

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
ELECTRONIC MEETING VIA ZOOM AND PHONE CALL-IN  
MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2020

**Present:**

Trustees: Steve Hatfield, Will Jennison, Scott Meyer, Athena Parke, Gordon Smith

Others: Meredith Dolan, Kyle Nuse, Lynda Hill, Mike Dunham, Diane Lehouiller, Raven Pfaff, Rick Aupperlee, Michael Zebrowski, Shayne Spence, Cal Stanton, Jackie Stanton

**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**

Meredith added discussion of reallocating funds to Johnson Works for lights and an update on the potential grant for an electric bucket truck.

**3. Travis Hill – Water & Sewer Permit Final Approval for 90 Clay Hill**

Meredith said the board previously gave preliminary approval to Travis Hill for 90 Clay Hill. He has his state permit and is now asking for final approval. Due to the exorbitant cost if he had to dig separate water and sewer service lines, we let him know he could submit a declaration that the parcel cannot be subdivided without village permission and a clear delineation of responsibility. He sent a draft declaration today. Meredith recommends giving final approval contingent on reaching agreement on the declaration. Our conditions that we receive a signed declaration and that separate curb stops be put in would remain in the final approval.

**Will moved to give final approval for Travis Hill's water and sewer permits for 90 Clay Hill Road contingent on Meredith's approval of the declaration regarding subdivision of the property. The motion was seconded and passed.**

**4. Johnson Works Request to Place Sculpture on Village Green**

Meredith said Johnson Works is not having the Jubilee this year. To bring vibrancy to the downtown, one thing they want to do is place a lighted sculpture on the village green. Kyle Nuse said it would be too difficult to hold the Jubilee with COVID so Johnson Works decided on a "Light Up Johnson" initiative. One part of that would be to put a sculpture on the village green called "Water Molecules." She showed a picture of the sculpture, a conceptual piece that has to do with water and snowflakes. Johnson Works likes that the artist is a Johnson resident. The blue and white theme goes along with the Light Up Johnson initiative. Johnson Works is providing blue and white lights for businesses in the village. Johnson Works has been talking for quite a while about getting public art back on Main Street. The sculpture needs to go up somewhere on the green where electricity is available. The artist would do all the installation. He needs to drive a pole into the ground so we need a spot where that can happen. He will install and maintain the sculpture. It would be up November through March. It lights up and is stunning at night. He will take it down. Johnson Works has raised half the money needed for the installation. The cost for installation, de-installation and maintenance is \$600. Johnson Works decided they would fundraise for at least half the cost and they would pay half the cost. They are looking for permission from the village.

Will asked if the additional funds will come from Johnson Works or the taxpayers. Kyle said from Johnson Works.

Scott said the village is trying to keep the village green open for a potential second food cart and we also have a flagpole going in for a Black Lives Matter flag and we have to maintain a right of way. He asked who will pay for the power.

Meredith said Mudgies has its own meter and there are six additional outlets. She believes those are paid by the village. She doesn't think we can segregate power for the sculpture. She is assuming the lights are LEDs. Are they on a timer and only come on at night?

Kyle said the sculpture is on all the time and cycles through many hues of blue throughout a 24-hour period, so it needs electricity the entire time, but it is very energy efficient. She is not sure what the electricity cost would be.

Michael Zebrowski, the artist who created the sculpture, said he doesn't know exactly how much electricity it uses but the lights are all LEDs running off a 5-amp converter so usage is very low. They do run 24 hours a day. They turn on at 38° and off at 39°, and they stay on as long as the temperature is below 38°.

Scott asked how big the sculpture is and how high off the ground it is. Michael said there is one similar installation that is about 6 feet off the ground and another one that is about 8 feet off the ground. It really depends on the length of the post. If the post is 8 or 9 feet tall the sculpture can be that high off the ground.

Will asked the diameter of the sculpture. Michael said it is about six feet in diameter.

Scott asked, since it will be running on village power, is it all GFCI so we don't have to worry about electrical code issues and will Troy be able to give final approval?

Meredith said if an extension cord is being run across the ground we don't want a tripping hazard. It needs to be outside the state right of way. She thinks we would want it to be as close as possible to the outlet with a hard plastic cover over the cord.

Scott said extension cords are made for temporary use. They can be used for 90 days before it becomes a code issue. He wonders if it would be better for the sculpture to be hardwired. Then we would not have to worry about tripping or electrical code issues. He thinks we need to figure out the logistics before giving approval. Maybe the artist or Kyle along with Meredith and Troy can figure out where the sculpture would go best, how to hardwire it and what that cost would be. It would be good if the village did not have to pay because the village budget is extremely tight.

Will asked if Kyle would be open to other locations. Kyle said maybe. Will said he would hate to see the sculpture obscured. Maybe the cold spring would be a good location. If the sculpture is behind something on the village green the effect may not be as good.

Kyle said Johnson Works talked about this before the flag vote took place. Is the food truck staying through the winter? Meredith said they have not come back with a proposal to stay past October 30. Currently our guidelines allow them to stay until October 30. She needs to check whether they are interested in being there during the winter months. We don't want to have to do extra snow

removal, but if we don't have to do additional snow removal for them we don't want to limit their business. If the food truck was not there or if it was swung around a little, which she was hoping might happen in the future, then there are many more possibilities for the green.

There was a question about whether there is power at the cold spring. Will said there is a lamp post there. Meredith said she thinks most lamp posts have outlets. There is an open area towards 100C between the cold spring and the Historical Society that is out of the state right of way. Will said he thinks the sculpture would fit there well. Michael said he is not sure if the ground conditions there would allow him to put in a post.

Meredith asked if Michael carries his own insurance that would cover the sculpture if it were damaged. He said he does.

Gordy asked if we are purchasing this sculpture and if so, where it would be stored. Kyle said we wouldn't be purchasing it. It is a temporary thing. It is still Michael's property and we are just paying for installation, de-installation and maintenance.

Gordy said if we put a pole in the ground we need to make sure to call Dig Safe. Would we leave it year round or remove it in March? Kyle said she thinks the idea is that the sculpture would come down in March. Presumably the hole would get filled in.

Kyle said Johnson Works sees this as not only having aesthetic value but also helping with economic development. Public sculpture is a draw to communities and there is hope that one day we will have sculptures up and down Main Street like there used to be. Although this particular one is temporary, Johnson Works is hoping people will like it and there will be momentum to get more.

Will asked if Meredith can go out with Kyle to check out locations. Meredith said yes. Will said he thinks this is a great idea and he would like to see it go forward with more information. He suggested tabling it until the board has more information. Others agreed. Meredith said the next regular trustee board meeting is November 9. Does making a decision at that meeting sound okay? Kyle and Michael agreed that sounds great. Meredith said she will be in touch with them to set up a meeting next week. *(Michael left at 6:34.)*

**5. Request from Johnson Works to Reallocate Funds**

Meredith said the village will not have to contribute \$1,400 to Jubilee insurance as budgeted. And we budgeted \$500 for Jubilee support. Because we will not be spending those funds we talked about reallocating them towards another effort of Johnson Works. They are hoping to purchase lights to be used by downtown business and property owners for a consistent theme. She wants to check if that sounds like an acceptable use of funds.

Kyle said Johnson Works wants to make downtown festive and fun. They decided they would purchase lights for business or property owners along Main Street that want to participate but need help doing it. They decided on a blue and white theme in solidarity with NVU. Those are their colors. Businesses can do more than that if they want. There are 40 business and landowners on Main Street. Some have said they will get their own lights but about half would like Johnson Works to purchase lights for them. Their hope is to use village funds for that. They would purchase the lights from Johnson Farm and Garden to keep the money local. Businesses would put them up

and take them down and Allison and Chris from Downtown Pizzeria have storage space they have offered so Johnson Works can store Jubilee supplies.

Will asked if Johnson Works has talked to all the property owners. Kyle said they divided up the businesses among them and they will ask all of them.

Will asked, wasn't the money allocated for insurance and the Jubilee tagged for the flagpole? Meredith said some of it will be used for that. The board didn't make a specific allocation but knew there was some left in that area that could be used. Village employees went to look for a flagpole and found that it would take seven weeks to get a full flagpole assembly so they bought some hardware and will buy pipe and make a flagpole. If the flagpole cost \$1,500 that would still leave about \$400 unused for Johnson Works. Is \$400 enough?

Kyle said when Johnson Works got approval to use the funds at the September meeting, in her head that was money for Johnson Works to figure out how to use and then get the village's blessing. It feels like the board reneged.

Athena said she feels like we already voted to allocate some of that money. Meredith recalls that the board talked about it and asked for a proposal to use the funds and said the board would give approval after getting the proposal.

Will asked what type of lights Johnson Works will provide. Kyle said they are talking about basic string lights that are white and blue. Will asked what size they will be. Kyle said Johnson Works is talking with Lynn Lehouiller. They are trying to order them through her and she is researching outside resilient white and blue lights. She is not sure yet what size the bulbs will be but they will be meant for outside use. The hope is that owners will put them on the outside of buildings. Will ask what the vision is of how the lights will be strung. Kyle said it is difficult because not every building has outside electricity. It depends where people can plug things in. They are leaving it up to owners to decide what makes the most sense for their building.

Meredith said we budgeted \$1,400 for insurance, \$500 for Jubilee support and a separate \$1,000 for general Johnson Works support. If all the Jubilee money went to the flagpole there would still be \$1,000 that she doesn't think has been used for other Johnson Works support.

Scott said he would like an understanding of the cost associated with the sculpture. Knowing an extension cord is not appropriate, it would be nice to get a budget put together that gives more detail. And it would be nice to get more detail about the lights. He thinks these are all wonderful ideas but wishes there was more information. He would like to do it all, but we have a fixed amount of cash.

Meredith said hopefully by the end of the week she will have more information on the cost of the flagpole. She will meet with Kyle and Michael to talk about the sculpture next week. Scott said Troy should be able to give us a cost estimate on hardwiring it. Meredith said she thinks we would hire an electrician for that. The food truck was hardwired and they hired an electrician to do that work. A question for the board is whether the board is open to the village paying for that. She was thinking an extension cord would work and we wouldn't have to hire an electrician. It changes things if we do.

Scott said he would also like to know if the sculpture is covered by our liability insurance and if there is anything special we have to do for the insurance. For instance does the post have to be in concrete? He doesn't think the lights are a big deal as long as they are UAL listed. Meredith said she would check with PACIF.

Will said if we had firm numbers on the lights he would love to support the initiative.

Kyle said when she walked away from the previous meeting where this was discussed, it was really her understanding that Johnson Works had \$1,900 to work with and now the money has already been reallocated. She doesn't know how that happened. In the past when Johnson Works has been allocated money from the village it has been used for the Jubilee and Meredith has been in on the meetings so she has been privy to what Johnson Works was talking about. Johnson Works uses the money as they think is appropriate for the Jubilee. She is fine with getting the numbers but there is a crunch due to the timeline for ordering. This is a very different process than it has been in the past. She is not sure how they will be able to get it done in time.

Meredith said she remembers Scott saying that in theory the board liked he liked the idea but wanted to see more detail on a plan around how the money was being used before signing off. She thinks all these projects can fit within the \$2,900 available. The trustees just want to make sure the village is not overextending itself. We can get a good cost estimate for the lights.

Kyle asked, it is not like Johnson Works has the \$1,900 to work with? We have to report back to the village and get the village's blessing? Meredith said when the Jubilee was planned the village knew what the money was for – to support a specific event. The trustees wanted clarity on the new plans.

Will said there is a total of \$2,900 for Johnson Works and the Jubilee. We are estimating a cost of \$1,500 for the flagpole, so that would leave \$1,400 for the downtown lighting project. He thinks Johnson Works is better off planning on having \$1,400 and if there is money left over from the flagpole then they can tag that on.

Athena asked if \$1,500 is the most the flagpole could cost or a conservative estimate. Meredith said if we bought a full assembly at Stove and Flag Works the cost would have been \$1,500. We bought some components and staff were going to buy piping. She guesses the total cost will be cheaper, but she isn't sure. We have to get concrete too. Will said he thinks \$1,500 for a flagpole is a budget price.

Gordy said he thinks two or three years ago we had requests made by Johnson Works and the board asked for Johnson Works to be more specific on dollar amounts. We have asked the same question before.

Meredith said she would like a sense of whether the trustees support paying for an electrician to do hardwiring or if they would want Johnson Works to fundraise for the cost. That would probably eat up quite a bit of the \$2,900. Will said he thinks that cost should be part of the \$2,900.

Scott said we may want to check with VLCT on use of an extension cord for a prolonged period of time. If our staff use the cord it could be an occupational hazard. Meredith said if the artist is going to do the installation her desire would be for village staff to have nothing to do with it. She was only thinking about it as a potential trip hazard. Will said Johnson Works might want to consider a 90-day lease for the sculpture if it is expensive to hardwire it.

Kyle said she will always push for the trustees to remember their role in helping with economic development and being as supportive as they can. The more we can make all of this work together the better. We will all win.

Scott said due to COVID, income coming in for village electric is way down. That is probably something we will not recover. We have to look at the big picture. Either there will be a rate increase or we have to cut way back.

Kyle said Main Street businesses are all struggling too. That is another reason why she was questioning whether it was necessary to pay for brand new infrastructure for a flagpole when there was already infrastructure at the municipal building.

Gordy said if permanent electrical work is done it has to be done by a licensed electrician.

Rick Aupperlee read from the minutes of October 13:

*Meredith reviewed the budget status report. There have been quite a few requests for line extensions. The electric department revenue for that will probably be at or over budget. We are hoping that for work we did on 100C recently we can tap into the \$45,000 that was allocated years ago for work on 100C. We think installation of the new taller poles can be billed against that.*

*Residential electric revenue is trending ahead of budget and revenue from small businesses and Northern Vermont University is under what it usually is, which is not surprising. Meredith is still working to fully understand the offsetting decreases in power supply costs. Purchased power is trending lower than budgeted, which is good since revenues are also low*

If residential revenue is good and small businesses and NVU are lower, how is it that the electric department is in such a pinch?

Meredith said NVU makes up about 30% or more of the revenue for the electric department, so that category trending low has a major impact. Residential use is up because people have been at home more but overall net revenue is still far lower than we budgeted. Our revenues and expenses are not at the same point each month so she has to try to check for the same time period how power supply compares to lost revenue. She can try to discuss that at the November meeting to explain how the two are impacting each other. It is definitely fair to say that our revenue is much lower than we anticipated, and on top of sales being down, mostly due to NVU, we have more people not paying their bills. We have much higher unpaid balances than usual.

Rick asked how the Christmas tree on the green was lit in previous years Meredith said the village crew puts the lights up. It is not hardwired but there is an outlet right by the tree. The village has always done that.

Rick said he is not sure that the board can reallocate funds from the Jubilee to pay for the flagpole. Gordy said we could have Meredith check with VLCT to see if we can do that. If not, it will kill the flagpole project.

Meredith said the parades, events and celebrations line item has \$3,900. There is not a line item for the Jubilee. She used figures of \$1,400 for insurance, \$500 for Jubilee support, \$1,000 for Johnson Works support and \$1,000 worth of staff time (putting up lights and doing things in support of these projects) to come up with the \$3,900 total. But there is no line item that says Jubilee; it says parades, events and celebrations.

Rick said the trustees had said they would welcome a recommendation from the Racial Justice Committee on the Black Lives Matter flag. Speaking as someone who has been appointed, it feels like the board is moving forward on the flagpole without even fully appointing the Racial Justice Committee. He would like the board to honor the agreement to take a recommendation from the committee.

Lynda Hill said she was involved in the meeting where trustees said the Racial Justice Committee would be the ones to decide on the flagpole but that it wouldn't be on one of the three flagpoles by the municipal building and now all of a sudden it has been decided. She has been involved with the Jubilee from the get-go. If Johnson Works was still having the Jubilee the money would be going to the Jubilee and she thinks the lights are in place of that. We need to do something to spark Johnson and she thinks we need to leave it up to the people that are going to put the lights up. They know what to do and will figure it out. The board could get details like the number of sets of lights but not specifics on where the lights will be put because each business and person will do something different. We have to have faith that they will do what looks nice. She thinks it will do a lot to brighten up Johnson. Maybe if Johnson is all lit up people in neighboring towns will come in. She has a problem with the Johnson Works money being put into the flagpole, especially the \$1,900. That money was put aside already and there is still \$2,000 left over for the flagpole. She has a problem with money allocated for the Jubilee not being put into whatever is needed to make Johnson look nice as a replacement for the Jubilee.

Scott said he is not looking for detail on how the lights will be placed. What he is looking for is how many sets of lights there will be and what the length of the strings will be. If people ask him about them he will just have to say he doesn't know. As a village trustee, he thinks that is a poor answer. He doesn't think that detail is a big reach. Lynda said she thinks people will be more likely to say, "Oh, look, the trustees are looking to brighten up Johnson!" She thinks most strings will be about 20 to 25 ft. Scott said he is just hoping we can say how much lighting we are giving out.

Kyle said she has kept Meredith abreast of information as Johnson Works has come up with it. Meredith hasn't been able to be part of the Johnson Works meetings because of childcare but Kyle has kept her in the loop. In the past Meredith has been a liaison between Johnson Works and the trustees. This is a new process – Kyle having to spell out every detail. Johnson Works is hoping Lynn Lehouiller can order a variety of sizes of light strings since there are different sizes of

buildings. In the September 14 minutes it says board members agreed they would be open to allocating up to \$1,900 to the relighting Johnson effort. That is the number she has been working with. Johnson Works is hoping to get 20 sets of white and 20 sets of blue lights in a variety of sizes from Johnson Farm and Garden. Lynn Lehouiller is coming up with a final number and we will have to order them soon because it takes time for them to arrive. Perhaps the board could approve it now or could say they approve in concept spending this money on lights, assuming Kyle is in communication with Meredith. It gives her anxiety hearing that Jubilee money can just be allocated for other things on a whim. She didn't know that was a possibility.

Meredith said putting \$1,000 toward the lights leaves us \$2,900 to do the flagpole and potentially give a contribution toward the sculpture.

**Will moved and Scott seconded to approve allocating up to \$1,000 for use by Johnson Works for lights and a lighted sculpture, to be revisited at a later date.**

Diane Lehouiller said she thinks she heard Kyle say she was working with \$1,900. She doesn't know where that went to. She agrees with Lynda that this is a great idea and important for Johnson. It will give Johnson a shot in the arm and we so need that to move forward.

**The motion was passed.**

Meredith said she will get the numbers for the flagpole, meet next week on the sculpture and then email the board an update and we can decide if we have to have a special meeting or can wait until November 9.

Kyle asked, we went from a \$1,900 budget to a \$1,000 budget, is that right? It got cut in half. Meredith said depending on how other budget items come back we could potentially increase it. Scott said there could be cost for the sculpture we still have to deal with. Will agreed that Kyle is clear on the numbers.

Rick read from the minutes of October 13: *Meredith said aesthetically she thinks a flagpole would be better than a utility pole. The cost for either type of pole would be similar, about \$350.* All of a sudden the village is naming a cost of thousands for the flagpole and taking the money from the Jubilee. He believes when the board allocates money for things that they do have a responsibility to the taxpayers to make sure that the money is spent on what it was allocated for. It was not allocated for a flagpole. If you want to put up a flagpole, find it in the budget somewhere. Don't take it away from the Jubilee. He is struggling with the rationale when the flagpole wasn't even part of the discussion when Kyle brought up the budget around the Jubilee. He would like to know how the pole went from being \$350 to being \$1,000 or \$1,900. It really jumped.

Meredith said in the initial discussion she thought we were looking at more of a homeowner flagpole. A utility pole costs about \$350 and the numbers she was looking at for flagpoles were not for flagpoles for commercial use but more of a homeowner version. We reached out to Stove and Flagpole Works and the pole and all the hardware was going to cost \$1,500. But staff are going to try to do something more cost-effective. She doesn't have the cost. Hopefully it will be less than the whole set that is not available



Rick said Laraway School put up a flagpole in June with a Black Lives Matter flag and a pride flag and he inquired into the cost. It was about \$150. It is in a very windy place. He feels the village might want to be more responsible with taxpayer money and consider getting another estimate. Meredith said it cost about \$170 for the hardware. Staff will try to do it as cost effectively as possible.

**6. *Interview Candidates for the Johnson Racial Justice Committee***

Meredith said three people indicated interest in the remaining spot on the on the Racial Justice committee: Diane Lehouiller, Raven Pfaff, and Lisa Kauffman. Scott asked if Lisa Kauffman was notified of the interviews this evening. Meredith said Lisa sent an email through Front Porch Forum earlier in October. It went to Meredith's personal email. She forwarded it to her Johnson email and emailed Lisa back that she should write a brief letter explaining her interest by last Friday. She hasn't heard from Lisa since her initial email, but she classified that as a letter of interest and emailed her information on this meeting and she hasn't heard back.

Gordy suggested an interview process involving only trustees interviewing the candidates. Does the board want to move into executive session after that? Will asked about the legitimacy of moving into executive session for hiring a committee member. Meredith said our attorney said "appointment of a public officer" is used pretty broadly and he felt it would be appropriate in this situation if the board wanted to go into executive session. Will said he would be in favor of that. Scott asked Diane and Raven how they feel about having the board openly discuss their qualifications. Would they rather have that done in private? Raven said she would trust the board's process and would be okay with that. Athena said she is okay with public discussion. Steve said he thinks he is okay with either but public discussion might be the better way to go. Gordy said unless someone moves to go into executive session the discussion will be in open session.

Diane said she is really interested in learning more about racial justice. She has attended presentations, meetings and a living room conversation. She has read and continues to read books on the subject. She has been involved in getting the inclusivity statement for the town and getting the Black Lives Matter flag to be flown. That makes her possibly a good candidate to be on the committee. She wants to educate herself more on racism. She recognizes racism in herself. She has the time to attend the trainings and educational opportunities that would happen from this committee.

Athena invited Diane to speak about one of her moments of learning that was powerful. Diane said the first presentation she went to was in Cambridge. What she learned was that she really doesn't know very much about it. She really does want that kind of thing to happen in our town. She thinks it is important to have that happen. That is what sparked her wanting to do the inclusivity statement and have the Black Lives Matter flag be flown and wanting to be on this committee. She doesn't know if it is one particular thing; it's just that in general the more she learns the more she wants to learn. She feels it is really important that we learn how we became racist. She doesn't want to be racist. She thinks good education and exposure would be helpful.

Steve said he knows Diane has been a school teacher. He is curious whether she ever had to deal with instances of racism or work things out among staff, parents or teachers. Diane said she taught at Hyde Park Elementary School for most of her career. They did not have one teacher that she can recall that was a person of color. She did have some students that were Filipino, African-American or Jamaican. The students she had in her classroom were terrific. She didn't see them acting any

differently among themselves. She did talk about racism in her classroom. They would talk about being African-American and what it is like. She had some kids pretend to be African-American. She tied a scarf around them and when she asked the kids to go get a drink the kids with the scarf had to go to a water fountain further away. She really did not see any kind of racism in her classroom.

Scott asked how Diane is able to have conversations and about her listening skills to find common solutions. Diane said she is a pretty good listener. She can't think of a specific example, but she will usually not want to hurt someone else's feelings so she would listen and hopefully come up with a solution. If it is a problem she would look for the best solution.

Scott asked Diane to talk about something she is proud about in her efforts on racial equality. Diane said she is very proud to have the inclusivity statement part of this town. She is the one that asked Kate Westcott to do that beautiful inclusivity statement that will hopefully soon hang at the town clerk's office. She hasn't run any presentations. She is really good at calling people and getting them to become involved. She is a behind-the-scenes kind of person.

Scott asked Diane to talk about something she still desires to change in her way of life regarding racial equality. Diane said she really wants to learn about how she can better see racism in herself. She is hoping that presentations or presenters we get to come to Johnson will help her see that in herself and help other people in this town so we can be proud of hanging that Black Lives Matter flag

Scott asked if Diane has been involved in committees before, and if so, in what way? Diane said she was on a lot of committees when she was teaching but she has not been on any since she retired.

Will said the committee will make recommendations to the trustees and the selectboard. Is it one of Diane's priorities to bring the town and village together as a community? Diane said she thinks it is really important to have people from the village and town attend the presentations and have discussions afterwards. Hopefully through that kind of thing we will all be learning together. Will said it sounds like her primary focus is bringing in lecturers and speakers. Outside of that, would one of her priorities be tying together the community as a whole? Diane said yes. She sees presentations and speakers that would come in. That would bring people together. She thinks good dialogue would make people come together.

Gordy asked if Diane is willing to work with all people and listen to all points of view. She said yes.

Gordy asked if she is willing to commit the time to attend all the meetings. Diane said yes. She is willing to put in the work and she has the time.

Raven said she is really interested in seeing a community that is functioning and working together and is safer and healthier for everyone she feels as a society we have lost the true definition of community.

Athena asked Raven to talk about something impactful that informed her perspective, a point of learning, etc.

Raven said she grew up out west and never paid attention to racial tensions. When she was 15 she was taking care of her young cousins and her cousins were telling her they did not want to watch certain things because characters had dark skin and they did not like that. Her mind was blown that a child would say something like that and that their parents had taught them that. Once you see it, you start noticing it everywhere. She felt a little dumb that she had never really paid attention to it before. That was her eye opener.

Will said he wanted to ask if one of her primary focuses is bringing the community together. It seems like she stated that she is interested in healing the community as a whole. Raven said yes. It is super important that we all come together. She knows there is a lot of divisiveness right now in a lot of communities and that doesn't work.

Steve asked if Raven has any specific skills or trainings or experiences she thinks would make her be a great person for this committee. Raven said recently she attended a seminar called Hidden in Plain Sight by the Vermont Racial Justice Alliance. She has taken applied suicide intervention skills training. In that training they talked about mental health in general and about minority mental health. Minorities are at increased risk of suicide. Most of her training is around crisis prevention and suicide prevention. She does volunteer work and she works as a preschool teacher. As a teacher she gets trainings all the time about including minority children in the classroom.

Scott asked Raven to give examples about conversation and listening skills to find common solutions. Raven said something she learned in her training is to listen and validate people's feelings – to give them time and not interrupt and to validate what they are feeling. To problem solve she would collaborate with them to find a solution. You can't come up with solutions that negate others' feelings. You need to work something in from everyone.

Scott asked her to describe something she is proud about in her efforts in racial equality. Raven said she is proud of working on it with children in the classroom. As a preschool teacher she has seen racism in her classroom. She has seen kids saying that if your skin is dark you lose and if it is light you win. She has been working on emotional literacy with a lot of children for a while now.

Scott asked her to describe something she still desires to change in her own way of life regarding racial equality. Raven said she is currently working on standing up for people. In some social situations you just shut down in the moment and she is working on taking advantage of the moment instead of shutting down.

Scott asked if she has been involved in committees before and if so in what way. Raven said she was on the committee for the Out of the Darkness Walk for suicide awareness in Burlington last year. The committee members all worked together on a budget, put out flyers and administered the whole thing. She was also part of a committee related to people using beads to show how they were affected by suicide.

Gordy asked if Raven is willing to work with all people and listen to all points of view. She said absolutely.

Gordy asked if she has the time committed to attend all the committee meetings. Raven said yes.

7. ***Vote to Appoint Third Member to the Johnson Racial Justice Committee***

**Will moved to appoint Raven Pfaff to the Racial Justice Committee, seconded by Athena.**

Athena thanked Diane for applying and said the board loved hearing from her. Scott agreed. Gordy said encouraged whichever candidate is not picked to attend committee meetings if they are still interested. There is likely to be an opening on the committee at some point and someone who has attended meetings is likely to have a head start if there is an opening. Steve said he is really grateful for the applications and he feels that whoever we pick, the other person will be equally involved in trying to accomplish these goals for all of us. He thanked both candidates. Will said just stepping up shows a lot of commitment and responsibility to the community. He thanked both of the candidates.

**The motion was passed.**

8. ***Update on Potential Grant for Electric Bucket Truck***

Meredith said there is \$400 million in grant funding available statewide to convert vehicles from diesel to all-electric or hybrid. Bucket trucks are included. We have a large 2008 bucket truck. The age cohort eligible is 1992 through 2009, so ours is eligible. It is 12 years old and they usually have about 15 years of useful life. So in coming years we will face investment in another truck. The grant would provide up to 85% of the cost of a truck. Those types of vehicles are much more expensive than traditional diesel vehicles but with a grant we could potentially get a bucket truck for far less than it would otherwise cost us. One requirement is that the diesel truck we are replacing has to be scrapped. They want to get diesel vehicles off the road. She and Troy have been looking into the options. Troy talked to one of the all-electric bucket truck manufacturers. She and Troy are getting cost estimates. The grant will cover up to 85% but if we can cover more than 15% it may help our application. If we paid 20% of the cost it probably would be about half the cost of a diesel truck. She and Troy are looking into making sure an electric truck could operate in a cold climate and that its range would be sufficient. A charging station would be needed and the cost of that would be included in the grant. Meredith thinks if it looks like we would be a good applicant it is in our best interest to apply. She knows some other utilities are applying. The grant will be competitive but it is probably worth our time to submit an application. She wanted to make sure no one on the board has major concerns. She and Troy are trying to do due diligence to make sure there is a vehicle that would meet our needs

Will ask if electric trucks have been around long enough to know about the lifespan versus diesel.

Meredith said the back end portion is made by the same manufacturer that made our current bucket truck. That manufacturer has been around for a long time. And the electric motor is the same as what has been used in electric buses for around 15 years, so it is proven technology.

Gordy said Green Mountain Power has had one for maybe eight years. The technology is out there and they keep improving it. A lot of our bucket work is within the village and an electric vehicle would keep diesel fumes from going into buildings. The technology is there and he thinks it would be worth Meredith's time to apply.

Meredith said she expects it will be very competitive but she thinks we are a good candidate because we have a small service area so we don't have to worry much about range.

## 9. *Other Business*

Gordy noted that when Meredith has questions or wants another point of view she often contacts him and if he feels the issue needs to go to the board Meredith sends emails out to everyone, so it is all very transparent. The board will know the process on everything that was done.

Meredith asked the new trustees what contact information they want listed on the website and they gave her their information.

Scott asked Meredith to give the three members appointed to the Racial Justice Committee by the village each other's contact information so they can start having conversations and getting to know each other. Meredith said she will talk to Brian Story and once the town has their three members selected we can put them all together and they can start their work. Scott suggested a letter of thanks for all those who applied. He suggested Meredith could mention that to Brian. We should be proud that our residents are stepping up.

Meredith said she will try to be back in touch with the board with cost estimates. Kyle was not thrilled with the amount being reduced to \$1,000. If we can increase that she will be back in touch so the board can have a conversation about it.

Rick said he feels that the public comment section of the October 13 meeting was cut short by the chair calling the question and having the vote to appoint Will before five members of the public who had their hands raised had a chance to comment. He did not mean to blindside or attack Will at that meeting. These are public meetings and they are a part of the public record. He doesn't go to people's houses to speak to them. He was a trustee and no one ever came to his house. He finds it offensive that Will went to a woman's house and called her out in her yard and told her he felt that she disrespected him because of her vote. He asked if Gordy, Scott and Athena are aware of a letter that Jena sent to the trustee board in August. There were comments at the last meeting that the statements about Will going to Jena's house might be hearsay. When Rick stated last month why Will should not be appointed, were the trustees aware of any communication from Jena regarding Will's visit? Specifically were they made aware of a letter by Jena to the board?

Meredith said Jena sent her a letter which she forwarded to the board in late August or early September. Rick asked when Meredith sent it to the board. She said within a day of when Jena sent it. It must have been in August. Rick said yes, it was August 11.

Athena said she had just moved at the time. She can't remember if Will's name was in the letter specifically but she did read the letter and it did concern her. She told her partner that maybe someone would show up at their house. She is from the city and that is not something people generally do there. But she thinks Scott brought up that he has had people visit his house. She doesn't know the dynamics. If Jena felt threatened, she would find that completely inappropriate. She is aware of Jena's letter and it concerned her.

Gordy said he is aware of the letter. There is no name referenced in the letter. The letter is addressed to Meredith.

Rick read the letter in question:

*Obviously, I am brand new to the Board and do not know how to report an issue such as what I am going to describe. I did think of the importance of documenting the situation and sharing with the other members, in order to have everyone be informed.*

*Today, a member of the Johnson fire department came to my house unannounced and knocked on my door at lunch time. I'm working from home, currently (due to COVID), so I was available.*

*I masked-up and went outside and listened to everything he had to say. I listened respectfully to everything he had to say, and only responded with calm and with explanations of why I voted the way that I did. The conversation was all in regard to the Black Lives Matter flag vote.*

*He asked me why I don't have the flag at my house. I responded that I don't fly any flags at my house. He replied, but I would vote to have a flag flown on the municipal grounds, though. He told me that my vote, and what I said in the meeting, was disrespecting the fire department. I replied that my vote and comments were about a social issue, and that I had no intention at all to be disrespectful to anyone. It's about inclusivity.*

*This individual told me that staff will leave "as soon as that flag goes up." He asked me what will happen when there is an emergency and there is no one to respond. He went on to say that they already have positions that aren't filled, and that people have said they will leave due to this issue.*

*He also talked about being "neutral" at the fire department. Again, I said that a social issue doesn't have to have a political element, in my view. It's about fairness and treating people equally.*

*He said staff won't feel safe, and to look at the riots around the country. I said that I thought that the majority of people are peaceful protesters, and that those who are causing damage and destruction are often likely other individuals who are not associated with BLM.*

*I said, again, that I just wanted representation of inclusivity for everyone in town and people traveling through, who might not read the inclusivity statement on the web site, but that they could see that flag and feel respected and represented. He said that I was not being inclusive of the fire department.*

*I kept my composure during the conversation and told him that I respect him, and I am sorry that he/they feel that my vote was disrespectful. I'm new to this role, and I am trying to make decisions and place votes with the information that I have at the time.*

*He, again, told me that I disrespected the fire department, and that I needed to think about that. He also said that there could always be a special meeting called to "fix" this.*

*Is there a way in which to "mend fences" with the fire department? Do you think they really will have a mass exit of firefighters? I would regret making a decision that would somehow disband our fire department. I put myself in the running to be a Trustee because I wanted to have a hand in positivity in Johnson.*

Rick said he doesn't think Jena really needed to put Will's name in the letter since Will admitted going to her house. He doesn't think we really have to question what happened. If the fire department is truly politically neutral, why is a member of the fire department, who is now a trustee, going to a trustee's house representing the fire department?

Will said at no point in his Facebook post or at any other time did he ever say he was representing the fire department. He has never said he was representing the fire department.

Gordy said what Rick is reading is not the letter that was sent to the trustees by Meredith. When he read the original letter he reached out that evening and had a private conversation with Jena.

Rick said the letter was given to him. It says "Submitted, Jena Gould-Hopkins" and it is dated August 11, 2020. All the while the three trustees were aware of Jena's concerns and the reason for her resignation. He is still struggling with the decision to appoint Will. He understands that Will has experience and he respects his service with the fire department but his concern is that as a member of the fire department, which is under the jurisdiction of the village, Will questioned a trustee and went to her house. We are talking about justice here. One concern he has is about white male privilege. Will is a man of around 250 pounds and Jena is a petite woman. It is a "power over" dynamic when he shows up at her house. He thinks it is in the best interest of the trustees to really look at what this letter says Will said – that staff will leave as soon as the flag goes up. If the fire department is really threatening to quit, it is not the flag that is the problem it is the fire department quitting. That is the much bigger issue.

**Will moved to adjourn.**

Scott said he feels like we are walking a fine line with regard to public disclosure and privacy issues. That email was not sent to Meredith for public distribution. He is not sure about legality. He is remaining quiet because he doesn't know the legal implications regarding emails being released involving personnel issues.

**Scott seconded.**

Athena said she worked hard to make sure there were more options for the trustees to choose from. She thinks it is important that younger people get involved. It would be ideal if she wasn't the only person under a certain age on the board.

Gordy said the letter he checked was dated September 4. That may be different from the one Rick read.

***10. Adjourn***

**The motion was passed and the meeting was adjourned at 8:35.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*