JOHNSON SELECTBOARD CANDIDATES NIGHT MINUTES

ALL PARTICIPATION BY ZOOM TELECONFERENCING

## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2021

**Present:**

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

Others: Beth Foy, Michelle French, Sophia Berard, Eben Patch, Gail, Lynda Hill, Joanne, Cal Stanton, BJ Putvain, Jackie Stanton, Marla Emery, Louise Cross, Lynne, Jessica Bickford, Phil Branca, Brackett, Charles Gallanter, Diane Lehouiller, Don Blais, Eric Hutchins, Howard Romero, Jasmine Yuris, Kirsten Owen, Shona Sladyk, Margo Warden, TS, Joie Lehouillier, Paul McClure II, Linda Jones, Casey Romero, Peggy Williams, Kylie Gellatly, Linden Griffiths, Lois Frey, Tina Bidwell, Mark Woodward, Brynn Nuse, Jennifer Burton, Greg Tatro, Nadeau, Alan Lehouillier, Manchester, Kim Dunkley

David Williams started the meeting at 5:05. He welcomed everyone and explained that he had been asked to moderate this Q&A session with candidates. He went over the rules for participation.

Eric said two current selectboard members chose not to run again: Doug Molde and Kyle Nuse. He thanked them for their years of service. He said it is refreshing to see the interest being taken. We have two contested elections. He introduced the two people running for the three year position, Beth Foy and Michelle French, and the two people running for the two year position, Sophia Berard and Eben Patch.

David Williams told a story about a past town meeting where two people on opposing sides of an issue left the hall side by side and thoughtful and respectful conversation. He said this is what happens when our better angels are working on us and he hopes we can proceed with this meeting in the same spirit.

Four questions had been given to each of the candidates before the meeting: What is your name and how long have you lived in Johnson? What is your day job? Why are you uniquely qualified to serve? What is your greatest opportunity or challenge for the town? David Williams invited each of the candidates to answer those questions.

Beth Foy introduced herself. She said her maiden name was Beth Hill. She has lived here her whole life except for two or three years in her early twenties when she lived in the Burlington area. She is project manager for Vermont Mutual Insurance Company and a member of the leadership team in their IT department.

She is very familiar with board structure. She has served on school boards and committees. She has a personal interest in coaching, which takes a team effort. She is a team player. She has a lot of leadership experience. She is interested in making data driven decisions. She thinks it is really important to hear all sides whether you agree with them or not and have a willingness to work through different perspectives and put yourself in other people's shoes. Maybe that is the most critical piece to being successful on a board. She is very committed to the Town of Johnson. She cares about its economics and vitality. She is a big proponent of NVU. We need to help it thrive. She understands the issues around our internet service and lack thereof. The reality is that there are probably people who are not joining this call because of issues around lack of service. It is important not just because of the pandemic but for sustainability of the community and ability to bring business in. She is pretty well rounded. She is a generalist. She likes to understand important impacts and be critical in the way she considers decisions. She has been listening into board meetings for quite a while.

Probably the biggest challenge we face collectively is the internet problem and the fact that business and activity in the village has diminished over the past 30 years. We need to do something and really commit to that. She doesn't necessarily have the answers but she is willing to try to find them. There will always have to be multiple answers. Another thing that is both an opportunity and a challenge is the ability to compromise on hot topics. On divisive issues we need to walk away from hot conversations and take a rational look, bring in people who understand the issues best and make data driven decisions.

Michelle French said she has lived in Johnson her entire life. She raised all her kids here. She enjoys the community. She thinks it is a great place to be. She is an office manager for Green Mountain Support Services in Morrisville. She hasn't been on any boards because she worked full-time and was raising her kids. Now that her kids are grown she feels like she can commit to something and make a difference.

She wants to focus on things that will bring businesses back into our town. She has watched so many fail. With the college and the Studio Center there shouldn't be any reason why we can't maintain good businesses here in town. She doesn't have a personal agenda. She will just do what is best for the town. She is a good listener. She is open-minded. She can communicate with anyone.

The greatest opportunity and challenge has to do with helping businesses in town and creating things for families to do in town. There are not enough things to keep kids and families busy. We have less crime and drugs when we have enough things to do. We are a small tight-knit town. She wants to find the camaraderie she had growing up. Lately she feels like there is more a sense of divide than working together with neighbors. That is not what she wants to see.

Sophia Berard said she has lived here about 15 years. She was born and raised in Vermont. She came to Johnson for school and has stayed since. The community was one she wanted to be part of. She and her husband bought a home here about a year and a half ago and they are raising their child here. She is a stay-at-home mother and full-time grad student at NVU studying mental health counseling. In spring and summer she also does part-time landscape and garden work.

She is already an active member of the community. She is on the Tuesday Night Live and Community Oven Committees. Before the pandemic she was working with the Rec Committee to revitalize Tumble Time for kids in town. She is also working with a couple of community members to bring a pottery co-op into town. She brings a wide range of experiences to any endeavor. She is able to adapt and adjust her skills to different tasks. She has been a baker, worked in the sugar woods, done housekeeping and gardening and also managed an executive office as the president’s assistant at the Studio Center. She is creative and thoughtful. She has a strong work ethic and a collaborative spirit. She is going to school to be a professional active listener. She feels that applies to all aspects of life. She looks forward to bringing her authenticity to the position.

She agrees that businesses in town and Main Street need attention. There are already some great things going on. There are some wonderful businesses on Main Street. She is proud of the town and the businesses we have. There is an opportunity and a challenge to reimagine the land around the rail trail now that the rail trail is up and running and to consider how we can redevelop the area to be an extension of downtown. There have been studies conducted and it is worth re-examining them to see if they offer viable options. She thinks that part of town has wonderful potential.

Eben Patch said he was born and raised in this town. His ancestors have lived here for four generations or longer. He works at Temperature Controls of Vermont in Essex. They design building automation systems. He is a manager for that company. He started as an engineer.

Working in a management position, he has to meet people in the middle and compromise on a daily basis. He thinks the town needs that. He is personally invested in this town. He wants to keep his children here. His family has done a lot for the town in the past. His grandmother was on the Planning Commission. His mother was on the Recreation Committee. He wants to keep this town a good place to live and raise children. It is part of his roots. He would like to keep it financially affordable to live here. New gravel for our roads is important. He would like to see more businesses come here.

People are both our greatest opportunity and challenge. We can get a lot done if we work together and meet in the middle. He would like to see the industrial park get off the ground but that will need the state's help. That would bring businesses to town to provide paying jobs. He worries about failing infrastructure and would like to take a proactive stance.

Eric Hutchins asked, with regard to the non-binding items on the town ballot, if the candidates would plan to respect the will of the voters. He asked them, would you vote to follow the will of the people or vote your own conscience and discretion?

Eben said as an elected official he thinks it is his job to uphold the will of the voters. Sophia said she would absolutely listen to the will of the voters. Michelle said she guesses if she is voted in by the people of the town she has no other choice but to go with the will of the people. Beth said she would go with the will of the voters. She wants to add that she is not super passionate either way about the ATV questions. She thinks even though the questions are not binding and the selectboard will be making the decision they do need to go with the will of the voters. But she thinks the issue won't die there. It will be a lingering issue. It is important that all sides of the issue be heard regardless of the outcome. If further study is needed the town should have a committee to dig into the details

Casey Romero said Eben had mentioned failing infrastructure. Could he explain what he meant? Eben said our bridges are in disrepair. Culverts need work. There is ditching that needs to be done. There is work that needs to be done to meet state regulations. We don't have enough gravel to keep maintaining our roads. Scribner Bridge is a perfect example. Due to Covid, the work planned for that bridge got pushed off. By being proactive versus reactive perhaps the problem with the bridge could have been avoided.

Greg Tatro asked the candidates if they are for or against ATVs and whether they support the Black Lives Matter flag where it is or support moving it to the fire station.

Beth said she doesn't feel strongly either way about ATVs. She personally has some concerns about ATVs in the village but she doesn't feel educated enough about the issue. She doesn't have a position other than that she understands the importance of ATVs to a large portion of the town and the position of people who have issues with ATVs or large groups of ATVs. She understands both sides. She thinks it is important to have all the facts and make an informed decision.

She is not in favor of putting the Black Lives Matter flag at the fire department because that is so divisive. She thinks there are other ways to address the issue and compromise. What matters is the equity we have in our community. She supports Black Lives Matter on a personal front. On the public front we need to work together to make change. We can do that in ways that don't make people in our community very upset. We have public servants who are very upset about idea of the Black Lives Matter flag on a fire department pole and for that reason she doesn't think it should be there.

Michelle said she is an avid ATV Rider. She is in support of ATVs and what they have to offer. It is something her entire family can do together. They can get outside and enjoy nature and it costs virtually nothing. For those who do it respectfully, it is a fantastic platform for families to enjoy time together, including the elderly who have mobility issues and children. She believes ATVs have the potential to boost businesses in the village. She would love to see statistics from the months the village is open to ATVs this summer on how much income and revenue ATVs bring in vs. the same months in past years when they weren't there. But not everybody wants ATVs and if that is the vote it is not up to her to push her opinion on everybody

She is not a supporter of having the Black Lives Matter flag on any town or village property. That doesn't mean she doesn't support what it stands for. She thinks it should be public representation of our entire town. For anyone who wants to put it on their personal property to show their support, that is a wonderful thing to do but she doesn't think it should be the face of our community for people who are coming or going.

Sophia said she does not have a strong opinion on ATVs. She thinks ATV riders should be able to ride in Vermont. She understands it is important recreation for people. She is in favor of a conversation about ATV usage in Johnson. Obviously a lot of people feel very strongly about it. She thinks we can have productive conversations where all sides are heard and come to a resolution that works for the majority of people. She thinks we should stay open to conversation. She is in favor of ATV riding in Johnson. She is a little hesitant about ATV riding in the village due to safety concerns, etc.

She does not think the Black Lives Matter flag should fly at the fire department. She is happy with where it is flying. If it could be moved to the municipal building she would support that. She thinks if it were flying at the municipal building it could be a statement that we could strive for as a community.

Eben said he personally is for ATVs. He understands there are some complications and complaints. He talked with quite a few ATV club members. They are trying to do what they can to meet in the middle. Maybe that could be facilitated better. Nobody is really talking about the positive things they do, for instance participating on Green Up Day. They put more money into our Class 4 roads than the town does. They donate money to charities. They spend money at some businesses in town. Opening the village up to ATVs will increase that. He grew up with Johnson being a free and welcoming town. The town and village both accepted the inclusivity statement. We are contradicting ourselves by saying, “We are an inclusive town except for you guys.”

He thinks it was a good compromise by the village to put the Black Lives Matter flag on the village green. He supports the fire department. They live here too and he doesn't think flying it on their flagpole should have been in question. That would not be fair.

Lynda Hill said Eben talked about the industrial park more than anyone else did. She asked if he has any ideas about what he would like to see there and how he would get a business there. Eben said unfortunately our town revenue is not high. It is dependent on the state and the college. The only way the industrial park will get off the ground is with state funding. Developers need to be contacted and worked with to make them want to be part of it. It is not next to the interstate. There are a couple of businesses that wanted to be here in the past and he wishes that could have happened. Butternut Mountain Farms is one. He thinks they are employing over 150 people. We need to push for more state funding as a way to get it off the ground. Given our tax base he doesn't see where we can come up with the money otherwise. As far as what type of business could go there, precast concrete would be an example. It is not a bad location for a server farm because village electricity is cheap. It doesn't have a good facade for a brewery but maybe trees could be planted. He would like to see a microbrewery there. The village could take the capacity, especially if the waste is pretreated.

Lynda asked if any other candidates would like to chime in on this topic.

Beth said Eben’s point about not being near the interstate is important when we talk about manufacturing or wholesale. If we focus on those companies, there are more attractive locations. It would be more suitable for businesses like graphic design, software services or development, technology services, HVAC or other types of supporting services. But if we do not have very high speed internet it will never happen. That is critically important.

Eric Hutchins said in yesterday's VTDigger there was an article about what every town in the state pays for police services. Elmore pays $41K per year. Cambridge pays around $150K. Waterbury, which is much larger, pays $423K. Johnson pays almost half a million dollars. He asked if the candidates know what we get for that amount of money and whether they would be willing to reevaluate what we spend since other towns spend much less.

Beth said she has the same concerns. She knows there is a group that is digging into where and how we spend our money on law enforcement. What always pops into her mind is how much we are spending on cars for the sheriff's department. Do they all need a car as frequently as they get them? That is a high expense item. We have heard a lot from the sheriff about the cost of bringing people on board and training them and the problem that they don't retain their deputies because they tend to go to other more high paying places. Typically businesses spend a lot of money on salaries. The highest cost usually is and should be employees. She thinks there needs to be more critical and exploratory thinking. And she would like to understand emergency services, which has a different budget from the sheriff's department. There has been a statewide effort in consolidating some of these and she is interested in seeing how that affects us. She is all for figuring out what we can do.

Sophia said she hasn't read that article yet. That is definitely a concerning amount. She echoes what Beth said. She looks forward to working with Roger Marcoux and the task force to examine costs and talk about potentially reallocating funds and closely examining how the sheriff's department can operate to provide what the community needs. She is interested in looking into that number and figuring it out with the sheriff.

Michelle said she is open to looking into different options. The subject came up years ago when Johnson was looking into moving to using the state police. Her biggest concern with that would be that we are offered 24-hour coverage here. We have people who know where our houses are and know the roads and we are not waiting for a state police officer coming from St. Albans when someone is breaking into a house. If there is a more sustainable way to get the same coverage we are used to she is open to researching it. Maybe Roger Marcoux can explain more about why some towns pay more than others.

Eben said he doesn't know how many hours an officer spends in the town per week. His sister was head of sheriff's dispatch for a long time. In the past there have been talks about hiring the state police but due to the demographic of the town the state police won't touch it. We need to keep the community safe. He supports the police.

Cal Stanton said he wants to set the record straight on the Black Lives Matter flag at the fire department. The original proposal was to have a Black Lives Matter flag at the municipal building. The narrative around the Black Lives Matter flag at the fire department is false.

Don Blais said he would like to hear discussion about making a possible list of growth businesses that would be compatible with the large businesses we already have in Johnson, like the college and Laraway, and the smaller businesses that are here. People are talking about growth in the village and we should probably be spending more time thinking about the kind of growth we should get and would be able to attract and whether or not 4-wheelers would be incompatible with some of the businesses we have, like the Studio Center. There might be some businesses that would be harder to attract if we had 4-wheelers in the village.

Beth Foy said that is a good point about compatibility. We need to bring in good jobs and businesses, not just any jobs and businesses. If we bring in low-paying jobs we are not growing the community the way we need to. We can't add another retail business if we do not have people with incomes to support those businesses. She thinks service-oriented white collar industries are critical. Internet is one big blocker. Networking is important. We have to have the right people involved. Developers have connections. We should be critical about what developers we work with and what connections they have and what type of businesses they can bring. We should be looking at internet-based white collar jobs that will bring in good pay and get more owner-occupied housing in Johnson. Our numbers for owner-occupied housing are pretty low. That should be concerning to all of us. It won't be a growth community if we don't have more owner-occupied properties. Graphic design or software development companies can be very small, with 2 to 15 people, but they can bring in good money and attract similar companies and they might be able to support Laraway, for instance, maybe in exchange for a tax break. She thinks there are plenty of companies out there. As businesses suffer due to Covid there will be more entrepreneurship. She is not well educated about the impact of 4-wheelers on businesses but probably we do need to better understand what that impact might be.

Michelle said she agrees with everything Beth just said. We need to be selective about the businesses that come to our town. We definitely have a lot of space in town where businesses could move in. She thinks they need to fit into the community and offer services for the majority of people who live here. As far as ATVs, that is a tough one for her. Would they impact some businesses? She is sure they would and would impact some adversely, but she feels they would help some businesses greatly. It could be compared to a group of motorcycles going to the village and stopping to have pizza. She doesn't see how that pushes people from wanting to stop in the village.

Eben said Beth brings up a good point that there are types of manufacturing businesses that are needed for local use. He would champion a business with a better business plan that is financially viable. As far as impacts on the village and businesses from ATVs, it is difficult to guess. The impact could be very positive. Some small businesses like grocery stores, restaurants or gas stations, could get more support from ATVs. If there was a business that might be negatively impacted maybe we could work with the ATV club so 4-wheelers did not get in its way. Heavier ATV use is mostly on the weekends and white collar work is mostly during the week so there is not a heavy overlap.

Sophia said she agrees with other things that have been said. The internet issue holds us back from getting some businesses. She thinks that is a major issue to address when deciding what businesses to attract. Thinking of what businesses we already have on Main Street and what businesses could potentially be impacted by 4-wheelers, it is hard to say. She would look forward to working with the ATV group to see how it may or may not affect the town.

Jessica Bickford said one of the great things about our community is that we have a burgeoning recovery community that is it investing a lot in our community and revitalizing Main Street. She asked how candidates see the role of the selectboard in supporting that.

Eben said we do have a growing recovery community. Jenna's Promise has done a great job. He believes their plan is to grow and support more people. He supports them as a person and as a selectboard member he would support them continuing the good work they are doing.

Sophia said one business in town she is looking forward to is the Jenna's Promise cafe. She fully supports the Jenna’s Promise mission. Every day she is learning more about clinical mental health and substance use disorders. She is personally invested in aiding the community with substance use issues.

Michelle said what Greg and Dawn Tatro are doing is fantastic. It is a great resource to have here. It is becoming a greater need in our area. She is 100% in support of it, along with programs that would go hand in hand with it.

Beth said she doesn't think anyone is opposed to having substance dependent people become undependent. Jessica’s organization has done work in our area, supporting Jenna’s Promise and also other initiatives like tobacco-free rec fields. She thinks as long as the town is working with supporting organizations on social issues it makes a difference.

Eric said as a member of the Racial Justice Committee he has been doing research. The white population in Vermont decreased 1% over the past 10 years but people of color in our state increased by 90%. If we want to grow our town one obstacle to that is that if you have a very white area it is less attractive to people of color. He asked if the candidates would be in favor of tax breaks or other financial incentives or ways to attract people of color to our community.

Michelle said she would not be in support of that. She feels every person should have the same breaks and incentives as anyone else. It doesn't sit well to give one specific group a tax break or incentive.

Beth said she is all for incentives to bring in any population that could bring business to our town. She would gladly look at and weigh out those options. She would want to hear more about it but she would absolutely consider it. She is not sure she is supportive of incentives for individuals to move here if it is not tied to bringing business or some asset to town. We have assets in town that bring cultural and racial diversity – NVU and the Studio Center and she is sure there are others. She thinks those are good avenues to bring people in and we should support them in their efforts.

Eben said he would support tax breaks for bringing any business into town. It gets hairy if it is worded to give tax breaks to a specific group of people but leave others out. He works a lot with members of the gay and lesbian community, which didn't seem to be mentioned. People should have equal opportunity. We are all equal. He doesn't think he would support tax breaks for anyone building a personal residence. He wants people to feel welcome across the board.

Sophia said she has heard this before. She is an active participant with the Racial Justice Committee. She is not on it but she attends its meetings. She would want to discuss this option with the rest of the selectboard but she would be in support of recommendations from the Racial Justice Committee and would support tax breaks and incentives to get a more diverse population in town. She thinks it is important to give representation to marginalized and oppressed people. Incentives are a way we can work toward equity for all marginalized people.

Doug Molde asked, if there is evidence that there is interest in construction of owner-occupied housing in the Clay Hill / Gould Hill area, would candidates be interested in expansion of the town sewer service area to that area?

Eben said that is a tricky question because the sewer department is owned by the village. He doesn't know how the town would pay for infrastructure that the village can build. It would be interesting to figure out how to properly meter for it and have town employees to maintain it. He isn’t against expanding the wastewater system, he just doesn't see where the town could own a portion of what the village already owns and maintains. He thinks it would be confusing. But he would recommend that the village do it.

Sophia said she doesn't know enough about this to answer now. She would be open to discussion of if and how it could work in conjunction with the village.

Beth said her short answer is that it depends on how it is paid for. She doesn't think it should be paid for by all residents of the town or village. It would have to be facilitated through the village if they are going to keep responsibility for the sewer system.

Michelle said she doesn't have enough information. She would need to hear both sides of how it would affect the town versus the village and what impact it would have.

Lynda Hill said being on the selectboard is a huge commitment. She is curious whether the candidates are aware that the selectboard has two meetings a month and a lot of information coming in throughout the month. With the current selectboard there very rarely is someone not at a meeting. It is much easier to meet with Zoom, but when the board is meeting in person again she is curious whether candidates are really committed and able to be at every single meeting twice a month and doing all the necessary reading to be on top of things when a meeting comes up.

Sophia said she is aware of the commitment. She has been attending selectboard meetings for a while and she is on two committees, the Community Oven Committee and the Tuesday Night Live Committee. She has been going to meetings even without being on the board. She is committed to showing up.

Eben said he has attended all but one selectboard meeting for quite some time now. It is quite a commitment. Growing up he was never allowed to quit anything. He would not be asking for people to support him and vote for him if he was not ready to commit the time.

Beth said she intends to commit her time. It is not a problem.

Michelle said she grew up with her father on the Johnson selectboard for most of her childhood. She is very aware of the commitment it takes. She has chosen not to be involved much outside of home responsibilities until now. Now she is confident her children are old enough and she can dedicate that time. She would not have done it if she did not think she could commit.

Greg Tatro asked candidates what they see for the future of Johnson and how they would implement it.

Beth her vision is to have those businesses we keep talk about coming in, having village and town homes be primarily owner-occupied and having empty storefronts populated because industrial or white collar jobs are supporting retail business. We have to support internet. For bringing in internet services we should not be saying no to anything. We should not be narrow-minded about the options. We should be shooting at the wall and thinking about crazy ideas and playing out what sticks. Once we get that and start getting bigger businesses it cascades from there and impacts all areas. Jenna’s Promise and the Studio Center revitalizing some of our older buildings is something that matters. We need to partner with whoever we can partner with as a town and support that growth. Partnership and internet are keys.

Michelle said she thinks all four of the candidates probably have the same vision of getting businesses in and making Johnson a desirable place to move to, raise kids and stay. Her vision includes revitalizing half-burnt buildings and getting everything back up to the beautiful community it was. We are well on our way to that. There have been many things done - the items Beth mentioned, beautification with trees and flowers, etc. How would she make that happen? It would have to be more than just her. It would require everyone wanting to pitch in and work together. She would hope everyone would be willing to step up and do that.

Sophia said in her vision for Johnson she sees families walking down Main Street and buildings full of businesses. Beth hit the nail on the head. None of us can do it alone. We need to lean on partnerships with big businesses in town, the Studio Center, the college and Laraway. Communication is key. We need to stay connected to make this happen

Eben said he would like to see businesses rejuvenate downtown. He would like to see the industrial park underway, but we are dependent on the state there. He would like to see agritourism. He would like to see a nice wedding venue. Mobilization is very difficult. It will take time. Time also comes with some stones that need to tumble and maybe go a different route with businesses first. Maybe businesses downtown would take priority first. He would like to see more agritourism to get more foot traffic.

Jackie Stanton said she wanted to acknowledge that all of us are participating in a historic event. We have three women running for selectboard this year. This is an unprecedented event. This is progress.

Eric Osgood said one of the non-binding articles on the ballot is a question about whether the selectboard should enter into discussions with the trustees on a merger. He asked if candidates have read the consultant’s report regarding a possible merger and what their thoughts are on the town-village merger question.

Sophia said she has read the report. She will probably have to read it again to get all the facts and details. She thinks there is still a lot to be discussed around it. There are a lot of different ways the town and village could merge. There is no huge financial benefit. There are many possible configurations. She would like more conversation to figure out if and how it could happen.

Eben said he did read the report. The report commended the town and village for working well together. He does support having one governing body to make it easier for citizens, but he thinks the town has other more pressing things. Road maintenance should be dealt with. That is costly if it is not taken care of. He does support the idea of a merger and supports continuing the discussion. He doesn't think it could happen right now. Other things should be taken care of to make sure the town is provided for.

Michelle said she has not read the report. She doesn't have all the information to give an answer. She is not familiar with the complete financial impact one way or the other. Her current position is that she feels the town and village should stay separate. She is open to researching it. From what she understands now financially it is better for both not to merge.

Beth said she thinks we should decide whether to continue discussions solely based on how the votes come in. However, she did explain her personal opinion in the News & Citizen. Going into the talks, she was very much for merging and the reason for that was the perception she had, which she still thinks was true at the time, that there was not great collaboration between town and village on some issues that could have been more collaborative. She is personally going to vote no. She thinks it is critically important that we work together to figure out where additional efficiencies and savings can be gained.

Mark Woodward said his major concern for Johnson right now is NVU. He asked if candidates could share what role they see the selectboard playing in keeping NVU in town. NVU pays a lot of taxes to the town and he thinks without NVU we would lose most of our businesses.

Beth said she talks about NVU a lot. She thinks the town should be supportive in helping NVU with partnerships they will need. She shares Mark's concerns. NVU is in a better place than a year ago but it is still not in a good place. We need to do everything we can to support them. We need to make sure we are loudly communicating with all stakeholders involved in the future of NVU and the state college system. She thinks we need to make sure we have open and honest conversations, not just with the administration of NVU but also with other parties at NVU like faculty, staff and students. We can get NVU more involved in our day to day activities through volunteerism or connection with Jenna's Promise or learning opportunities. She thinks we can help by providing those opportunities and maybe providing support with the revolving loan fund. Maybe we can partner with graduates coming out and trying to start small businesses.

Michelle said NVU is an extremely vital part of our community. It is vital we do everything we can to keep it here. Open communication is absolutely necessary to make anything successful. The best we can do is have open communication between the town and all aspects of NVU.

Eben said he supports open communication and supporting students where we can. The college is its own entity. The city council of Burlington sent a letter to UVM saying they condemn the budget cut but they have no actual say. He would do whatever he could to keep it in the community. He fully supports them staying. He is happy to talk to administration, faculty, students, etc. He would send letters to our local representatives. Taxpayers have a voice but in the end we don't have the money to prop that college up.

Sophia said she is a grad student at NVU. The news that it was potentially closing came around the time she was accepted last year. She thinks we need to instill a strong partnership with the college and be loud about our support for the college. She thinks we need to do whatever we can to sustain it. Making sure there is a clear partnership between the town and the college is important.

Beth said the Vermont State College board of trustees needs to hear from all of us here. The governor and legislators need to hear from us. UVM is a quasi-public institution so it is not quite in the same boat as NVU. Eben said it is still a separate entity. He does support communication and voicing support. He wants them to stay.

Jackie asked if the candidates know Representatives Kate Donnelly and Dan Noyes. She asked, do you have relationships with them? Will you be using them as a resource in your role as selectboard member?

Sophie said she has gotten to know Dan and Kate because they have come to pizza bakes. She likes them. She can see working with them and reaching out to them if she needs to

Eben said he doesn't know them very well. He is interested in to getting to know them. He knows Rich Westman a little bit.

Beth said she knows them. She reaches out to them often on NVU and has recently reached out on internet and Comcast storage capacity issues. She has also reached out to some representatives from surrounding areas.

Michelle said she does not know them but she would be open to asking them for assistance or advice. She doesn't feel she needs to know them personally to reach out to them.

Hearing no further questions, David Williams thanked everyone for their participation and concluded the meeting at 7:01.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*