite people of all ages, sexes and colors. He disagrees with having a litmus test for the committee. We need to come together. This community is very divided. Businesses are leaving. We need to come together and work together to bring business back.

Mike said everyone talks about diversity but they don't want diversity on this committee. That doesn't make any sense to him.

Brian R. said you can't be against racial justice and making a sane decision. Gordy used the words "for or against." We need people against racial justice on the racial justice committee? That destroys the committee. This isn't a committee to debate whether we should have racial justice.

Gordy said it's all part of education. Kyle said that is what the racial justice committee is tasked to do – provide educational opportunities for people in the community. That is what education is for; that is not what forming a racial justice committee is for. It is for improving the quality of life of minorities and people of color, not being a therapy group for white folks. She thinks we are talking about two very different things. The inclusivity statement also says

we reject racism, bigotry, discrimination, violence and hatred in all its forms. Why would we invite those onto a racial justice committee?

Doug suggested we interview people and show them the mission statement for the committee and ask, "How would you do this?" We would make a decision based on what they say about that. He pointed out that there is a difference between the name of the committee and the social justice aspect that entered into the mission statement.

Gordy asked, can we form the committee and leave it up to the committee? Brian asked, have we talked about who is going to be on it? Eric said we have to decide how we will select the members.

Nat said one idea suggested was that a joint subcommittee of trustees and selectboard members would choose appointees to the racial justice committee. He suggests an alternative – each board can appoint a certain number of members. If a volunteer needs a vote of approval from both boards that adds a layer of complexity and he thinks it would be frustrating for volunteers. He proposes that each board be able to appoint 2 or 3 members.

Eric said he likes that suggestion. Doug said equal representation chosen by each board doesn't lead to majority decisions. Nat suggested that maybe the two boards together could appoint a chair in addition to having 2 members chosen by each board. Kyle asked, on the subcommittee? Nat said no, the racial justice committee.

Eric asked, would we solicit for volunteers and then make the appointments? Nat said yes.

Gordy said he likes the idea of having two and two and letting them appoint a chair. Nat asked, the committee would appoint a fifth member?

Brian clarified that he believes Nat's suggestion is not to form a joint committee to select membership. Instead, the selectboard would appoint 2 people to the racial justice committee – not members of the selectboard, but members they choose – and the village would also appoint two members of the public to the racial justice committee. At a joint board meeting the two boards would agree on a fifth member that would serve as the chair.

Nat said the last part of that sounded awkward. Appointing a chair jointly sounds a little more convoluted. But he agreed that Brian's description is the idea he had.

Doug said he is in favor of 3 appointments by each board for a larger committee. And we could have one jointly appointed representative that might or might not be the chair. We could have them pick their own chair. And the boards ought to solicit and hire a moderator.

Nat agreed that 6 members would be better.

Athena asked, would the moderator be separate from the board members? Eric said yes.

Kyle said she is confused about why we would need a moderator. Why wouldn't the chair be running the meetings? If we are appointing people who are working towards racial justice and have proved they are committed to that, she doesn't see why we would need a moderator.

Scott said maybe we should term it a facilitator. Most committees have one. Kyle said she doesn't think any of the town committees have one. Mike said we have had moderators for joint meetings. Kyle said for joint meetings but not for committees. Scott said the form based code committee had a facilitator. Kyle said that was an outside consultant we hired. She wouldn't call him a facilitator.

**Scott moved that the trustees appoint 3 members from the community at large in the village to the racial justice committee.** Brian asked, should it be 3 members, a moderator and a chair? Gordy said just 3 members from the village to start with. **The motion was seconded.**

**Mike moved and Nat seconded that the selectboard appoint 3 members from the town to the racial justice committee.**

Kyle asked, would the trustees just be appointing village residents and the selectboard would appoint three from the town? Eric said yes, which includes the village.

Shayne Spence said he likes the 3 and 3 split. He read what Brian S. was quoted as saying in the News & Citizen article, comparing this committee to a conservation committee that might include hunters, trappers, anglers, pig farmers and people opposed to killing animals, all of whom considered themselves conservationists and saying that likewise there are people whose opinions vary on things like white privilege, reparations, police defunding, affirmative action and the meaning of Black Lives Matter, but we would not appoint a racist to the committee. He thinks Brian laid it out well. If you are interested in the committee you probably are on the right side. We should worry about turning people away who don't fit our personal definition of being committed to racial equality.

Greg said he agrees with Scott that we should have people on the committee who challenge other people. In his business he wants people challenging his decisions. If he makes them all himself he accomplishes nothing. He believes no one who is really racist is going to join this committee. We might have some people in the middle who could be swayed to be more racially sensitive. People who don't think Black Lives Matter is a problem could change their minds and they could change their friends' minds. If the committee already has its mind made up and you leave the broad population behind he doesn't think it will work. It will divide the community more. He thinks Scott has the right idea.

Rick Aupperlee said he is hearing about two sides. He is thinking that justice is a concern and a genuine respect for people and there can't be two sides on this. It's either justice or it's injustice.

Carrie Watson said she wanted to echo Rick and Kyle and Brian. You really can't begin a committee that has a certain common goal if the people on the committee don't all agree on

the problem that needs to be addressed. If people are calling Scott that are concerned with what the committee might achieve or who might be on it, usually that comes from the standpoint of someone who stands to lose something or feels threatened. If we are talking about equality it is concerning if they don't see a problem with inequality in our community. If they are not willing to work towards a higher level of equality maybe they are not members we would want on the committee to perpetuate those beliefs. We need to work on education and helping people understand the issues and problems but that has to be the job of the committee. We won't achieve anything if there are not like-minded people on the committee.

Scott said he has had conversations with people who want the same thing as everyone else but their way to get there is different. Does that exclude them from the conversation? Carrie said they should apply to the committee. Scott said that is what he is hoping for, but if they are not fitting the model of the avenue people are wanting to take, are we excluding them? We had talked about putting Black Lives Matter flags up and down Main Street. That was his idea and he took a lot of grief about it. There were other wonderful ideas that came into the conversation because we had a conversation. He is worried about forming a committee and excluding people because they have a different way of getting there. He spoke to some people that were pretty much on board but were angry because they were left out of the conversation. He sees this happening again tonight.

Carrie said maybe what kind of people we are looking for needs to be more fleshed out. The fear when talking about bringing diversity to the committee might be including someone racist.

Eric asked if the board wants to cut off public comment and vote. Kyle said she wants to hear what people say. Gordy said he wants to vote. Nat said he is in favor of getting public input, but meetings have gone late recently. If they go too late that is anti-democratic because people can't participate. He doesn't want to cut the conversation short but hopefully we can be mindful of the time. Scott said he wouldn't mind going a little longer but maybe we should limit statements to a few minutes.

Cal Stanton said he isn't clear on whether the committee is for racial justice or social justice. He sees it as part of an educational process. He doesn't think anyone on the committee will be an expert on anything. He believes the committee will be tasked with finding educational opportunities for our community. As far as diversity, if we have a recreation committee we have people on the committee that believe in recreation. If you need to get a truck fixed you go to a diesel mechanic with expertise. He agrees that any committee will have discussions about nuance, like about who will educate us, but the holistic ideals of the committee would be to further social or racial justice. We wouldn't even be talking about this without people in the community who have been working on this for a few years. Diversity should be around things like who presents, not whether we should fly a confederate flag or a Black Lives Matter flag. Certain ideas need to be left behind. He thinks we should look to those with more education on these things to lead us. He doesn't see the need for a moderator.

Jackie Stanton said when the committee was first proposed, she was curious and that has gone to concern. We keep hearing “both sides” and “We need a strong moderator.” We are not recreating the wheel. There are social justice groups around the state. There is an expectation that there will be fighting and angst. It is almost a setup, putting into motion that dynamic. The people who join groups around the state are people who have a commitment to racial justice. It’s not being exclusive to have that expectation. There are no “both sides.” We never talk about a strong moderator for other committees. She has heard more about how the committee will be comprised and a strong moderator than about the work of the committee. One person talked about flying a confederate flag on Main Street. We need to cut that off. The idea of bringing those things in is frustrating to her.

Brian summarized comments from chat. Margo Warden said committee members should have a common goal of racial and social justice. Divergent opinions on how to get there are desirable. Rob Rodriguez said what we really need is a “how to unite Johnson” committee.

**The selectboard motion was passed. The trustee board motion was passed.**

7. ***Discussion of Vote on Town/Village Merger***

Scott said he thinks we need to get the merger vote done. The village has some reasons that he won’t discuss tonight. He would like to see the question be brought to a village meeting and a town meeting for moving it forward.

Eric said we had committed to bringing it back to the voters but with COVID-19 we felt it could be tabled until we can have a townwide meeting. Scott asked if that is something we would be doing in spring. Eric said, “You tell me.”

Nat said the discussion needs to be informed by the report we commissioned. The consultant hasn’t corrected the report. He thinks it is appropriate to put pressure on him to complete it.

Meredith said we haven’t pressed him much lately. She and Brian submitted corrections and comments. It is time to get the report finalized. Brian said the last communication he had from the consultant was that he was involved with COVID-19 related consulting and didn’t expect to have free time immediately, but it has been longer than it looked like it was going to be.

Scott suggested just getting the report out along with the village’s and town’s views of things that are misleading or incorrect and getting it into the voters’ hands so we can have dialog and get moving. It is a detriment to employees and managers to have hanging over their head the question of whether they are going to have a job or not. For the sake of employees we need to figure it out.

Meredith said maybe she and Brian can get something out to the consultant this week and then we can come up with another plan if we don’t get something back soon. Her preference would be having a correct document rather than one with separate corrections.

Nat asked if it is okay with the village if the discussion on the town side does not happen until town meeting day in March. Scott said he thinks it will be a while before we can get

around social distancing, etc. He can't see it happening any time sooner but he thinks we should try to focus on springtime and hope for the best.

Doug said he thinks we should start with the report, but either side could veto a merger. We need to get to an answer but it isn't clear to him that merger is a really wonderful idea.

Scott said he doesn't think it's fair to village employees that this has been dragging on so long. If we have people move on, how will we have people step into the job not knowing if they will have a job come spring? Nat said he thinks that is an important message. Gordy said we are going to be losing an excellent manager and before we bring on another we need to know where we are going to go.

Mike asked why we can't just get revised information mailed out to people and have a mail-in vote. Eric said we could have an Australian ballot vote.

Gordy asked if the consultant is violating the contract. He suggested that if we don't get a revised report each board can make its own corrections. Brian said he doesn't believe they are in violation of the contract.

Rick Aupperlee pointed out that the boards did not get around to choosing a moderator. Brian asked, do we want a moderator and if so, how are we going to select one? Nat said he thinks lack of an answer is an answer. He suggested this could be taken up at a future meeting. Kyle said she doesn't think there is a need for a moderator if we are appointing people who are committed to working toward racial justice. Doug said he disagrees. Scott suggested tabling the question for now until we see who the picks are for the committee. Eric and Gordy agreed to that.

#### 8. ***Other Business***

Rick thanked everyone for the time put into this. He said we have the inclusivity statement, which is a building block. It gives the boards the municipal and moral authority to vote for certain things. The oath of office for board members says they do equal right and justice to all persons to the best of their judgment and ability. A while ago, Gordy asked, "When will this end?" He would like to help the two boards come to a conclusion. It will end when this is not a political thing, when the boards do the job they took the oath to do, to uphold justice. He would like to see the selectboard move to support the trustees' decision to fly a Black Lives Matter flag at the municipal building on the flagpole. And he would like to have a motion by the trustees setting the date, time and manner of raising the Black Lives Matter flag.

Kyle moved to support the trustees' motion to raise a Black Lives Matter flag at the municipal building. The motion was not seconded.

Rick said he would like a motion from the trustees regarding the date and time and manner of raising the flag they approved at the last meeting.

Scott said the trustees have a couple of housekeeping things they have to do. He doesn't see the need to make a motion. There is some work behind it, like figuring out how big the flag



will be, where we get it, how much it will cost, and what pole to put it on. That will be discussed in a trustee meeting. The time when the flag will be put up will be when we get it all figured out. If Rick has ideas, he can come to a meeting and discuss them.

Rick said he knows a flag has been donated. Meredith said she got an email last week offering to donate a flag.

Scot said there is a flag code that says another flag can't be bigger or higher than the American flag. Meredith said she has some research to do this week.

Gordy said the trustees will take this up at their next monthly meeting. It is not on tonight's agenda. Rick is welcome to come to the next trustee meeting.

9. *Adjourn*

**Scott moved to adjourn at 10:23, Brian seconded and the motion was passed.**

**Mike moved to adjourn at 10:24, Doug seconded and the motion was passed.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*