

JOHNSON VILLAGE TRUSTEE BOARD MEETING MINUTES
ELECTRONIC MEETING VIA ZOOM AND PHONE CALL-IN
MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2021

Present:

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

Others: Meredith Dolan, Rosemary Audibert, Diane Lehouiller, BJ Putvain, Jackie Stanton, Kyle Nuse, Rick Aupperlee, Sophia Berard, Susan Tinker, Cal Stanton, Kim Dunkley

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Scott called the meeting to order at 6:05.

Meredith said two candidates submitted letters of interest: BJ Putvain and Diane Lehouiller. This is an interim trustee position to serve until the annual meeting on the first Tuesday in April. This will be the fourth interim trustee on the board. Any of the interim trustees who want to run for a position on the board have to put their names on the ballot. She explained to the candidates that we are coming into our budget season. The village has four departments and each has its own budget. She will probably offer to do an overview of the budget for whoever is appointed tonight and Steve Hatfield, who is a fairly new board member. Budget meetings will start in February. Scott is currently chair of the board. He stepped in when Gordy Smith stepped down.

Each of the trustees introduced themselves.

2. Changes, Additions to Proposed Agenda

Two items were added to the agenda: discussion of celebration of a community member's 100th birthday and discussion of Racial Justice Committee meetings.

3. Interview Candidates for the Interim Trustee Position

Meredith invited Diane to speak about her interest in being on the board.

Diane said she would like to be on the trustee board because she thinks she can bring good energy to the village. She has qualifications and qualities that she thinks would be valuable. She is honest and hard-working. She is good at reaching out to people. She has good listening skills. She is resourceful at finding facts and doing research to help a group come to consensus on issues. She was a head bookkeeper for Vermont Legal Aid where she worked on budgets, did federal and state reports and did payroll. She also held official positions for the teachers' union and negotiated for teachers. During her teaching career she was involved in many committees.

Steve asked what she thinks is a problem facing Johnson that she would try to put her energy into if she were on the board. Diane said she thinks there are some problems with the merger, but she would have to read the report. She would like to put her energy into that. She would like to work on having more good, positive things happen in Johnson. She would like to work with the college. A big problem that could be facing us is NVU closing down. She thinks we need to look at that.

Athena asked if Diane could talk about any specific tools she would use to have difficult conversations. Diane said she thinks reaching out to people is really important. It is important to bring all the facts to the table and respect what people bring to the table. Civility needs to happen.

She thinks we can work together to get consensus. She thinks good listening skills are important and she thinks she has those.

Athena said the merger is going to come up a lot this year. She asked how up to date Diane is on that. Diane said she really doesn't have a preconceived notion. She needs to read the report and see what it says. She realizes a decision has to be made because village and town workers are waiting for an answer. But she thinks to be a good trustee she needs to read the report.

Scott asked how Diane handles differences of opinion. Diane said she thinks it is really important to value what people bring to the table. She thinks you need to discuss your differences, gather information, listen to others and try to come to consensus.

Scott asked how Diane sees Johnson in 5 years. Diane said she would love to see businesses on Main Street and families on the streets off of Main Street. She loves that Kyle has a gallery in her building. She would love to see more of that kind of thing. And she would love to see a good connection between the college and the village. She thinks that is important to start thinking about. She would love to see different people moving into our village. That is what the Racial Justice Committee is also looking at. Bringing businesses and families to Johnson would be terrific.

Scott said the village has to follow rules and regulations from OSHA, VOSHA, EPA, ANR, etc. There are rules we have to abide by for our public water source and our wastewater. We have our power supply under the Public Service Board. There are a lot of rules, policies and procedures we have to follow. We have to make certain any trustee is fully on board with these state and federal regulations. He asked if Diane is good with that. Diane said she thinks when someone gives her a task to do she usually gets it done. She wants to do her best for the taxpayers. She would hope that Scott and Will, with their experience, would help new board members and all would work together. She thinks if we work together we will get things done.

Scott invited Diane to give a 5-minute wrap up if anything else comes to mind that she wants to say. Diane said she has lived in Johnson for 42 years. She really loves this town. She wants it to stay friendly and flourish. She wants it to have positive things happening that make people want to move here, start businesses and come visit. She thinks that is really important. She will do her best to learn everything about the job of being a trustee and work together to get our town in the best possible place.

Meredith invited BJ Putvain to speak about his interest in being a trustee. BJ said he has lived in Johnson for a year. In 1999 he went into EMS because he wanted to help the community. He worked in Newport, then got a job in Jay. During this time he was also doing security. He got married about a year ago, moved to Johnson and bought a house. When he lived in Jay he started baseball and basketball leagues with his own money. Through EMS he was involved with fundraisers for a senior living home, etc. He started a business in Johnson and has reached out to other businesses and has been working with them. He wanted to sponsor a basketball or baseball team here but then Covid hit. He was talking to his wife about how to get into the community and then she saw the opening on the trustee board and he applied. He works a couple of jobs. He works for Smuggler's Notch security and in that job he deals with VOSHA and Covid. He is also contracted by Homeland Security and he has a powder coating business.

Steve asked what BJ would want to address here in Johnson. BJ said one thing about him only having been here a year is that he doesn't have any prejudice one way or another. He is coming in totally blank and may be able to pick things up that others are prejudiced on. He and his wife have a passion for helping low income people and helping with things like food banks, parks, and activities for kids.

Athena asked what tools he uses to navigate difficult conversations. BJ said for about 3 years he worked in corrections and at their academy he learned how to defuse things: don't argue, make the other person think it is their decision, don't raise your voice, go down to their level.

Athena asked how up to date BJ is on the merger. BJ said he is definitely interested in it and will find out what he can do on it. Hopefully he can come in with a different outlook than someone who has been here longer.

Scott asked how BJ handles differences of opinion. BJ said everyone has differences of opinion. He prefers to hear and deal with them. He doesn't have a negative look on them. At his job at Smuggs there are a lot of people who don't always agree. He is fine with consensus and majority rule. As long as he can put his opinion out and be heard, listen to others and vote his conscience he is fine with however it turns out.

Scott asked what BJ would hope to see in Johnson 5 years from now. BJ said he thinks he is coming into Johnson at pretty much the worst time. He wishes he saw more families walking down the street. He lives on Railroad Street and what he sees doesn't scream community but he thinks Covid has a lot to do with it. He does powder coating and he gives a 5% discount for donating to the food shelf. He would like to see the community grow. He would like to see more kids playing, sports, etc. There is not much of that now because of Covid.

Scott said the village has to follow rules from OSHA, the EPA, the Agency of Natural Resources, etc. There are rules regarding wastewater and public drinking water supplies. We have our own power company and have to follow Public Service Board rules. We are a board strictly governed by rules and regulations. He needs to be clear that BJ is on board with that. BJ said in his work he deals with VOSHA, the state and Covid. He is a stickler for rules. There is no bending a rule. Either you are breaking it or not. A rule is a rule and there is no middle ground to it.

Scott invited BJ to give a 5-minute wrap up for anything else he wants to add. BJ said he is definitely interested in being part of this community. Whether he gets on this board or not, one way or another he will be part of it. He would love to be part of changes. He brings a blank slate and maybe an outsider's look at some things the village is dealing with.

Scott said the reason he asked the regulatory question is that sometimes the board has to do things that are expensive. For instance we had to dismantle our old decrepit power station. We were facing rules and regulations we had to follow from the EPA, ANR, and health department. It cost a lot to get rid of the building. The board was hoping for a cheaper fix. It could have been done a lot more cheaply but when we came down to it we had to do what was right under the rules and regulations. That was why it was so costly. Sometimes the board is asked to put up a lot of cash to follow regulations. That is why it is important that all trustees are willing to do what we have to do.

4. *Celebration of a Community Member's 100th Birthday*

Scott said there was a post on Front Porch Forum saying that one of the Bradleys will be 100 years old. He suggested that the trustees send a card. The board agreed to that.

5. *Racial Justice Committee Meetings*

Rick said the Racial Justice Committee warned a meeting for January 7. Eric Hutchins, a committee member, agreed to host the meeting and when he signed into the Brian Story personal meeting room, a different Zoom number was generated. Rick asked for guidance from the Secretary of State's office and was told that there is nothing in open meeting law covering technology issues like this. The Racial Justice Committee is planning on a special meeting at 6:00 on January 26 to cure the problem around the fact that Zoom changed the meeting room at some point between the Skatepark Committee meeting and the Racial Justice Committee meeting. Brian Story can explain better what happened. It has something to do with the Zoom bombing.

Scott said he really wanted to be on the Racial Justice Committee meetings. He looked everywhere for the address. He called Eric Osgood and Brian Story and no one knew how to get in. He felt frustrated. He doesn't know if members of the public were locked out. He wasn't able to see any paperwork posted on the community board at the shopping center. He did a search on the town web page and came up empty-handed. He would love to come up with a plan for how to fix such blunders with the Zoom platform so people are able to be part of committee meetings. He would like a backup plan.

Rick apologized for what happened on the 7th. It happened in the moment. That meeting was posted at the post office a couple of days before. He believes the meetings are also being posted on the website. One of the recommendations from the Racial Justice Committee was to have the website looked at. It is very complicated and people are struggling to find the committee's information on the website. Brian said that is being taken care of. Zoom changed the meeting room and password from what was warned when there were already 11 people in the meeting. At 6:20 Eric Hutchins sent an email to committee members asking where they were and giving them the correct meeting number and password. The only way to continue the meeting was to sign out and sign back in. The person he talked to at the Secretary of State's office said there is no specificity in open meeting law regarding a situation like this. She hadn't heard of that happening before. Rick was asked to add Scott's name to the email list for agendas so he will have information in advance.

Scott said he thinks it would have been beneficial to the committee if a representative from the trustees had been at the meeting. There were questions about where the trustees were with the flag and if a trustee had been there they could have cleared it up. That is why he wanted to be on the meeting. Rick said had he had a way to make Scott aware he would have, but things changed in midstream.

Scott said as far as the Black Lives Matter flag is concerned, he asked Meredith to hold off on buying the flag because he wanted to buy it. Cal Stanton had sent a link to a place to purchase it but it was always out of stock. He couldn't find a secured site to purchase it from. Finally he tried to order it through a vendor he doesn't usually like to do business with because he doesn't like the way they treat their employees. But the order was botched. So he went back to Meredith.

Athena said she ordered a flag and it is on its way.

Scott said when it gets here he would like two members from the Racial Justice Committee to be the ones to raise it. A representative from the village may be there too. Maybe in the spring we can have more of a presentation where we can have representatives from different organizations and do a ceremony and flag raising. He would be looking for the Racial Justice Committee to be involved. He takes responsibility for the Black Lives Matter flag not being up. It was due to his reluctance to use a vendor he doesn't believe in.

Rick invited Scott to come to the next committee meeting to give a similar report to the committee. He said the agenda for that meeting was posted at the municipal building and should be on the website, where it might be complicated to find, and at the post office. He also posted it at the Johnson Public Library just inside the door.

6. Other Business

BJ said he didn't mention before that he also does the budget for his department and he is the recording secretary for the union at his Homeland Security job. Scott asked if Diane had anything else she wanted to add. She said she forgot to mention all the committees she is on. She is part of a group that meets with Sheriff Marcoux about safety and policing. She has been participating in the Racial Justice Committee Zoom meetings and she is also part of Be-Longing for Justice, which demonstrates every Tuesday on issues important for the community, state and country. And she is part of a community group working on starting a pottery studio in Johnson.

Sophia Berard thanked Scott and Athena for clearing up what happened with the Black Lives Matter flag. She appreciates their transparency.

Kim Dunkley said there will be a values mapping event on January 27 from 6:00 to 8:00. People can get more information about it from her or from Lois Frey. Front Porch Forum should have a post with links. It is about mapping places people think are special in our community.

7. Executive Session for Appointment of a Public Officer

Will moved to go into executive session for appointment of a public officer pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(3), Athena seconded, the motion was passed and the board went into executive session at 7:04. The board came out of executive session at 7:25.

8. Vote to Appoint Interim Trustee

Will move to appoint BJ Putvain as interim trustee, Athena seconded and the motion was passed in a roll call vote with Will, Athena, and Scott voting in favor and Steve opposed.

9. Adjourn

Will moved to adjourn at 7:29, Steve seconded and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths