

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
ELECTRONIC MEETING VIA ZOOM AND PHONE CALL-IN
MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2020

Present:

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

Others: Meredith Dolan, Brynn Nuse, Rick Aupperlee

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Gordy called the meeting to order at 6:05.

2. Changes Additions to Proposed Agenda

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. Interview Candidates for the Johnson Racial Justice Committee

Gordy suggested having chat turned off and only trustees and Meredith unmuted initially, with candidates unmuted for their interviews. Jena and Scott agreed.

Meredith reminded everyone that the town and village created a joint racial justice committee and agreed that each board would appoint 3 people. We advertised and initially had 3 applicants but one is not a village resident. Their land is within the village but their home actually isn't in the village. So Meredith let them know they should apply to be appointed by the town. We have 2 applicants for 3 open seats. We may want to add to the agenda a discussion about re-advertising the open position. Rick Aupperlee and Brynn Nuse both submitted letters of interest.

Gordy said he has known Rick for a long time and he knows he is very passionate about this cause. He asked if Rick is willing to listen to any and all viewpoints and then make up his own mind.

Rick said he will make no peace with oppression. He stands for change. He is open to hearing conversation but since this is a racial justice committee the focus needs to be on justice. He believes that means fairness and listening to others. He thinks he has lived by those principles since before he came to Johnson.

Gordy said open people use the same terms in different ways. He read a statement about the definitions of inclusion and racial justice. He said he knows the work Rick does. He knows he is open-minded. He thinks Rick would be a level-headed person on the committee.

Jena said she thinks the idea that people are using terminology differently is important. Terminology is important to moving the conversation forward. She asked how Rick might go about trying to educate people around Black Lives Matter. She is hearing a lot of people in the community refer to Black Lives Matter as a radical group. She is wondering how we can educate people to focus on civil rights, which is what it is really about, and the fact that the bulk of Black Lives Matter protesters are peaceful.

Rick said he believes that Black lives matter and that justice matters. He has no political motivation in this committee appointment. Based on his research into Black Lives Matter he believes it is not a political organization. It has been defined by the federal government and protected under the Hatch

Act as not a political organization. He thinks we need to do more community outreach. He has never called anyone a racist and would never call anyone a racist. He believes we all have biases. He has been involved in many anti-bias trainings in his work and as a member of Be-Longing for Justice. He has participated on over 200 Tuesdays in peaceful gatherings on Main Street. As a community we have a history in race relations. He is working on a project now with the University of Vermont related to a minister who was at the United Church in Johnson in the 1940's and published a document called The Vermont Plan for Racial Equity. He was recognized by the governor for his community service and his plan was adopted by 4 states. He died in 1949 and his work is largely gone. Rick is hoping to use his research to highlight that this is nothing new in Johnson. We can be proud of our history with racial equity.

Scott said one reason he was asking the trustees and selectboard to have a committee is to give this topic the respect it deserves. The boards couldn't do that by squeezing it into regular trustee and selectboard meetings. The committee will give the boards the information they need for driving things forward. He asked Rick to give two examples of having conversation and listening to find solutions. Rick said he was a village trustee in the past. As a trustee he had to listen to all sides. Currently he does a lot of community service work and service learning and he is actively engaged in trying to bring students into our community and trying to help students understand their responsibilities and opportunities.

Scott asked Rick about his history of wrestling with and righting racial issues. Rick said an important moment was when he was 17 years old and in a school-to-work program. His supervisor was a Black woman who was a single mother. When he invited her to a school function around honoring people, people questioned that. It was his first real introduction to discrimination. It informed his decision making throughout his life.

Scott asked what Rick would still like to change within himself on racial equality. Rick said he always questions his privilege. He doesn't take that for granted. He is always looking for opportunities to question his own biases. He is a believer in anti-bias training.

Scott said Rick had already answered his next question, which was going to be whether he had been involved in any board or committee before. He invited Rick to talk more about his experience. Rick said he was a trustee. He talked about work he was involved in related to the sewer plant. He was a member of the church council at the United Church. He advocated for the elderly and isolated. He has over 30 years in service work. He is a volunteer at the food shelf. He is connected and engaged in the community.

Athena joined the meeting. She asked about ways Rick has navigated difficult conversations. What tools does he use in those difficult moments?

Rick said he is a big believer in empathic listening. He believes the committee has to make no peace with oppression. That is a core value he has. He believes we all have biases and need to question them, including himself. He has been involved in multiple trainings.

Gordy asked Brynn if she will be able to work with all members of the committee, be considerate and let all the input inform her decisions. Brynn said yes. In her previous jobs she spent a lot of time listening to people and getting their perspectives.

Gordy asked if Brynn will be willing to evolve and change. Brynn said yes. There will be different input from community meetings and meetings of the committee. It is important to have collaboration between people and not set a rigid plan. It is important for different input and different perspectives to be taken into account.

Gordy suggested that if either Brynn or Rick knows someone they might like to work with on the committee they speak to them about joining.

Jena said the town and village have an inclusion statement. She wonders how Brynn sees that moving forward so we are even more inclusive and the town and village are very welcoming. Brynn said we need to have conversations with residents of Johnson so they don't feel anything was done behind their backs and maybe we can get ideas on how to word things differently so everyone can be on board. She knows the town is very divided right now. She thinks the committee should talk to everyone, not just one demographic.

Scott asked Brynn for two examples showing her ability to have a conversation and listen to find a common solution. Brynn said one example is when she joined a sorority in college but then heard they only wanted her because she was Asian. She felt very hurt. She had a conversation and described her frustrations and what she had heard. She learned that it wasn't true and they explained to her what really happened. After hearing the rumor she felt she didn't belong but instead of quitting or assuming it was true she was able to initiate a conversation with them and hear why the rumor was started. Another example is that while she was UVM she was part of the Asian Student Union. They would have conversations with clubs at school about inclusivity and it was interesting to hear their perspectives.

Scott asked Brynn to describe her efforts for racial equality. Brynn said she went to high school in this area. She was one of the only people of color. It was a daily battle trying to explain to her peers that she looked different but was still just like them and wanted to be treated the same. She is proud that she tried to maintain a positive outlook and not be dissuaded by their attitudes or be negative about white people. She tries to be a role model for her nieces, showing that color doesn't matter in your abilities and capabilities.

Scott asked if there is something she still wants to change in her way of life related to racial equality. Brynn said she wants to be able to listen to other people being free of judgment and be open to new experiences.

Scott asked if Brynn has been involved in committees and in what way. Brynn said at UVM she was on the board of the Asian Student Union and went to all the meetings but she was not in an executive position. When she was in a sorority she was a secretary.

Athena said she was going to ask the same question she asked Rick, but she thinks Brynn already answered it with her sorority story. She invited Brynn to add to that if she wanted to. Brynn said there was a good outcome because she had patience and listened with open ears and did not come in with a specific mindset determined that she already knew the truth.

Rick thanked Meredith for the work she has done and thanked the trustees for considering his application. He would like to continue the good work that was started by the trustees who are moving on. He thanked Jena for her commitment to what she believes is right.

Brynn thanked Meredith and the trustees for their hard work and for the opportunity to be considered for the position.

Scott moved and Athena seconded to appoint Brynn Nuse and Rick Aupperlee to the Racial Justice Committee. Scott thanked them for being involved and for being so honest during the process. Athena said she really appreciated reading their application letters. It seemed like they put a lot of thought into them. **The motion was passed.**

Meredith said the village needs to figure out next steps with the town. The committee needs to get full membership. She thanked Brynn and Rick for their willingness and interest.

Rick said the selectboard is talking about possibly having alternates and some other things. He is curious what the trustees think about the third open position. Scott suggested reaching out to Brian Story and suggesting to him that if there are village residents who have applied to be appointed by the town he should let them know the village still has a position available. He is highly supportive of the idea of having standing members available in case there are changes in membership.

Meredith said she can ask Brian to send people our way if they are village residents applying to be appointed to the committee. If everyone agrees she can put the call for committee members out again and maybe give people another week to apply. Maybe the board could have a special meeting later in the month. If we get more than one applicant, talking about an alternate would make sense. The board agreed Meredith should advertise and the board will plan to have a special meeting on October 21.

4. ***Adjourn***

Scott moved to adjourn at 6:56 and the motion was seconded and passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths